

# **Assessing the local-centre government policy relationship in Ireland**

(Two Volumes)

Volume I

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## **Abstract**

The policy relationship between local and national government has tended to be delineated into two frameworks. The first defines a relationship which is centralised at the national level. The second is one which identifies local government as autonomous. Current accepted thinking suggests that Ireland is a very centralised policy arena in which there is limited scope for initiative at local government level.

This thesis questions whether this is actually the case. In doing so the research incorporates a comprehensive literature and document review including internal policy papers at local and national level. More particularly, the research generated extensive material drawn directly from the policy interface between local and national government in Ireland. Thus the research draws upon a rich vein of source material, including access to senior personnel at local and national levels.

The research establishes that the policy relationship in Ireland can no longer be considered as centralised. Equally it establishes that the relationship cannot be characterised as autonomous. Rather, the thesis establishes that characterisation of the Irish local-centre policy interface is one which is most appropriately defined as disaggregated ambiguity. Based on this characterisation the thesis examines the possibility of the local-centre policy interface moving towards a model where co-governance would be the ideal. It acknowledges that such a model, whilst a key driver in the reform of policy interaction elsewhere, might itself be a constraining force in Ireland. The flexibility that arises in Ireland through local innovation efforts could suffer if placed within

such a model. Therefore the research concludes with a model which is characterised by features of a co-governance model but which reflects the need for flexible policy development between the local and the national level.

## **Abbreviations**

**CCMA-** County and City Managers Association

**CDB-** County/City Development Board

**CEMR-**Council of European Municipalities and Regions

**CLÁR** - Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais

**DCEGA-** Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

**DOEHLG-**Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

**EU** -The European Union

**HIA** -Health Impact Assessment

**IPA-** Institute of Public Administration

**LAPSI-** Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

**LGAPLN-** Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network

**LGMSB-** Local Government Management Services Board

**NPM-**New Public Management

**OECD-** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OSI-** Office of Social Inclusion

**PIA-**Poverty Impact Assessment

**PMDS-**Performance Management and Delivery System

**RAPID** - Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development

**RTPI-**Royal Town Planning Institute

**SIMS Group-**Social Inclusion Measures Group

**SPC** - Strategic Policy Committee

**UK-** United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

**UN** -The United Nations

## **Glossary of Terms**

**An Chomhairle Leabharlanna** - A national agency established to support the development of the local authority library service.

**Association of County and City Councils** -The national representative body for elected members of each City and County Council.

**Association of Municipal Authorities in Ireland** - The national representative body for elected members of each City and Town Council.

**Barcelona Declaration** - The international agreement addressing the needs of peoples with a disability.

**Better Local Government** - The Government Initiative published in 1996 which gave rise to the Local Government Modernisation Programme.

**Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais. (CLÁR)** A Government initiative to target priority investment into designated rural communities.

**Commission on Administrative Structure**-An expert task group established by the Danish Government in 2002 to review the advantages and disadvantages of alternative models for the structure of the public sector and on this basis to make recommendations for changes that would remain sustainable for a number of years. The Commission reported in January 2004.

**Community and Voluntary Forum** - A County/City wide forum consisting of representatives of the community and voluntary sectors established with the support of the local authorities and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

**County and City Managers Association** -A national body that represents the County and City Managers.

**County Childcare Committee** - A committee of representatives of the local government, local development and state agencies charged with overseeing the local delivery of national policy on childcare provision.

**County/City Development Board** -There are 34 Boards, one each in every local authority area in Ireland. These Boards have been established to oversee the preparation and implementation of an integrated strategy for economic, social and cultural development in each local authority area.

**Governance**- The processes, formal and informal, through which policy is made and implemented.

**Integrated Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development** - A local framework for the local government, local development sector, the state agencies and the community and voluntary sector to work together in the planning and delivery of public services under the auspices of the CDB.

**Life Cycle** - The approach adopted in the national partnership process to meeting the needs of the population through the planning and delivery of improved public services at local and national level.

**Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy** - A strategy to address social exclusion which is prepared and adopted by a local authority.

**Local Authority Members Association** - The National association for local elected members.

**Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network** - A national network of local government elected members and officials established with the support of the Combat Poverty Agency, the Office for Social Inclusion and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

**Local Government Computer Services Board** - A national agency established to provide support services for information and communications services for the local authorities.

**Local Government Management Agency** - An agency established to provide support services for the local authorities principally in human resource management and staff development.

**Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group** -The national group drawing representatives from local government, national agencies and departments addressing the role of local government on social inclusion matters.

**Modern Public Administration**-A school of thinking developed in the mid 20th century seeking to apply rational organisation to the development of public policy.

**National Social Inclusion Consultative Forum** -The national consultation body set up by the Department for Family and Social Affairs under the National Action Plan for social Inclusion.

**New Public Management**- New Public Management represents an approach to the organisation of public management following the efforts of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century to introduce “modern public administration” in line with the scientific or rational policy schools of management.

**Office of Social Inclusion** - A unit of the Department for Family and Social Affairs that has been established to facilitate the implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. It is now within the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

**Part V** - The sections addressing the preparation of Housing Strategies by local authorities under the Planning and Development Act 2000.

**Performance Management Delivery System** -which has been set up in local government and elsewhere in the public service to improve public service delivery.

**Post Modern Public Management-** Public Administration processes applied within a framework of collaborative planning, inter-temporal application and with a spatial perspective.

**Poverty Impact Assessment** - A policy evaluation framework which allows a policy maker to consider the issues of poverty within a policy-making process, regardless of the nature of the policy area being considered, with a view to achieving a reduction in poverty.

**Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development-** A Government initiative to target public service improvement under the National Development Plan in urban areas of disadvantage.

**Report of the Task Force for the Integration of Local Government and Local Development** - The original report that gave rise to the establishment of the CDB's which was prepared by a cross departmental committee consisting of various assistant secretaries of national government Departments.

**Social Inclusion Measures Group** - Each County/City Development Board has an SIM Group which addresses issues of social inclusion in each County/City across a range of public bodies and the community, rural and development sectors.

**Sustainable Development-**A policy process based on the recommendations of the Brundtland Report and adopted by the United Nations in 1992 as the overriding policy framework for world social and economic development.

**Strategic Policy Committee.** The local authorities have a number of SPCs consisting of elected members and representatives of the social partners. The SPCs help the preparation and consideration of local policies that are ultimately considered by the elected members.

**Strategic environmental assessment** - A Europe wide process for the consideration of significant environmental issues in the development of plans and programmes by public agencies.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Purpose of the Thesis - General Perspective**

Ireland is usually perceived as one of the most centralised countries in Europe. To accept this popular conceptualisation is, however, to miss the colourful tapestry that is the local-centre policy environment. There is a two-layered democratic system in the state. One pre-dates independence, the other post-dates the traumas of the Irish wars 1916-1922. Ultimately both underpin every aspect of life in Ireland and therefore have a long-standing, at times fraught, relationship. It is a relationship that decides where the people in Ireland can live, work and play. It is a relationship that provides the opportunity to express an identity for the many communities in the country. It is a relationship which is so little understood and yet so significant.

Local government has been at the heart of the history of Ireland, critically featuring at different points in the story of the nation. In many ways it remains so. The local and, to a more limited extent, national media coverage of local government activities is an everyday reality. Both resident and visitor use the services of a local authority, generally without realising it. When they do realise a service is being provided by a local authority it is usually about something that has gone wrong with a daily service such as poor water supply. Economic development and cultural endeavour are dependent on local government fulfilling its role. Social engagement takes place within an environment shaped by the local authorities. The natural environment is either protected or despoiled by actions which are directly the responsibility of the local government system.

Given this significance in the daily life of the nation it might be expected that study of the system would provide a rich vein of research. Strangely, however, the study of local government in Ireland is relatively limited with few articles and books being written on the subject<sup>1</sup>. Much of the implementation of national objectives and policies takes place through the local authority system. There is therefore a considerable gap in our understanding of the systems of public management in the state if we continue to ignore local government. This thesis contributes to filling that gap and provides a road map for others interested in taking up the challenge of understanding how policy-making processes in Ireland work.

The centre-local relationship therefore, is at the core of the examination presented in this thesis. It is through the policy regimes employed in the relationship that public expectations, national objectives, international commitments and political ambition are interpreted and addressed. It is also through these policy and political interactions that the local perspective can become a feature of the international and national policy dialogue.

## **1.2 General background to the study**

Notwithstanding the considerable impacts of the current recession and fiscal crisis, Ireland remains one of the wealthiest, most open economies in the world<sup>2</sup>. It is often suggested that the country punches above its weight in the international arena. Politically, the country is also seen as having moved from

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these publications include: *Local Government-Inside Out*, and *The corporate governance of regional and local public service bodies in Ireland*. both published by the Institute of Public Administration, and *Governing below the centre: local governance in Ireland* published by TASC 2007.

<sup>2</sup> <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics> 14 January 2010 and *Measuring Ireland's Progress 2009*, CSO Dublin 2010.

being peripheral to playing an active part in world events, while in cultural terms the huge contribution of its artists, writers and musicians is recognised world wide. The national partnership process has allowed dialogue to take place between the government, the social partners and other voices at the national policy table. Notwithstanding the radical improvement in the economic and cultural position of the State, many of the institutional structures on which policy implementation is dependent remain similar to the structures bequeathed the state at independence. This has been the case despite the national partnership process, the influences of the international community, (most notably the European Union, the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the recurrent demand for greater local control over decision making and the quest for greater autonomy. An apparent rigidity within the local government system has in the past been used as an argument for by passing the system when it comes to attempting innovative institutional shifts..

However, allowing such a simplistic view to influence our understanding of the local-national relationship would not do justice to what is a multi faceted interface. Hence, in this thesis, the challenges confronting both local government and the state to resolve social, cultural, environmental and economic expectations which are driven by local perspectives but within a national policy arena will be considered. The concept of collaboration being central to achieving a sustainable community will be debated. New political and organisational forms which challenge existing institutional settings to shift mind-sets will be explored.

These issues, among others will be examined as they are defining features of the centre-local policy relationship. It is necessary to understand the dynamics of such influences in order to appreciate the existing relationship and to begin to reset our understanding of the local - centre process.

### **1.3 The key issues**

This thesis examines the relationships that underpin the existing local-centre policy dynamic in Ireland. It considers whether the nature of these relationships can be correctly defined as “centralised” or whether there are other influences that now require a new interpretation of the local-centre policy process. If so, what sort of local institutional setting should those seeking reform of the relationship attempt to put in place? Given the backdrop of international influences, political realities and the move towards more transparency and accountability in public service policy development and implementation, is it appropriate to retain current structures? These questions, and others enumerated later, stem from a series of issues which will be developed in the thesis. These issues include:

- The need to address current thinking in public management and the strands of academic perspective which inform such thinking. This involves identification of the characteristics and fields of influence which now define the nature of local-centre policy development. Doing so establishes a greater understanding of the institutional relationships between the two levels of government, local and central.
- Having addressed the influence on the local-centre relationship, new models to delineate the possible range of such relationships are developed. These models will be used to examine the public management structures in Ireland

and to evaluate whether they reflect the nature of the changed policy environment.

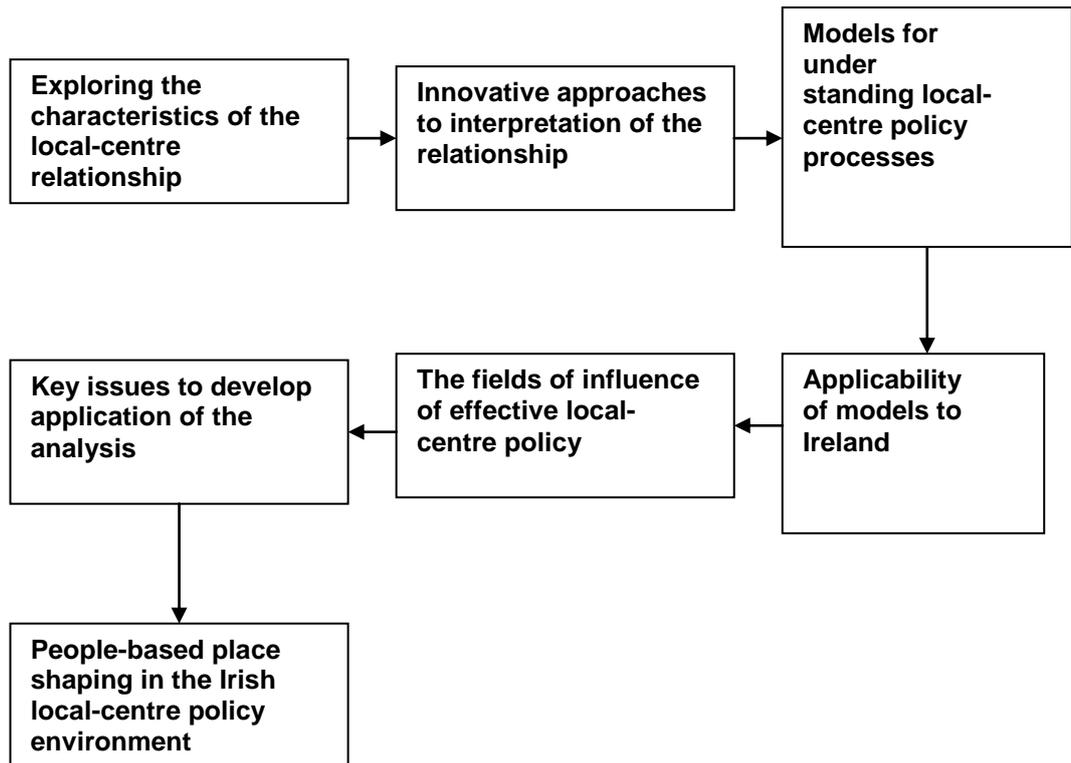
- In addition, there will be an examination of policy-making in Irish local government. The applicability of the models will be determined, as will as the need to look at some variant that encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type. In that context, the researcher will consider whether it is appropriate to apply, in the recent efforts to reform the institution of local government, such an approach.

Specific examination of the individual characteristics developed through the literature review will facilitate determination of the nature of the Irish local-centre relationship. In addition, it will allow for consideration of possible structures to more effectively manage the local-centre policy relationship. In doing so it will assess the implementation of the local government modernisation process in Ireland over the past fifteen years.

The drive for undertaking the research is partly based upon the experience of being at the centre of the local government reform process over the past fifteen years. This ranged from initial conceptualisation of interventions through to policy drafting and finally implementation in one form or another. This has brought with it a recognition that, notwithstanding considerable institutional effort, perhaps the wrong questions underpinned the reform process of the past decade. Perhaps what was needed was an understanding that the local-centre relationship should not have been wholly focused on bilateral structures but on external relationships within the local operational environment and, vertically and diagonally, across the hierarchy of public management.

In starting this process of reflection, the opening position of the researcher was that of seeking to align the physical planning structures of the State at local and national level. The intention was to acknowledge that the reform processes of recent years would be complementary and would therefore result in integrated thinking and joined-up policy-making. The work which follows will provide the reader with a sense of the journey from this opening position. This opening perspective it now seems following the exploration undertaken, was far removed from the reality of the relationship. In some respects the opening position of the researcher echoed the mistaken assumption that applies generally to the limited research in the area i.e., that Ireland is a centralised country and everything is directed from the centre. The following research will demonstrate that the nature of the local-centre relationship is far more complex. Exploring the complexity of the relationship opens up the scope to be more original in proposing an ideal model for local-central government policy development in Ireland. It also opens up the prospect of identifying other research areas. More particularly, it allows for the development of new thinking which may allow for more efficient and effective policy delivery across the complex strands of public management in Ireland. The research therefore will provide a considerable fillip to understanding the multi-faceted nature of Irish public management in general but more specifically it should encourage a more informed debate about the nature of local-centre policy development in Ireland. Figure 1 below delineates the process undertaken.

**Figure 1: Transition from Characteristics to Models**



#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives of the thesis**

The overall objective of the thesis is to delineate an ideal model for the local-centre policy relationship in Ireland. More specifically the thesis is an exploration of the nature of the relationship which seeks to challenge the current thinking on the extent of centralisation in Ireland. It aims to interrogate current orthodoxies in order to develop a more nuanced model for policy engagement between local and central government in Ireland. It is intended that the comprehensive model developed from the research will equip local-centre policy-makers, with a realistic template for reforming policy-making in the Irish context.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured around eight chapters and a series of supporting annexes as follows:

### *Chapter 2: The changing dynamics of the local-centre policy arena*

Chapter 2 provides the reader with an overview of current thinking on the local-centre policy interface. It is written within the framework of pluralist perspective on policy-making which ordains that as society moves into a post-modern environment, the integration of, at times, opposing views and ideas on where a society should be and where it should go, will be informed by structures of public management whose responsibility is to create the necessary institutional arrangements to accommodate the differences in perspectives. In the review, the arguments around the move from a new public management policy analysis to a post-modern analysis are provided. Concepts such as collaborative planning, joined up government, sustainable development, place-shaping and integrated policy discourse are examined to provide international insights on local-national policy dynamics. There is recognition and acknowledgement of the significance of the local-centre policy balance which is a key aspect of thinking based upon a pluralist perspective. However, the debate in the chapter seeks to move beyond this particular focus and highlights the impact of participation and collaboration which has emerged within the sustainable development process that is now a significant driver of policy processes at local, national and international levels of government.

The literature review therefore provides an overview which allows the researcher to develop, around the key themes emanating from international academic perspective, a conceptual framework to undertake the necessary

analysis which must be central to understanding the local-centre policy interface. This will then allow the researcher to turn towards the development of a series of models that delineate the local-centre policy process in Chapter 3.

### *Chapter 3: Models for the centre-local policy process*

Four models which delineate the local-centre relationship are developed in Chapter 3. This provides the researcher with a series of concepts that enables consideration of the current policy arena in Ireland. The appropriateness of placing the Irish policy environment into such models is then analysed. This in turn brings the researcher to a point where the focus on Ireland can be explained in Chapters 5 and 6.

Recent thinking around the applicability of concealed administration are introduced and related to existing thinking on the role of autonomy and central direction in the local-centre policy interface. The applicability of the spatial perspective and resource control are also considered. This is particularly important in the Irish context. Given the relative dearth of analysis of the Irish policy-making environment generally and the almost complete absence of such perspective in regard to the local government-national government policy environment the drawing together of such characteristics into a series of policy fields of influence allows for detailed consideration of the existing local-centre arena in Ireland. Significantly it will allow for consideration of a most appropriate model through which future reform initiatives might be derived.

#### *Chapter 4: Methodology*

This chapter will set out the approach to developing and addressing the series of appropriate research questions which has emanated from the earlier chapters. The research process involved an extensive literature review. This was followed by an initial series of interviews, workshops and the issue of a scoping questionnaire to key actors in the local-centre process in Ireland. Following interpretation of the research material and completion of a document review, the models were developed and an appropriate policy-based case study completed. These elements became the basis for examination of the Irish local-centre process. Following completion, a further series of elite interviews was undertaken to determine the validity of the research outcomes. This chapter demonstrates that the research inputs, which are both quantitative and qualitative in form, are underpinned by a robust methodology. The approach taken is elaborated and justified. It acknowledges that this topic is relatively under researched and the organisational culture being examined will have had a limited engagement with academic research methods. The literature underpinning the methodology is synthesised to provide the necessary robustness to ensure validity.

The philosophical basis for the research is also established along with the research design framework. This, in turn, allows for consideration of the limitations of the research. The data sources, primary and secondary are also outlined. This leads naturally into the primary research chapters.

One of the challenges in writing the thesis has been to allow for the fact that the policy environment is organic and subject to on-going change. The methodology

has had to be adapted to allow the researcher to consider the on-going evolution of the policy environment and to take cognisance of on-going developments. This longitudinal approach places the research in a relatively unique position, as it allows for the research to reflect the on-going changes of a dynamic environment. The importance of such an approach is that the outcomes and recommendations have the benefit of being developed to reflect current developments and consideration.

#### *Chapter 5: Key characteristics of the local government system*

This chapter addresses the Irish local government context. It sets out the role and functions of local government in Ireland and analyses the Irish case. It addresses the current local government reform processes within the models developed in the review. This approach helps establish an understanding of where the policy process might be placed within the concepts that have been developed in Chapter 3. An elaboration of the research debate, focused on the Irish case, is also set out to frame the case study that is being undertaken for the thesis.

#### *Chapter 6: Social Inclusion: From a national intent to local implementation?*

Chapter 6 examines as a case study, the centre-local approach to implementation of a national policy namely, social inclusion through the National Action Programme on Social Inclusion. The case study seeks to reflect the research themes identified in Chapters 2 and 3. It takes forward the process of developing a response to the key questions. In addition, it develops an understanding of the reality of the local-centre policy interface in Ireland. The

chapter then applies the models to the current policy interface. This allows for consideration of an ideal model that could apply to Ireland.

#### *Chapter 7: Towards a model for Ireland*

This chapter sets out the local-centre policy model that could be most appropriate to Ireland. It explains the rationale for such a model and identifies where the existing system of local-centre policy does not meet with the framework of the preferred model.

#### *Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations*

The final chapter sets out an overview of what needs to be put in place to move the local-centre policy process towards the proposed ideal model. In addition, the chapter analyses the principal findings of the research work. It demonstrates how that research facilitated the identification of the existing model best applicable to current policy processes in Ireland and what should ideally be the case. Finally the chapter highlights a roadmap for further academic research in the area of local-centre policy-making in Ireland. It concludes on how this might facilitate an understanding of where such research might lead to greater understanding of such dynamics.

### **1.6 The key research contribution**

As discussed above this research has taken place over an extended period (six years). This has allowed the researcher to incorporate the on-going local government modernisation programme in Ireland into the research. These changes happened at the same time as much of the thinking on post modern public management was being articulated. The researcher, perhaps uniquely,

was therefore positioned to consider the local-national policy interface against the background of radical shifts in thinking about policy-making in a post modern environment. This means that the research is dynamic, reflecting considerable movement in the local-centre policy interface in Ireland and elsewhere.

By addressing this particular research area, the thesis provides a comprehensive analysis, perhaps for the first time, of the Irish local-national policy environment. It brings together the influences of international perspective, national expectation and local practice. In doing so a new understanding of the complexity of local-centre relations is developed, and direction is provided for systematic reform and further academic research.

### **1.7 Further recommended research**

As acknowledged above the local-centre policy interface is under researched. Particular research effort should concentrate on understanding the nature of the policy relationship between the management structure and the elected members of local authorities. This need will become more urgent in the event of the likely recommendations in the forthcoming White Paper on Local Government. The enhancement of the role of the Mayor will be a central feature of the White Paper. As such the internal policy dynamic will shift away from the existing management and elected representative structure within local government. The political standing of the mayor will also potentially have significant impact on the policy relationship from local to national and on the policy field across public bodies at local level.

In addition, the expanded role of local government will need to be examined in light of the recommendations of the *Report on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure* and the *Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group*. The implementation of these recommendations could have significant short term cost efficiency effects alongside longer term structural reforms which would roll back potentially much of the innovation associated with the development of the local partnership process.

### **1.8 The Changing Context of the Study**

General environmental factors have remained stable in policy terms over the six year programme. The reform processes under investigation in this research were instigated six years (1998) prior to commencement of the research. The corporate planning process at both national and local level in Ireland were coterminous with the research programme. The reform and research processes were affected by publication of a new reform programme for local government, a change in Government and thus a revised Programme for Government, and the completion of a review of public management in Ireland by the OECD. In addition, the likely impact of re-structuring of local government following completion of an efficiency review in July 2010 is acknowledged. However, as this remains a report on recommendations to the Government, its direct input to this research has been restricted.

The dramatic changes in the economic conditions confronting the state are acknowledged as a critical influence on the thinking found within the elite interviews. The substantive impact of such conditions in regard to the nature of the local-centre policy relationship is however not significant to the

determination or otherwise of an appropriate model for an effective policy interface between the local and the centre in Ireland. This will be made clear in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The chapters which follow cumulatively delineate such a model.

## **Chapter Two: The changing dynamics of the local-centre policy arena**

### **2.1 Introduction and theoretical frames**

This chapter examines the nature of the local-centre policy relationship and how it has been conceptualised and theorised. It provides a perspective on the policy-making process and the understanding that it applies over time, territory and theme. In Ireland, as elsewhere, the role and functioning of the state has altered in response to changing paradigms, changing social and political norms, changing expectations and increasing demands on state resources. The blurring of boundaries between state, economy and society has fostered a range of theoretical interpretations. Theories which depicted a rule-based state have been overtaken by relational theories such as pluralism and neo-pluralism which provide an apposite frame for this study. A pithy definition explains pluralism as the 'effective participation of multiple differentiated actors in the production of collective outcomes' (Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009 p149). In Ireland, an implicit pluralist perspective frames both the national social partnership structures and the interaction of central and local levels of government, bringing together public private and third sector actors in an intricate policy process. Theorists have also concerned themselves about the role of the centre and its power relationship with sub-national government. Some like Rhodes (1999) have theorised a 'hollowed-out' state whose power to steer has been eroded. Others such as Saward propose theories in which the centre retains its dominant role. Such theoretical insights are illuminating for a study such as this, concerned as it is with the central-local relationship in policy-making.

A central feature of the chapter is an exploration of the strands of academic research on these themes. The review leads to the establishment of an hypothesis on which to build the subsequent research. In setting out the nature of the policy process, and the move to, what is argued, is, a post-modern framework, the chapter draws upon several strands of academic analysis. One of the overarching strands is pluralism which asserts that

*...an accommodation between organized interests is the only feasible way of making national-level decisions which can approximate to democratic requirements in the real world*

(Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987 p55)

This is a key understanding as it places the study of local-centre relations within a theoretical framework which declares that:

*The core expression of pluralism is that political power is fragmented and widely dispersed ...*

(Murphy, 2003 p 20)

Pluralism is seen as creating an understanding of the dynamics of the nature of policy engagement on the part of government in which, in the case of local-centre policy-making, both local and centre are themselves participants that are competing. This is a central feature of Rhodes' analysis (1999) as he seeks to develop a theoretical framework for local-centre relations. The pluralist perspective is also central to the development of a theoretical framework for collaborative and participative models of government in which the local-centre policy dynamic may be played out on a daily basis across advanced liberal democracies (Healey 1997). Pluralism itself is also seen as a critical pillar on which to build sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987) while Hooghe and Marks (2003) also acknowledge the necessity of mediation of policy players within a pluralist context.

Each academic strand analyses the dimensions of the local-centre policy process within the pluralist context. The rationale for each strand is in the first instance established. Subsequently each is addressed to identify the variety of local-centre policy relationships. Thereafter, a series of models is created to delineate the local-centre policy process. Such an approach is necessary to develop a clear understanding of the dynamics involved in the local-centre policy environment. This is due to the fact that the policy environment in public management is subject to a wide range of influences. These influences range from the structural organisation of public management to the institutional dimensions that influence the preparation and implementation of public policy. These influences have had the benefit of considerable international academic analysis. However, one of the most significant institutional features of public management i.e. the local-centre policy process, has been subjected to only limited examination. This is particularly the case when applied to the organisation of local government in Ireland and the role it plays in the policy process. The chapter draws on these academic strands to generate a new perspective on the local-centre policy process. This will subsequently be related to Irish context.

The approach being taken in this chapter is therefore necessary to allow the researcher and ultimately the reader appreciate the ontological basis for building the research models which are central to the thesis. The research process behind this approach will be more fully explained in Chapter 4. The research synthesises the strands of argument and debate and their impact on the processes of policy-making. This facilitates identification of the characteristics that drive the local-centre policy process. The creation of a series of research questions will follow in chapter three. These will be

developed as a central aspect of this characterisation. This approach allows the researcher to begin to argue for an innovative approach to understanding the various fields of influence of an effective local-centre policy structure. It allows for an increased appreciation of how such processes might work given the move away from hierarchical forms of governance towards newer forms of policy development.

Therefore the chapter reflects the findings of a comprehensive literature review. The review identifies and considers the many influences on the local-centre policy process. The resulting fields of influence are identified. These, it is argued, frame the relationship between the layers in local-centre policy processes. The approach being taken allows the development of a new understanding of these relationships. It thus facilitates the characterisation of the relationships into possible models which will also be put forward in the next chapter. The models will underpin the analysis of the Irish local-centre policy environment in the remainder of the thesis. This, in turn, allows the researcher to argue for a reconsideration of the nature of the local-centre relationship. It will place the Irish local-centre relationship into a more structured framework than has heretofore been available to the Irish research arena generally.

Finally the researcher will be positioned to recommend possible reforms to the existing local centre policy relationship in Ireland.

## **2.2 The transition from modern public management to post-modern public management**

### *2.2.1 Policy-making in transition*

Policy processes are played out within the public arena as well as within political institutions which are local, regional and national. In addition, international institutions are having an increasing impact on the policy processes of both local and national government. The challenges associated with local-central government policy processes across most OECD countries nonetheless remain relatively under explored. In light of the somewhat ambiguous and incoherent nature of the relationships, it is perhaps surprising that this is the case.

Goldsmith (2002) suggests there are on-going institutional conflicts between the local and the national systems of government of most countries. Therefore there are differing perspectives on policy development and implementation at local and national level. The policy-making process therefore is about both the making of policy and its implementation. On the one hand, there is a national process, at times and only in some countries, a regional process, and always a local policy process. Each level ultimately, is seeking to keep electorates engaged and to meet the demands of interest groups, many of whom have conflicting needs and expectations. Furthermore, and arguably increasingly, there are the international influences which can seem remote to both local and national electorates.

Government is, as a result, no longer the sole purveyor of public sector “goods and services”. This, it is suggested by Hajer (2003), is particularly the case for

central government. More often than not, the centre seeks to implement its policy objectives at the local level through either local government or, in light of the reforms of New Public Management (NPM), agencies, quangos and contracted out service delivery mechanisms. The public policy arena therefore has become populated by many stakeholders. It is congested by competing interests. Under such conditions it is central government's role to provide the lead. Such leadership, as Bullock (2001) and Hajer (2003) argue, tries to ensure that policy congestion does not result in communities, sectoral interests and other stakeholders being crowded out from the policy-making process. Bullock (2001) further describes an integrated framework as a policy formation process where specialisation through increased professionalisation and the externalisation of public service through contracted out delivery is the norm.

Such a framework focuses on “joining up” the layers of government (from the centre to the local) and across the themes that underpin these layers. This perspective was informed by the level of turmoil existing, as Bullock wrote, between and within the policy-making processes of the United Kingdom. This turmoil was due to the New Public Management reforms that were undertaken in the country over the previous decade. Bullock (2001) suggests that the turmoil indicates a shift from the rational and scientific forms of management and structure associated with the modern public management movement of the earlier twentieth century. What is left in its place are post-modern public policy processes, i.e.:

...a gradual transformation of liberal democracies from state-centred, unitary systems of sovereign rule into decentred fragmented political systems regulated by dialogical interaction between a plurality of stakeholders.

(Gjelstrup and Sørensen 2007 p24)

This analysis describes a transition in public administration occurring as a result of the shifts arising from New Public Management. This transition has to be one which is:

*...capable of facilitating vertical and horizontal interaction, coordination and cooperation between the many public and private stakeholders that contribute to the production of public governance. This transformation calls for a post modern public administration*

(Gjelstrup and Sørensen 2007 p24).

Bullock (2001) goes on to contend that such processes, are inter-temporal, necessarily evidence based and subject to external influences, both national and international. Public policy-making therefore can no longer be solely thematic (or sectoral). Public policy-making must also be cognisant of territory and identity. There is a need for whole of government responses to what are increasingly multi-dimensional challenges that will arise in a post-modern society<sup>3</sup>. This necessitates cross organisational working in the design of public services so that such services can meet the competing expectations of an ever increasing range of stakeholders with different needs. So policy-making in the post-modern public service is now about creating, as Hajer, (2003, p 175) puts it,; “...solutions for pressing problems ...” within an integrated framework of government. In seeking to achieve a solution to a particular problem, or set of problems, the policy maker endeavours to create an environment which will foster an endorsement of the proposed response.

The process of endorsement might require creating new power relationships, enticing, for example, the stakeholder to become a part of the decision-making

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<sup>3</sup> Post-modern in that New Public Management represents an approach to the organisation of public management following the efforts of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century to introduce “modern public administration” in line with the scientific or rational policy schools of management first developed by Taylor and Weber. (Simon (1957), Wildavsky (1959) and others discussed later).

of government. It might involve the use of informal controls alongside the formal mechanisms of government to control and direct. Whatever might be the means to achieving a particular policy outcome, Hajer (2003, p175) does acknowledge that :

*It is far less obvious that the government is the sole actor to intervene in policy-making...*

The development of public policy no longer solely takes place within the formal structures of central government as envisaged by Weber (1947). The thinking derived from the scientific schools of management and developed by Lindblom (1959), Simon (1957) and others is therefore no longer appropriate. Public policy now takes place within an environment that is subject to constant change where the power to give effect to change is “*dispersed*”. Rational based models derived from the scientific movement are no longer applicable. Thus the move from the modern era of public management to the post-modern era. In such a transition the policy-maker must build the linkages needed to deliver on intended policy objectives. It is no longer the case that a simple setting of direction will suffice. What is required is a shift from direction-giving to building the necessary coalitions and partnerships to deliver policy within a crowded environment. This requires a fundamental change to the way public policy gets made and delivered.

### *2.2.2 New Public Management and the move towards governance*

Such changes were a primary motivation as Pollitt et al (2007) argues, behind the development of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s (see also Ferlie and Pollitt 2005). Reforms under NPM programmes, across Europe and elsewhere, sought to apply an output based policy framework to public service provision. In doing so the NPM process sought to move service delivery

towards what might be described as a customer focused policy arena more similar to private sector services planning. The effect was to create greater specialisation, often manifest in the form of policy silos (Bullock 2001).

These silo effects became reinforced with the NPM focus on the performance of the individual bureaucrat and the measurement of outputs. There was a tendency, as a result, for policy makers, local and, more especially, national, to work within the strict organisational mandates set out for them through the New Public Management framework. The result was to stifle the capacity of the centre to reflect on the multi-dimensional nature of the public service environment. Factoring in local realities within national policy expectations and international obligations therefore became increasingly difficult and as a result duplication across policy silos more prevalent.

Both Bullock (2001) and Bogdanor (2005) suggest that these difficulties manifest themselves in the creation of duplication across levels of government and within their governance processes. Control by customer focused regulation, they argue, is no longer the means to counter the duplication of the policy process. The need to deliver effective public services which underpin the sense of citizenship, the relationship of the service user with the wider community and the democratic process, now therefore requires the cooperation of others. These other players can operate within a system where formal regulatory and institutional rules can be applied. Increasingly however, there is an assumption that the policy interface is as much determined by the need to negotiate outside of the formal institutions as within them. This means that the role of the public policy maker becomes one of facilitator as much as direct service provider. This

is a weakness, Bovaird and Löffler (2002) suggest in the application of New Public Management perspectives to the policy process. Excellence, they argue, in local public service is not just about the provision of effective and efficient services. It is also about the approach to engagement with the community being excellent.

Public management processes therefore exist not just as a framework for coordination and cooperation in service provision among the relevant statutory bodies at a particular level of government. Post modern processes also exist and are necessary, they argue, to ensure that services can actively seek to meet both the expectations of the policy-maker but also, more significantly, the needs of a target community be it territorial or thematic. Engagement within such processes requires institutional arrangements that are less rigid than those envisaged by Weber (1947). This applies not just to stakeholders at local level. It is equally relevant to central levels in their policy relationship to local government. This core principle can be developed by suggesting that governance at the local level is a process which requires interaction between both the formal systems of government and the stakeholders who frame the operational environment of those systems. It is also however, as Bovaird and Löffler (2002, p16) establish, a practice where local governance is:

*...the set of formal and informal rules, structures and processes which determine the ways in which individuals and organizations can exercise power over the decisions (by other stakeholders) which effect their welfare at local levels.*

This applies not just to stakeholders at local level. It is equally relevant to central levels in their policy relationship to local government.

There is also the need for complementary policy processes, as Brusis (2003) acknowledges, that move up and down and increasingly across the public service that forms the multidimensional environment that now is the public policy environment. This also has an additional temporal dimension in that sustainability must be considered within such an operational context. Brusis, in his 2003 Bertelsmann Foundation Paper, underpins the above perspective when he writes that:

*Governance capacity denotes the ability of a political leadership...to commit itself to... strategic prioritization, a coherent and consistent reform programme, policy credibility, sufficient political authority and organizational capability for effective policy implementation...*

In the effort to manage the policy process, the policy-maker has to, as both a principle but also as a practice, involve those stakeholders that are necessarily external to the formal structures of policy development. This requires new levels of accountability and collaboration, and may even necessitate shifts in resource management and institutional culture. At one level it is argued by Lyons (2007) that the national process must take precedence, but equally, however, it can be argued that the national level is not sufficiently close to the citizen to have a real understanding of local needs and expectations.

These shifts in thinking and practice mean that the implementation of policy through administrative devolution and the assignment of responsibilities must become the normal practice. Such norms fit with the notion of the enabling state. State organisation is thus characterised by a role which actively seeks to reduce levels of dependency on the State. This can only happen, however, within a multi-level dialogue across government which becomes the institutional basis for public management reform. As this institutional basis includes local government, the reform of local government becomes a necessary feature of

the transition from modern public management to post modern management. There is therefore, the need to consider the policy environment of local government and how it is influenced by multi-level government.

## **2.3 Government at many levels**

### *2.3.1 Policy-making in the local-centre environment*

The approach to multi-level dialogue within a national context is one shared across administrations and political systems within the European Union. The 2004 Commission on Administrative Structure in Denmark, for example, held that policy problems in certain areas such as social disadvantage were due to parallel functions/tasks being distributed over several administrative levels while in France, Reigner (2001) acknowledges that local authorities continue to turn to the State even though they have been juridically competent since the French decentralisation reforms of 1982-83. There will thus be variations in the extent of national influence. Such influence will however, be a feature of almost all forms of local government policy processes. Lyons, in this regard, (2007, p5) posits that current UK local government policy-making is limited by:

*...the weight of central controls-both formal and informal...can lead to local choices being crowded out.*

Sommerville, (2005) had suggested that, with multi-level governance as a backdrop to the making of public policy, the challenges of representation based on function can result in the creation of added institutional boundaries, variations in institutional scale and limited co-terminosity. Added to this confusing environment is the realisation, as Wilson, (2003, p318) confirms, that:

*There is an increasingly contested and differentiated governance terrain resulting from the fragmentation of 'local government' as a distinct entity and developing importance of other local agencies and partnerships.*

Nonetheless Gaulini, (2004, p32) does propose that:

*...the rise of innovative local governance settings has, in general, cast a shadow on one of the most striking developments in territorial governance, particularly in Europe, that is, their embeddedness in a broader renewal of trans-scalar intergovernmental and interorganizational relationships.*

The transition to post modern public management seems therefore, to call for implementation of a system which allows for a level of local autonomy but within a national framework. The local authority is, as a result, placed at the heart of the policy process. There is however, an acknowledgement that policy development should allow for a multi-level dialogue but it will do so within a national context. This does not come as a surprise given, as the OECD in 2001 acknowledged, that poor outcomes are associated with public policy reforms under New Public Management generally. This poor response has arisen from the failure of NPM processes to recognise the necessity of multi-level dialogue in societies which are coping with the twin challenges of meeting both local needs and managing international imperatives such as competitiveness, and environmental regulation. There is therefore a need to consider the implications of the transition of public policy development within a multi-level framework from the fixed hierarchy of the modern era to one in which iteration and process play a critical role.

### *2.3.2 From hierarchy to place-shaping to managing function in space*

Lejano, (2006) suggests that policy-making must be placed within an institutional context which is based on a range of organisational types, either state-centred or decentralised. He seeks to understand the differing policy contexts presented by the *“Dichotomy of Institutional types”* set out below in Table 1. He has developed two possible models (i.e. State-Centred Institutions and Decentralised Institutions) for public policy development across government levels. He also seeks to characterise both models in terms of the nature of the

relationships and whether these are determined by the centre or the local policy arena.

**Table 1: Dichotomy of institutional types**

<b>State-Centred Institutions</b>	<b>Decentralised Institutions</b>
Top-down	Bottom-up
Authoritarian	Democratic
Technocratic	Participatory
Secretive	Transparent
Hierarchical	Entrepreneurial

Source: Lejano, R., P., 2006 p141.

In state-centred policy development the policy-maker is informed by the policy expectation that exists at that level. He/she seeks to achieve implementation through control determined at the upper level. The policy-maker will also be influenced by a professional perspective without necessarily having regard for the stakeholder environment in which the policy is developed. In a decentralised model of policy development, the policy-maker will be influenced by the local stakeholder environment and is therefore more open to external influences. The argument is made by Lejano that the public manager does not, as a rule, start with a clear policy sheet every time a new policy needs to be developed. He writes:

*We begin with the realization that policy, at least the kind that effects change, does not simply land upon a latent field from above. Rather, policy evolves on the ground, within and part of a context."*

(2006 p4)

Unsurprisingly this perspective conflicts with those of the rational policy schools<sup>4</sup> who would have argued in the 1950s through to the 1970s, that policy can be newly created without the necessity for drawing upon pre-existing policy influences. The reality is that policy development starts from a particular point and within a particular socio-political context. Hill (2005) goes further by suggesting that public policy is the result of on-going conflict between government departments and agencies at national level with a reciprocal process at the level of local government. Thus, all policy development, be it at a national or a local level, is subject to both internal and external features. Some policy-making is informed by locational characteristics, while other policy-making can be shaped through organisational cultures and perceptions. Policy must therefore be constructed within a context where the cultural and demographic characteristics of a society along with the economic and physical features of that society are a central feature of the relationship.

All organisations, public or private, seek to achieve a positive outcome, through their policy processes, for the relevant organisation. To be successful, the necessary linkages between and across the stakeholder environment in which, and for which, the policy is being made, must be established. This includes the governance processes of a community, formal and informal, which frame the decision-making associated with policy delivery. The policy process thus becomes the basis for a coherent policy framework. Even in the event of a community not immediately appreciating the potential impact of the policy

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<sup>4</sup> Most notably H.A. Simon, *Models of Man* 1957 and A Wildavsky, "If planning is everything, Maybe it's nothing, 1973 *Policy Sciences* 4(2):127-153.

proposal, such a community will be equipped to embed that policy within its socio-economic reality.

This then allows for a policy to become relevant and meaningful for the particular community, and thus allows for the subtle differences in application that will follow. Such application clearly acknowledges that the policy process is set within the realms of both national and local government. Neither can exist in the absence of the other but they may conflict in the move towards greater coordination. In other words, if a local system did not exist it would have to be invented. Equally, if a higher level of governmental policy development were not in place it would have to be created. In having both a local and a national policy arena it must be expected that there will be conflict and a struggle for power and influence in how policy is made and implemented.

Given the above, the analysis of public policy development, and the planning which underpins it, has to be informed by both the location and cultural perspective. In addition, It may need to draw upon the internal corporate perspectives of the bodies responsible for the policy processes which influence the direction of a particular territory. Furthermore, an analysis may need to have regard for the policy frameworks that increasingly are set by external institutions and regulatory obligations. The traditional understanding of the role of dominant national institutions is no longer a valid determination of the institutional settings currently in place for public management identities. Rather, as Lejano (2006) argues, there is an alternative model which must be considered. This is one where “*depicting institutions as structures of care...*” becomes

relevant. The state, in other words, is less about hierarchy and output and more about:

*...a coalition of agents who cooperate to pursue a larger, public goal...*  
(Lejano, 2006 p237)

The models he suggests in Table 1 allow for a delineation of the local-centre relationship. The focus is less on the formal hierarchical structuring of the State and more on the relationships which underpin such structures. There is an acknowledgement of the need for formal structures. However, these are not the only settings in which policy gets made. Rather, while formal institutions may provide the necessary framework for policy-making, policy is more a result of worked relationships. These take place between and across the structures of local and national government and with those within the governance networks that frame the policy environment. Policy gets made therefore within coalitional and network processes which may be as informal as they are temporal even where legislative and resource levels are driven by formal and centralised processes. Thus the concept of the local-national policy interface becomes one which is based upon the shaping of the direction of community or place by such coalitional and network processes. Lejano's "*Dichotomy of institutional types*" is not sufficient to explain the full scope of the policy interface. What he does successfully is bring the discussion forward from one centred on the nature of the unitary and autonomous policy arena to one which acknowledges that relations can no longer be simply understood in structural terms alone.

In summary, as Lejano (2006) acknowledges, policy change in a state-centred policy development arena will be influenced by the (largely) professional perspectives of those central to this arena. This provides the policy space

needed to address the making of policy. The perspectives formed within such spaces, will seek to limit or open, depending on the circumstance, the policy process. Policy development, based on process, is path-dependent, reflecting particular socio-political contexts as well as territorial perspective. Given such dependency, governance, being the means by which policy is translated into the decision-making associated with policy delivery, becomes more a result of worked relationships involving the various policy actors. Some of those actors draw upon locational perspective rather than professional background. As some of those actors are concerned with implementation at the local level, they are a critical part of the public management infrastructure. Therefore the concept of the local-national policy interface becomes one which is based on both shaping the direction of community or place as well as seeking to fulfil a particular professional need. A model of policy development, in such circumstance, based on the interplay between the local stakeholder environment and the national policy framework is therefore more likely to be open to external influences. This subsequently calls for consideration of policy development within a multi-layered regime.

### *2.3.3 Policy integration through multi-level government*

Rhodes (1999) acknowledges that the establishment of a multi-level institutional framework has to provide the means, at the local level, to determine the most appropriate response to local expectations or concerns. He argues that:

*The phrase, 'central government' is convenient shorthand but potentially misleading because it accords the centre a unity it does not possess (1999, p126).*

There is therefore the knowledge that the policy process is more likely to be influenced by a combination of both international and national dynamics, most of which place a limitation on the extent to which a purely central perspective

can be applied. This further translates into the local policy arena where Hanf argues that:

*Territorial and functional differentiation has produced decision systems in which the problem solving capacity of governments is disaggregated into a collection of sub-systems with limited tasks, competencies and resources, where the relatively independent participants possess different bits of information, represent different interests and pursue separate, potentially conflicting courses of action.*

(Hanf 1978 p1-2)

To avoid fragmentation within a pluralist context there is a need to integrate the institutional features of multi-level governance with those applying a territorial perspective. In the Netherlands, for example, while the function of all levels of government is organised thematically or sectorally, the public policy process has a clearly determined spatial intent. This is provided within a national policy framework and is used to drive the policy interface across the various layers of government. The preparation of policy and its implementation therefore takes place within a vertical/horizontal institutional iteration and, importantly, on a diagonal basis<sup>5</sup>. The significance of such an approach is that it allows the local, regional and central authorities to operate with the shared objective of achieving greater efficiency in public service delivery. This allows both the political process and the sense of local identity to be a central feature of planning across relatively long term periods and levels of government. It does so within a spatial dimension which was missing from the New Public Management process.

Hajer et al, (2000) acknowledge the value of the Dutch approach to policy-planning when they note the benefits of such an approach but they also appreciate that even in such a policy-planning environment there is also evidence where:

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<sup>5</sup> Diagonal on the basis that policy moves across vertical layers into horizontal applications of public management.

*..the system obviously struggles with some macro-sociological developments that erode both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Dutch system of planning. (2000, p339).*

This struggle points to the challenge of embedding policy integration into the cultural perspective of organisations operating within a multi-level policy process. If the organisation's culture is one seeking to retain all mandate and power of implementation within its own strategic organisation, the embedding of external institutional perspective into the policy process is less likely to take place. The policy process is unlikely to be iterative and therefore less likely to be able to confront challenges especially if such challenges exist outside of the immediate parameters of the policy maker. In circumstances where the embedding of policy integration takes place within a multi-level environment the iterative processes are no longer seen as addressing the challenge of public services delivery singularly but rather on a converged basis. So, as Lazer and Andre-Clark, (2000, p2) recognise, managers in public administration must be positioned to lead change within their operational environment<sup>6</sup>.

They too:

*... have a greater role than ever to play in ensuring that cross-functional communications are successful and productive.*

In having such a role the policy-maker can be positioned to gain the necessary:

*...support and resources from the external environment...*

that they now find themselves operating within.

This poses a clear challenge when those public servants are not drawn from the local political process and are part of the national institutional setting. Attempts

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<sup>6</sup> One which is now multi-agency as well as multi-level.

by national public servants to direct policy on the basis of political priorities set without regard for local need and expectation will inevitably be seen as a direct challenge to the local political context and consequently unfulfilled. Ansell (2000, p303) reflects this thinking when he acknowledges that:

*An analysis of regional development structures and strategies in Western Europe reveals that many features of such a polity now exist alongside and, in some cases, supplant more conventional institutional features of governance.*

The traditional hierarchy of government, (i.e. vertical command and control (Weber, 1947)) is thus no longer the model to manage the diversity of post modern society. It has no place when the organisation is expected to function within an environment where increasingly organic policy development is required. As Hooghe and Marks, (2003, p 233) note:

*Centralized authority-command and control-has few advocates. Modern governance is, and according to many, should be-dispersed across multiple centers of authority.*

Hooghe and Marks (2003) however acknowledge that once the debate moves beyond this broadly accepted perspective, differences do arise in regard to the nature of the structure and the levels it could be applied at. They question whether public management mandates could be developed around structures which are competency or functionally based (what they label as Type I Governance) or whether a territorial perspective to particular shared challenges could be the basis for multi-level governance (Type II Governance). The significance for this examination of local-centre relations is not so much that they seek to categorise the concept of multi-level governance. It is that they recognise that, regardless of the typology, policy implementation can overspill from one area to another and so:

*...coordination is necessary to avoid socially perverse outcomes. (Hooghe and Marks, 2003 p233).*

This is critical to developing an understanding of the nature of local-centre policy iteration.

The insights drawn from the multi-level governance literature indicate that a vertical/horizontal institutional policy iteration, set within a framework which facilitates collaboration on a diagonal basis, is necessary. Peters and Pierre (2001, pp. 131-132) define multi-level governance as:

...negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions at the transnational, national, regional and local levels ....

Such processes are a central feature of the public management framework. The coordination of policy-making from local to national and international levels is acknowledged by Ansell (2000), Bullock (2001) and Hooghe and Marks (2003) as a motivating factor underpinning the need to create formal and informal networks which are necessary to ensure complementarity across the policy processes of the local-centre environment.

The significance, as acknowledged above, of such an approach is that it allows the local, regional and central authorities to operate with the shared objective of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. This, whilst meeting the challenge of embedding policy integration into the cultural perspective in organisations operating within multi-level policy processes and an environment where increasingly organic policy development is required. The creation of processes which underpin the dialogue which must necessarily feature in a multi-level process therefore becomes a critical institutional feature of the local-centre interface. Given the need to retain, however, the existing constitutional basis of the organisation of public management the challenge is one of establishing the networks within which policy dialogue may take place,

rather than the setting up of further structures to deliver on the multi-level governance policy dialogue.

## **2.4 The networked public policy arena**

### *2.4.1 Networking to coordinate*

The corporate planning of the public sector, notwithstanding mandate or legislative function, has to take on network forms to enable coordination take effect within a multi-level environment. This is the result of public policy bodies having to operate in conditions where policy spill over is increasingly the norm and the reliance on non-governmental actors to implement policy is clearly determined. Networks, often informal in corporate terms, can be seen as the means to deliver public services within horizontal and vertical governance frameworks. Perri 6 (2002) acknowledges that such forms can be seen as central to creating whole of government responses notwithstanding the increasing specialisation associated with New Public Management. Increasingly however, given the cross-institutional effect of public policy, this alone will not resolve the challenge of achieving joined up government in a multi-level environment. Rather, the organisational form must move beyond even this model of cross governance to allow the diagonal governance, acknowledged above, as well as hierarchical and horizontal governance (Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000). This is particularly the case for thematic based, multi-competence bodies operating within national policy arenas. A local policy body has to structure its policy framework to allow for cross over in its own multiple mandates. The need to coordinate with the national or European policy arena will also often be spread across different ministries, thus reinforcing the need for diagonal integration. The effect is such that the local policy process needs to be

hierarchical and diagonal across ministries as well, at times, as horizontally engaged with individual local governments and other local stakeholders. This operational environment means that local policy bodies have a multi-institutional environment which is vertical, horizontal and diagonal. It also means that such bodies can no longer be simply focused on a particular policy arena emanating from a single ministry. In the absence of formal institutional arrangements such as the centralised structures suggested by Lejano (2006) for example, networks provide the policy-maker with the necessary flexibility to address the multi-dimensional variables confronting communities at local and national level. There remains the challenge of determining where the initiative for creating such networks will be.

Ansell, (2000, p309) for example does appreciate that:

*An important implication ...is the idea that the unit of planning and administration in the networked polity is the multiorganizational 'project team' that transcends the boundaries... the turf of different government bureaus, and the vertical and horizontal jurisdictions of the state.*

While the point of diagonal governance may not have been developed by Ansell, there is recognition, on his part, that the local policy process exists within a wider socio-economic environment. National institutions therefore can no longer be the mechanistic corporate bodies directed by a singular political view that Weber suggested in 1947. Rather, they are a part of a dynamic form of governance. In framing this thinking Ansell (2000) understands that the move towards inter-linked organisational and political practice brings with it a continuing role for central leadership.. The important factor is not the determination of who does what or indeed who holds the resources *per se*. Rather the challenge is about ensuring that the centre is equipped to interact

with a policy framework which has the necessary flexibility to influence the policy choices associated with public management. The creation of the capacity to think through policy impact becomes a key requirement, particularly within a multi-dimensional policy process. This becomes even more significant when policy is being determined through the administrative process at central levels, but will be delivered locally with probable implications for the local electoral process. Whichever it is, it will need to allow for a networked application between the policy maker and the delivery of public services within a local policy environment.

To conclude on this point, networks can be seen as central to creating whole of government responses but the creation of networks alone will not resolve the challenge of achieving joined up government. National institutions are a part of an organic form of governance which is inter-linked with the local policy process as well as driven by political practice. This brings with it the challenge of accommodating central leadership alongside local initiative. A key feature of such accommodation is the need to manage the direction of future economic and physical development. This is so given the pressures on both political and administrative leadership to sustain inclusive communities, deliver enhanced quality of life and standards of living. These pressures are among the most critical confronting leadership at all levels of policy-making and are particularly evident in the spheres of spatial development and territorial governance. Addressing this however requires the integration of government so that within a networked polity, the horizontal, vertical and diagonal layers can interface.

## **2.5 Joined-up government**

Smith (2006) argues that, apart from the issue of responsibility for the resourcing of local public service delivery, the challenge of achieving joined-up government is dependent on a hierarchical relationship. It is within this hierarchy that local implementation takes place. It does so subject to the sanction of the centre. Notwithstanding the need to meet local expectations, actual service delivery thus rests within a framework which is determined by external factors and influences. These are increasingly beyond the scope of the local policy arena. In such conditions, the integration of the vertical governance of policy development is dependent on the centre. Effective local policy delivery is therefore an influence only when the central policy process is open to integration processes. (Bullock and Mountford (2001). This analysis is further acknowledged by both Perri 6 (2002) and Healey (1997) in their perspectives on local-centre integration and the network polity. They argue that joined up government facilitates the creation of a regime which allows the national policy process set a strategic agenda. This is then tempered by local analysis, articulation and understanding of the local priorities. Smith (2006) further suggests that joined-up government is a top-down process. Its effectiveness will be determined by the extent to which local autonomy is limited, along with having in place clear lines of direction on the part of the state. He does not, however, see it being wholly restricted to national determination. He acknowledges that the national policy arena is not the ideal mechanism for setting local priorities. This is especially the case where the environment will be different to others due to locational and cultural drivers. This poses the challenge of putting institutional structures in place which can flexibly interpret

the nature of the local problem within a strategic framework set by the national policy arena.

The argument for joined-up government, as Poliitt (2003), Perri 6 (2002) and Healey (1997), assert, is based upon two pillars. In the first a joined-up process should reduce the potential for different policies conflicting with each other or blocking the potential for beneficial impact. This could also have the effect of maximising value added for public spend. In the second instance, the potential for achieving greater synergy is acknowledged. This arises through applying a multi-sectoral perspective to policy development within a joined-up policy framework based upon networked arrangements. Such a framework has the likely impact of restricting any external negative influences which, in turn, might undermine a particular policy objective. Pollitt, (2003), argues that joined-up government has a series of goals which includes the elimination of public policy contradictions and therefore the increase in the effectiveness of public policy. The better use of resources through greater coordination and application will necessarily follow. The generation of greater synergy across policy fields will allow for a “smarter” delivery of services. The result is the production of services that will meet the targeted needs of the citizen-user and thus an underpinning of the policy objective in the first instance.

There must be recognition however, that joined-up policy development requires a considerable shift in the cultural perspective of the elected official and full-time professional at all levels of government. Such thinking, which Healey, (1997) and others also seek to establish, recognises that it is not simply structure

which must be adjusted to the meeting of the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century policy-making process.

There is a need, in such instances, for adequate levels of accountability and appraisal along with the necessary local-national dialogue to underpin a process of joined-up governance. In a local organisational environment where there is a high level of congestion, there is a need to understand the extent of local fragmentation of the public arena. This would allow for the retention of specialisation in service delivery. The key as Healey (1997) argues is that such fragmented specialisation takes place within a strong local strategy making process. This process suggests the need for a lead organisation having the effect of levering agreement across the local policy context. The same, it is argued, might also be the case at the national level.

The 2005 Dutch Presidency of the European Council, reflecting this thinking steered a common opinion from the Member States of the European Union to declare:

*The idea of governance highlights the involvement of regional, local and non-governmental actors in the policy-making process...*

The central governments of the Member States should thus include an awareness of the implementation consequences for local and/or regional authorities during the national determination of positions in the European decision-making process. This, it held, is of such significance to the local policy framework in regard to the allocation of competencies among the different administrative levels from local to national.

In light of this European wide acknowledgement, the question needs to be asked where does the local-national policy process develop and how can it possibly begin to achieve the expectations set before it by the diversity of communities which it is attempting to address? Healey, (2006, p68) develops her earlier work by suggesting:

*A core meaning of integration centres on co-ordination between policy fields, sometimes expressed as 'bringing together', usually linked to some concept of co-alignment, and making policies in different fields mutually consistent.*

The essential argument she puts forward is that integration is an iterative process that implies the existence of a relationship between the different policy layers. Perri 6 (2002) draws similar conclusions.

Integration has therefore to be understood as meaning inter-connection. Thus for it to be effective, it must be based upon the aligning of the policy layers and processes of public management. The process is not just two way as this implies a closed interface between specific policy layers. It must be a multiple interface across multiple institutional features within a public policy environment which is open and accessible. Such thinking underpins both of their arguments centering on inclusionary augmentation as well as the role of the network in policy development (Healey 1997). It also provides the basis for shared responsibility, a feature of the principles of sustainability. This point is understood by Baldersheim and Ståhlberg, (2002, p74-90) when they suggest:

*That governance of central-local relations may be multi-level in character does not follow exclusively from the rather trivial fact that central-local relations are about interaction across levels of government.*

In the Nordic and mainland European States a feature of the institutional setting which is specifically established to provide the means for such integration and coherence is that of the position of prefect. This position has developed into a

substantial role. It has its historic roots in representing the various royal households at the local level though a royal appointed official who would ensure the royal remit was respected in local municipal affairs.

It is a role which survived the modern policy era and it now underpins centralisation trends in countries applying Napoleonic Law. It is a position that therefore applies to most of Western Europe. The continuing role of the prefect is justified on the rationale that there is an on-going need:

*...for institutions that ensure cohesion and some kind of standardization and coordination.... As there has been an overall tendency in recent years towards decentralization in the form of devolution of power and responsibilities from the national level to the local level, an institutional response seems quite a challenge.*

(Bjørnå and Jenssen, 2006, p308)

Hence there is the irony of having in place a centralising force within apparently highly devolved systems of governance. This invariably results in arrangements which can be delimiting to local autonomy and independence in policy arenas which are determined by either a national or an international policy process.<sup>7</sup> Such is most apparent in the management of the physical and economic pillars of States such as the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Germany, all of whom place the spatial perspective at the heart of both national, regional and local policy processes.

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<sup>7</sup> The argument underpinning the level of state intervention, particularly through the use of prefectural structures is that local government and the governance of the locality cannot be expected to manage the inherent complexity of both international and regional boundaries. The prefect provides the arena for policy negotiation. This is reasoned to include sustainability, and hence much of the local policy process is necessarily subject to national direction.

## 2.6 Spatial development and territorial governance

### 2.6.1 Planning for space

Land use, to a significant extent, determines the level of pressure exerted upon the natural and economic environment. Such pressure in turn, when combined with the degree of vulnerability of the environment, determines the quality of the environment. Pressures and vulnerability vary considerably from one place to another as does the quality of the environment and its natural resources.<sup>8</sup> These differing characteristics result in policy challenges which can be significantly different for the policy maker, even before there is any effort to begin characterisation on the basis of cultural identity, economic position or demographic profile.

Where an overlay of societal characteristic is applied to the physical characteristic of an area, there has to be an expectation that the policy parameters applicable in one jurisdiction, or area, will be different from those applicable to other areas. Therefore, within an increasingly internationalising policy environment, policy-making and implementation must be organised so as to take account of such physical as well as social/cultural differences. As Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann, (2002, p114) argue:

*The focus on the spatial relations of territories holds the promise of a more effective way of integrating economic, environmental, cultural, and social policy agendas as these affect localities.*

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<sup>8</sup> The European Union is characterised by extraordinary variability in its socio-economic framework in terms of natural resources endowment, degree of exploitation and quality of environment. For example, in the area of landscape characterisation, Europe displays considerable diversity due to, among other physical dimensions, the extent of forestry in the Member States. In Ireland, some 10% of the land is afforested while in Sweden and Finland over 70% is afforested.

Nonetheless, what has to be a central feature of any approach to policy development and the planning that results, is the realisation that territoriality, regardless of the physical characteristics and social/cultural mores of the area concerned, is a central aspect to sustainability.

It is, therefore, a necessary pre-condition in policy development to incorporate a spatial perspective within the societal identity in which the policy is to be implemented. This is so as the geo-societal characteristics of local policy environment will be different across areas and regions due to their demographics, social outlook and physical characterisation.

Thus, spatial planning is seen as essential for matching development policies and subsequent land use with the capacity of an area or region to absorb development. Wong, (2002) for example, considers a list of criteria that could be used to assess the need for country wide spatial planning. She groups these under four main headings: improvement in the co-ordination of different policy frameworks; provision of a completed national spatial coverage and consistent monitoring frameworks; development of a national spatial vision for development; and provision of more effective national solutions to the pervasive force of changing spatial structure. The Royal Town Planning Institute, (2001 p1) underpins this thinking when it considers that:

*Successful spatial planning is integrated. Too often plans are made and planning objectives are taken on a restrictive land-use basis, without proper integration with other policy objectives. Planning needs to be developed on a more consistent, cross-cutting and collaborative approach.*

What this means is that the spatial planner necessarily must consider the broader policy process. Equally the policy maker, regardless of the thematic consideration, has to factor in the spatial/territorial impact of the policy being

developed. In the absence of a territorial application, the policy may undermine rather than underpin the socio-economic sustainability of an area. This, the RTPI(2001) suggests, may be due to the probability of incoherence in policy application or, the re-interpretation of the policy by those challenged to deliver public services within the particular socio-spatial characteristics of an area. Ultimately, the challenge of any public management process at the local level in regard to spatial development has to be met. This challenge arises given likely differences in perspective arising from social as much as physical character. The RTPI argues that the challenge can be addressed through the creation of a relationship between the horizontal planning processes of local and regional governance with those of the State and the international environment such as the influence of the European Union. It also must address the diagonal nature of cross boundary planning and policy overlap. This is so as policy influences will arise outside of the immediate territorial or organisational boundary. Equally however, a failure to address institutional restructuring at the two upper levels of governance i.e. regional/national and national/international will negate most integrationist actions at local / regional level. Integrated planning therefore requires a complementary political and administrative commitment to reform.

The UK Audit Commission, (2004) puts forward that:

*Progress in improving economic, social and environmental well-being is most likely to be achieved where national and local priorities are fully aligned and where local partners achieve coherence in establishing their priorities and targets...*

The Commission went on to acknowledge the case made by Bullock (2001) and underpinned more recently by Bogdanor (2005). Both argued that the effort to integrate from one level of policy to another, within a spatial perspective, will fail if the silos created under New Public Management processes are not addressed. The Audit Commission goes on to suggest that local policy

development is at its best when local leadership is provided. Such leadership however has to seek to improve local well-being through coherent policies that are aligned at the national, regional and local level. Leadership therefore, the Commission argues, is based on processes which seek to develop coherent programmes of change that are based on local needs and opportunities. Strategic planning and management, in its broadest sense, is being advocated as the framework for the co-ordination of economic and social development. In particular, it is being seen as a means of ensuring that the territorial impact of policy is taken into account in its development and implementation. There is a developing consensus (Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann, 2003), however, that strategic planning could be used more consistently. This requires the implementation of sectoral or thematic policy, while contributing to sustainable and balanced regional development.

*Within the spatial planning policy community, at the European level, much of the discussion promoting a stronger spatial approach to spatial development emphasises forces arising from national, European, and global shifts in economic organisation, social values, and political organisation.*

(Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann, 2003 p115)

Ultimately the spatial perspective or the governance of territory increasingly must be factored into the corporate planning of any organisation with a public policy remit. This necessitates integrated planning processes across such public bodies. Complementary political and administrative commitment to reform the nature of the policy interface is therefore necessary. While local policy development may be at its best when local leadership is provided, it will not deliver on local expectations for the same reason that applies to the national policy maker. No matter how well engaged a community is within a local policy process, the expectations arising within that process will not be met. The management of local expectations by local leadership has to take place within a

framework that allows for translation of national into local policy and *vice versa*. In the absence of complementarity across policy fields that are horizontal, vertical and most particularly diagonal, the advantages of such leadership will be more limited. Such need for leadership therefore puts a focus on the organisational arrangements in place and how these can be manoeuvred into making the connection between place, space and policy.

## **2.7 The role of strategic management**

### *2.7.1 People- based management*

Given the above thinking, Hague and Jenkins,(2005 p7) suggest:

*Places are places (and not just spaces) because they have ...identities... formed through milieux of feelings, meanings, experiences, memories and actions that...are substantially filtered through social structures and fostered through socialization. Thus place identities are relational.*

In other words public policy development requires collaborative engagement based upon the territorial outlook because it is person centred and people live within particular locational context. Healey, (2007) also argues that joined up policy based on collaborative models is relational but within a territorial context. It is thus possible to develop institutional settings within local-national systems. Such settings can be designed within a place-shaping strategy that has a territorial focus to meet local perspective and political expectation. Such place-shaping is therefore person-centred. Hague and Jenkins, (2005, p20) suggest that this is key to understanding local-centre policy processes. They see the policy process as one which: *"...sits within a social context and is embedded in power relations..."* In doing so they attempt to define territory as:

*essentially the governance context of space-as limited generally by formal (or legally constituted) boundaries that are spatially determined and of course mapped and even physically created."*

The nation-state however, cannot be the only manifestation of identity through territory. This is so because the characteristics, physical and cultural, of the nation-state or the region, also become distinguishable in their own right at the local and in certain instances, regional level. Such characteristics may reflect a locally shared perspective arising from a particular physical characteristic. It may also reflect a relevant historical embeddedness in the local population along with other related socio-cultural and linguistic characterisations.

The relevance of such is that sense of place and identity are becoming an increasingly important aspect which must be internalised into the local-centre interface, particularly in the context of the internationalisation of the policy process across economic, social and environmental matters.

Hague and Jenkins (2005) see the policy process as providing a spatial framework which can stimulate the opportunities necessary to underpin a vibrant and planned approach to the governance of the public policy framework. It can thus provide wider negotiated responses to the local-centre relationship. However such responses, Healey argues (1997), become more difficult for the local community as the process moves to one which is centred on the elites within the policy process. Healey therefore calls for forms of engagement which will augment participative processes by underpinning good governance through relational webs. But how can this be adequately framed within what, after all, have to be institutions applying the principles of new public management in order to realise the benefits of greater efficiency and effectiveness? The work of Lejano, (2006, p4) provides the basis for comprehending this challenge. While the “... *politics of the everyday does touch us all in complex and common ways...*” the need

for dialogue across and within the layers of public management presents the ultimate challenge to the organisation of public management. Therefore the politics of the everyday and the processes of public policy-making are entwined within a spatial perspective and sense of identity. The creation of a coherent approach to the local-centre policy interface ultimately depends on the extent to which spatial perspective and identity can be embedded into the local-centre policy process. Thereafter such coherence can be translated into the globalised process which increasingly influences the regulatory and constitutional position of the centre. The institutional setting thus grows with the shifts in the policy environment. These are based on the experience of implementation at the point of implementation, i.e. at the local level. Therefore:

*...we should expect institutions to reflect some characteristics that are unique to their particular context. (Lejano, 2006, p203)*

In instances where this uniqueness is not in place the expectation that policy coherence will be achieved will be over-optimistic. The likely outcome therefore, is one where achieving the policy objectives originally determined is problematic.

### *2.7.2 Institutions for person-based policy-making*

Lejano proposes an institutional model to allow for the local-centre interface. He presents the policy analyst with the challenge of understanding the dynamics of the local interface i.e. the relational webs as discussed by Healey, (2007) and others. But he also questions the coherence of the actors operating within those webs. This includes the extent to which there are shared strategic goals and values to underpin the relationships. The policy analyst is thus provided with the opportunity to explore the extent of alignment across the boundaries that form the institutional setting for local-centre policy deliberation. This can take place

as it becomes possible to delineate the gaps between the objectives of local and national policy. The identification of these gaps then allows for consideration of the means to fill them.

What becomes critical is the acceptance, which must be mutually reinforcing, of the right for both formal and informal relationships to establish the policy framework across the institutional boundaries of formal government. The need to establish the necessary modalities for such relationships must also be mutually acceptable.

The approach to applying the necessary institutional dialogue is based upon setting in place planning processes which can allow for multi-layered policy dialogue. Healey, (2007, p1) describes such an approach as:

*governance efforts which recognize that both the qualities of the places of an urban area and the spatial organization of phenomena are important for quality of life, for distributive justice, environmental well-being and economic vitality.*

Hutter and Wiechmann (2005) draw upon the thinking of the organisation theorists in drawing parallels between the strategic planning of territories and those of organisation management. This thinking, indicative of Mintzberg's approach (1989)<sup>9</sup> to organisation, places the organisation of society within an unstable environment. Such an environment has to be managed through a futures based perspective. This, in turn, is developed on an evidence based approach to understanding the dynamics of a territory.

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<sup>9</sup> Strategic management writers such as DeWit & Meyer address the need to manage the complexity of future thinking for organisations operating in unstable environments. This advances Mintzberg's thinking in terms of the organisation of structure within organisations.

The relevance of such an approach to understanding the dynamics of managing a territorial or spatial context is that it places forward planning as a central feature in the public policy process. It is not intended to address here, in detail, the processes associated with strategic management theory. It is however worth acknowledging that strategic management in the public service is now a central feature of management literature and research (Pollitt, Birchall, and Putman, 1998 and Adamascheck and Banner, 1997 among others). The introduction of corporate planning as a tool in the public policy process has fostered the development of the concept of integrated strategic management in public policy. It does so in a manner which facilitates the analyst to consider corporate planning for the organisation and strategic planning for the policy arena as complementary to each other. In both instances the policy planner is called upon to understand the complexities of the environment in which the organisation and territory function. The influences will be the same.

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) suggest that a process of institutional reform, in an environment as unstable as that which modern public management agencies now find themselves, must be sufficiently dynamic and organic to parallel the societal shifts that can arise in such environments. This is necessary in order to approach the conflicting demands of stakeholders seeking to shape the design of the reform. This implies, in an expanding collaborative process, high levels of trust, behavioural change, attitude adjustment and research. Such are factors which public agencies can find difficult to handle while at the same time responding to the various crises associated with public service delivery.

### 2.7.3 Strategy and the electoral cycle

Strategic planning could therefore review the service delivery mechanisms which have been established. These more often than not are created in response to relatively narrow, immediate and ad hoc political problems. Earlier efforts (in the modern public policy era) at strategic planning, were based on the debate centred around the reality of a 'rational planner'. This was either accepted or attacked because public policy could not be innovative but incrementalist or because politicians either wished to retain power or get responsibility passed over to others (Healey, 1997).

However, the problem in the post modern context, is one which is based on the reality that policy-making in all forms takes place, within not just an economic and environmental context, but more significantly, a social context. It is also long term and can thus create policy legacies which may be unforeseen in the absence of a long term perspective. Cultural perspectives informed by identity or socio-economic conditions are thus as important as the natural environment or the capital base. Any approach to strategic planning, therefore, must recognise that policies need to be developed within the context of a society's social, economic and environmental condition. The capacity, therefore, of a society to develop sustainably is dependent upon the creation of appropriate checks and balances. Within a multi-tiered spatial perspective which accepts the diversity of conditions in each of those areas such checks and balances must apply equally within each policy tier. Application of checks and balances at one level alone will skew the capacity of the policy process to balance local expectations with national obligations and *vice versa*.

Strategic planning therefore is as much a process of on-going debate about the existing and future condition of a society, as it is about preparing programmes and actions for service delivery. This is very difficult in a policy environment based on incrementalism. There are political risks to shifting from traditional approaches to management and policy development to the more developed post corporatist forms of strategic planning. The planner and politician, in the new environment, become decision facilitators rather than the decision makers of the modern public management era.

There is however the dichotomy that exists between a political process which has an electoral cycle and the longer term perspectives that may be applied by senior management of a public sector organisation or local authority. These generally are not influenced directly by electoral requirements. This can bring with it the challenge of ensuring that the electoral manifestations of democracy are embedded into the strategic process and *vice versa*. The task of the public service manager to progress towards the generally agreed *longer term* aspirations of strategic planning can, and in some respects must, be subject to the short-term expediency of local or indeed national democracy.

Strategic planning is therefore at times seen by elected representatives as a barrier to achieving a response to an immediate electoral issue. In Norway for example, strategic processes are seen by the local democratic process as a means to reduce political influence over essentially political processes while the organisation of local government is seeking to confront the increasing complexity of sustainability and the need to manage natural as well as financial resources (Aars and Fimreite 2005).

The strategic management of policy development across the layers of government is therefore, fundamentally dependent upon relational layers in the form of a networked polity. The creation of collaborative engagement based upon the territorial outlook of the network participants is further underpinned by the sense of place and identity. These aspects of the relationships are becoming an increasingly important aspect which must be incorporated into the local-centre interface. This requires wider negotiated responses to the local-centre relationship, otherwise it will be difficult to make the local-centre relationship realistic. A policy process which is centred on the elites within the policy process will in the long term restrict the capacity for shared strategic goals and values to underpin the policy relationship and can thus create policy legacies. Unforeseen political risks therefore become more likely as the policy process restricts itself to being informed by a perspective driven by a particular objective of an elite to maintain or sustain their influence, one which is not necessarily based on real evidence or shared view. Ultimately the participative processes underpinning good governance through the use of relational webs are critical in the acceptance of a policy framework across the institutional boundaries of formal government. These relational webs and the coherence of the actors operating within those webs allow the policy maker to establish the policy-making process within a social context that is both politically and professionally accepted.

Furthermore, given locational characteristics the policy maker also needs to reflect on the long-term impacts of the policy process as well as the resource effects the policy may demand. Such effects can include the depletion of the

natural resource stock of an area, a shift in cultural perspective of an effected population or the enhancement of financial reserves. This long-term influence is increasingly being factored into the policy process given the effect of cumulative legacy and the need to manage it. This brings with it the need to place the local-centre policy within a strategic context that can be applied within an inter-generational environment. Policy creates legacy over time. It is not simply applied at a specific point with no extended impact. The nature of public management is that it is long term, even if the objective is met within a reasonably short period. This points to the need to move into a strand of thinking which recognises such long term impacts.

## **2.8 Sustainable development**

In acknowledging the need to consider policy over time Healy (2007) characterises the local-centre policy arena within three identifiable traditions: economic planning, spatial planning and public policy planning. These have grown to become the key elements to initiating the debate on the role of local government and policy development, its relationship to central government and the impact of participative democracy on the traditional process of elective governance at local level. In many respects the debate developed out of the sectoralisation of public services which had its roots in economic planning and rational management. The approach to service delivery became informed by '*disjointed incrementalism*', (Lindblom, 1959 p 79).

This, rational approach to policy development and public administration, recognises that society is built upon a series of social, economic and environmental conditions and it is out of this model or tradition that the concept

of sustainable development has grown. This led to a further development of the public administration tradition, based on an inter-temporal perspective. The effect of a sustainable development led policy environment is that, as Jacquier (2005) argues, policy originating at central level is increasingly being pressured due to the increasing use of public-private partnership in the policy arena along with both top-down and bottom-up collaboration within policy arenas which are fragmented. The use of separated models of spatial planning, public policy development and organisational theory, (themselves features of both centralised and autonomous policy development) are therefore no longer appropriate. Thus, through Dutch eyes for example,:

*A sustainable development strategy contributes to good governance by overcoming government fragmentation, by enhancing policy integration, and thus improving government efficiency and effectiveness.*

(Dalai-Clayton and Krikhaar, 2007 p19)

Good governance is seen as essential for proper planning and sustainable development.<sup>10</sup> This includes cross-sectoral approaches in the formulation of strategies and plans for sustainable development. These approaches include poverty reduction strategies, aid coordination, encouraging participation and enhancing policy analysis, growing management capacity and implementation capacity.

The increasingly disaggregated nature of government from the centre reinforces the challenge of resolving the inherent contradiction of local empowerment within a state supervised institutional framework. The need to focus on strategic planning for public policy development therefore becomes relevant. Thus policy determination through a centralised process of direction could be as relevant to

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<sup>10</sup> For further details on Sustainable Development see Annex A

traditionally autonomous local government systems as would be the case in systems traditionally seen as centralised. Alternatively the opposite might be the case, i.e. that centralised systems might now carry the hallmark of decentralisation due to there being a deconcentrated/autonomous policy framework within a convergent application of public service standards.

Sustainable development suggests therefore that policy-making for place-shaping has to have regard for the integration of the economic, social and environmental development in a balanced manner and within an inter-temporal context. It does so for the simple reason that, in a post modern society, responsibility for decisions that impact over an extended time frame has to be embedded into the policy process. A failure to do so may ultimately create an even less satisfactory outcome to the policy of doing nothing to resolve a particular need or expectation. This would be achieved through greater policy coherence, coordination and monitoring. In institutional terms, the rule of law and strengthening of governmental institutions requires greater and enhanced participation and effective involvement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of planning policy. This is in addition to it promoting transparency and broad public participation.

The UK Presidency of the European Council in 2005 acknowledged that there is a direct relationship between sustainable development, the spatial perspective of the local and the need for integration across policy silos and governmental layers. More specifically the 2005 UK Presidency Paper number 9, argues that:

*Successful sustainable communities can only be built with good governance at every level-European, national, regional and local. Effective local and regional government is just as important as effective government nationally or at the European level.*

The Presidency Paper, now an adopted position of the European Council, goes on to set out what a sustainable community might be. It outlines the necessary local, national and EU institutional arrangements that should be coordinated to underpin the development of sustainable communities across the Union. The Paper is a first political acknowledgement that:

*Neighbourhood, local and regional government leaders have a crucial role because they are best placed to understand many of the needs, many of the problems and many of the aspirations of their local communities. Sustainable communities can only be built with strong and effective leadership and the active participation of citizens in decisions that affect them.*

A sustainable community therefore is now one which has processes of governance that underpin inclusiveness, security and well-being and which interface across traditional policy silos typically established on a sectoral basis. Healey (1997) drawing on the thinking of the original Brundtland Report (1987)<sup>11</sup>, complements this framework for sustainable development by suggesting it developed out of the public administration tradition. The principal differentiation between public management within a sustainable development model and earlier concepts is that policy needs to be multi-dimensional.. Therefore an examination of the public policy process in a local-centre context needs to understand both local and national political perspectives on sustainability. The sense of identity which a community will have within a particular geo-societal context is a significant influence, be it local, regional or national. Thus policy-making from a sustainable development perspective is about both the making of decisions about public service provision and developing a direction which has a spatial and a political impact. The validity in such thinking is underpinned when the delivery of public services is placed

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<sup>11</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development - *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, 1987.

within both participative and representative democratic perspectives. This argument when viewed from a specific local government perspective is acknowledged in that Vetter, (2007 p23) argues:

*Local authorities are a central agent in addressing problems with respect to efficiency and democratic procedures. As the last stage in the nation-state administrative apparatus, local authorities represent the synapse between the political-administrative system and the citizens.*

The essential point is that, from a sustainable development perspective, the delivery of public services at both the local and national level is more correctly centred on the citizen and not the customer. The citizen exists within a spatial context but is a user of thematic services at particular points in his/her life-cycle. The citizen has both regulatory and constitutional rights and responsibilities. The customer simply holds contractual rights based on specific commercial characteristics at particular points in time. Any service, established within a constitutional and democratic context therefore requires more than a focus on commercial or economic efficiency and effectiveness as would be envisaged in New Public Management. It also is impacted upon by both participative and representative democratic processes that are fundamentally based on a right of appeal beyond the simple act of appealing to a judicial process. A breach of process such as a failure to implement a contract or achieve an expected level of output can be challenged within an administrative judicial framework. A failure of the State or its institutions, however, to meet the needs of the citizens, individual or collective, is also subject to democratic review and electoral processes that are now well established. They are also more recently subject to review through the collaborative processes that are a feature of post-modern public management.

This framework recognises that the process of professionalisation of public policy, the gaining of experience and the creation of expertise takes place within a social context. Policy analysis and implementation, therefore, has many forms and, as a result, all elements of society hold interests which are shaped by their social and economic context. In a society holding diverse views, the key challenge to a process of sustainable development is to balance the levels of power such as to reflect such views. In other words those charged with policy-making and its management are accountable to those in society holding a stake and *vice versa*. Thus policy development is based upon negotiated relationships across themes and spatial dimensions. Finally and perhaps the key development to the thinking behind the public administration tradition is that effective public policy-making is based upon a process of collaborative consensus through which policy can be delivered.

## **2.9 Collaborative planning and policy-making**

The key, which Healey (1997) recognises, is that collaborative policy development and strategic planning focuses on the networks or the relationalist webs within which the individual exists. These networks or 'relationship webs', as Healey (1997) describes them, seek to form the basis of the policy process at local, regional and national level. They also do so within a framework subject to international influences and are dependent upon the nature of the relationships found within an individual's and an organisations' operational environment.

Negotiated processes within networks provide the basis for co-governance or iterative models of policy development. Furthermore, collaborative planning

focuses on the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process of deliberation prior to its delivery. What is significant, therefore, is that strategic policy development within a collaborative model actively seeks to inform all stakeholders through inter-active social mechanisms. The objective of the public policy process therefore is to achieve a shared view on the future of society, the organisation and even, at times, the family or the individual. The principal elements are based on the creation of innovative responses and catalysts to change the local or area based socio-economic condition. This can be done via the restructuring of some elements of the existing environment but also the application of innovation within and throughout the network of organisational webs which characterise a society. The key to this process, is one where a lead organisation (or indeed individual) recognises the need to drive change rather than respond to it. Thus, the policy-maker become an active player rather than one who is simply responding. Equally significant is the recognition, by the active policy-maker, of stakeholder inter-action. Creation of nodes of interaction through which strategic thinking and learning can be undertaken become central therefore to the policy process. There is thus a place for the output driven logic of New Public Management, but only as a tool in the move towards integrated policy development which is inter-temporal.

Relational cultures can vary by time and place. They provide the arena in which societal networking takes place. Such cultures can be either formal, through institutional arrangements such as local authorities, or, more likely, informal. The key strength of collaborative planning as a model for the local-centre policy interface, relative to public policy-making based purely on formal structures, is

that there is recognition of the importance of the informal as well as the formal organisational context.

Clearly the issue of sustainability is related closely to the process of future development. Hence the concept of strategic planning. A key challenge for an organisation or an area based policy process is to reflect upon the possible future trends which may impact upon the actions that are seen as critical to the implementation of the relevant policy. Decision making is driven towards being based upon the possible outcomes of such decision-making and the problems which will be recognised as potentially arising from these decisions. Equally, decision making is being based upon an understanding of the relationship between an area's capacity in the future to access resources, financial, technological and human. Such arguments are developed by Egan (2004) and Bogdanor (2005). Understanding the relationship will facilitate the mitigation of future externalities that might arise from the decisions associated with the taking of a particular policy position. Finally, in an internationalising environment, trends associated with the actions of others need to be internalised where such actions could, depending on the level of predictability and exposure, impact upon the organisation or its stakeholders.

The collaborative planning process which recognises the social context in which policy-making takes place, calls for a balancing of the diversity necessary in shaping the socioeconomic condition of post-modern society. Hence the challenges to both the management and political processes which exist within the policy process. In light of the demands arising from an inter-temporal or strategic planning process the characterisation of models which

might adequately delineate the local-centre policy relationship can commence. This allows consideration of joined up policy development which is disaggregated rather than purely vertical, albeit that it might be placed within a formal hierarchical framework.

## **2.10 Resource issues in the local–centre policy arena**

Ahem et al (2005), for the World Bank, acknowledge that the devolving of responsibility to local government has been a feature of local and central government reform across the globe in the past two decades. They argue that the devolving of responsibilities must be accompanied by the provision of greater clarity, on the part of central government, of what policy expectations have to be met. This clarity also includes how a local authority's approach to meeting such expectations is to be adequately resourced. Such thinking by the World Bank clearly complements that of the Council of Europe (see Annex I). The Council acknowledges the conditions relevant to policy dysfunctionality, and therefore likely negative policy outcomes.

Turok, (2005, P5), suggests:

*The availability of resources is generally a more important constraint on local authority provision than the permissive power to act...*

Therefore, the reality for a policy process is that there has to be some recognition that resource management is a significant factor in understanding the local-centre dynamic. Turok (2005) does recognise that the organisation of public management within a place-based context is a central aspect to delivering more effective public services. He nonetheless, appreciates that there is considerable difficulty in leading a policy initiative from the local government level. This is particularly the case when it requires buy-in from the national

policy-maker to ensure consistency and commitment across government departments as well as at local level. Commitment, in this case, being in the form of both regulatory and financial resources.

Resourcing that may come from a particular central hub in the public management system brings the incentive to influence the decision-making in the first instance. As Bish (2001, P1) notes:

*When the beneficiaries also pay the costs, they have an incentive to choose an efficient level of service. Such internalization is not as 'perfect' as it can be with individual purchases in a market, but it is as good as we can achieve for government activities.*

The suggestion is that where beneficiaries, particularly those at local level, are not providing the resource, government expenditure is less efficient. Equally there is a danger that actual services delivered by the local authority are less likely to meet local preferences as they are following a national financial instrument which will be based on national priorities. Lyons (2007) underpins this view by considering the need for enhanced flexibility in resource streams. Such flexibility is necessary to allow policy innovators or leaders at the local policy level to pilot implementation without the fear of being crowded out from the policy arena due to the risks associated with such innovation.

The reform of local government financing, Lyons (2007) argues, must be seen as a central pillar in the move towards greater equality in the local-centre relationship. It brings with it the challenge to central government of avoiding the temptations associated with cost shifting. Such approaches to the financing of local government are a feature of the outcomes which Lyons (2007) identifies as being closely associated with reforms under New Public Management. He

further argues on the point of resourcing (which was the *raison d'être* of his review in the first instance) that funding reform has to be:

*...guided by a set of broad objectives...greater flexibility and choice; stronger national and local accountability based on clearer responsibilities; better incentives for local government; efficiency in local tax and spending; better management of pressures; and improved fairness, and perceived fairness in the tax system.*

But of note is the recognition that the resourcing of local government goes beyond the idea of fiscal application. In the context of inter-temporal policy development, resourcing has to clearly regard the long-term effects on a community, of decisions which may be influenced by simple short-term financial concerns. The attempt to move from a purely financial resource consideration (in regard to the decision-making now associated with public management) to one which places sustainable development at its core reinforces the democratisation process that is a feature of joined up government. It also allows for the internalisation of cost legacies into the decision-making, at which ever level, to take account of the longer term pecuniary benefits (negative and positive) associated with a particular policy initiative. Such legacies can have the effect over time of a short term policy initiative becoming negative, particularly in addressing social disadvantage.

The Council of Europe's (2007) report on the relationship between local and central or regional government suggests that currently the trend, within the framework of the Council's political initiatives, in local-centre relations is one that is concerned with the question of how responsibilities are distributed. It also examines whether the mechanisms available to facilitate interaction are available and/or shared. The Council adds that across Europe legislation remains a central responsibility with funding principally determined at central government level.

Supervision of the use of resources becomes the increasing role of the centre in such instances and thus underpins the argument for centre based performance measures based on outputs. The need for such supervision throws up the need to gain an understanding of the dynamics of joined up government and the impact which this will have on the local-centre policy process.

## **2.11 From policy process to life-cycle people-based policies**

### *2.11.1 From themes to space*

It seems therefore that policy implementation across levels of governance is dependent upon the level of integration from a territorial perspective, between the centre and the local. This suggests that any effort to reform the planning and policy direction of a local government system must approach the challenge of achieving coordination between the layers of government through a whole of government reform process. There may be objectives to deliver more effective policy at the local level through greater participation, better value for money and more local empowerment. It is however really only with a substantive involvement in the national policy arena, and *vice versa* that such objectives can be delivered.

The interdependence between the policy environments of both is too overwhelming for one level alone to apply thematic and area-based approaches. In an arena of considerable uncertainty and ambiguity, spatial planning can be seen as a contributor to the reform of territorial management. It also could provide the policy-maker with the means to address historical boundaries which are associated with the existing institutional framework established to address

public policy. However, the absence of a consistent, cross-cutting and collaborative approach will not lead to an outcome which will underpin good governance. Therefore an integrated strategic planning process is required. The nature of the institutions created to allow for the processing of wider sets of concerns and external influences into the local-national policy process therefore moves beyond the traditional hierarchy of decentralized institutions and political processes favoured by pluralist writers such as Lindblom (1959). The challenge within such a policy context is one where overcoming government fragmentation and policy decentralisation becomes the core of the policy approach. As Forester (1993) concludes, the policy process builds on existing linkages to and around the public management process. In doing so it begins to allow for a multi-dimensional perspective which makes policy through a series of administrative, functional and political units. The process, or more importantly the central actors in the process, work through governance networks where the relational and the negotiated become the norm in an environment of diversity and competitiveness. The policy-maker therefore can, as argued by Dunleavy and O'Leary (1986) and Forester (1993), take on conflicting roles. These include being the pro-active originator of change or the fixed and controlled actor depending on the nature of the challenge being addressed. Forester (1993) for example suggests that the planner in public management has to be able to differentiate between those occasions when the role might be either to keep information or to release it, to enable or to undermine participation, to build or to eliminate the relational webs necessary at a point in time to underpin or shift a previous policy dynamic.

The key is to have the capacity to understand when:

*...the environment ...structurally presents... with problems of distinctly differing levels of technical uncertainty and normative ambiguity. (Forester, 1993 p88-89)*

In having such understanding the policy maker can create the necessary policy dynamic to take, at times, challenging and conflicting positions. It is on this platform he/she can develop a policy or series of policies which have application across diverging institutional settings and varying socio-demographic characteristics and physical dimensions. The capacity to do so may be based upon an evidence based analytical position.

Place, identities and the societal/cultural mores (and thus the concept of place-shaping) that are associated with the characteristics or qualities of the inhabitants of a particular area can become a central feature to underpinning governance where the application of Forester's "*pragmatics with vision*" will arise. But this does not necessarily address the importance of the local-centre relationship in the public management process. A territorially based strategy can be functional or sectoral and might even be targeted at a single layer of government. However, given that public policy is now a process which extends across policy boundaries and layers (even if indirectly or unintentionally) the extent to which a strategy can ignore influences outside of its immediate objectives is questionable. Such questioning is due to the diagonal and vertical interface now necessary in most public policy applications. In processes based upon democratic and transparent values, the formal systems of government create the new political spaces in which policy is developed, appraised, applied and reviewed.

### *2.11.2 Conclusions: Developing new models for integration*

Given the many arguments set out above and their being clearly placed within a spatial perspective which is inter-generational, the key issues for consideration

may now ultimately begin to be identified. Just what is the ideal model for local-centre relations within multi-layered cross-generational governance in which the principles of sustainability, transparency, collaboration and co-governance may be applied?

The first thing is the need to acknowledge that the hierarchy of government has to establish a credible strategic planning model. Such planning needs to be based upon relational webs or networks. These relational webs require both political and administrative/professional characteristics which are established upon a form of corporate governance which is multi-layered and is also accessible to those actors and stakeholders. This is underpinned by a common perspective on resourcing and accountability in regard to the measurement of policy outcomes which are territorial in focus but also effect future generations in both political and institutional terms. The centre retains its central role. It will have a central institutional process that is embedded into the local process.

Equally however, the local will have an understanding of the central policy expectations while also having the means to communicate and influence the policy process. The local government process will itself have a framework which is enabling of other local stakeholders and will be the focus for communication through to these local stakeholders on the part of the centre. Any move therefore towards devolved or reformed local government has to be accompanied by complementary structural and cultural shifts at the national level. This applies to both the political and administrative/professional pillars of central government. At the very least it suggests, as Pearce and Mawson (2003 p51) argue:

*... removing unnecessary statutory burdens which may constrain innovation and partnership working, and actively supporting those communities willing to take responsibility for some of their local affairs.*

There is clearly an appreciation of the need to relate the respective policy processes of local, regional and national government to each other. The devolving of greater decision-making to local government may be a central aspect to any public service reform process but the management and organisation arising will apply to each tier of government. (Pearce and Mawson, 2003) The experience associated with such institutional changes in the local-centre relationship, given the increasing role local government is playing as the hub of the local policy environment, is increasingly influential in electoral terms due to policy outcome impact. As a result local government systems are increasingly being engaged by the centre in developing new policy. In other words, because of an initial decision to shift responsibility to the local on the basis of greater effectiveness and efficiency and cost shifting, the state, in order to achieve its expectations, has to bring the local policy-maker into the national policy arena.

This is resulting in the creation of both formal and informal contracts, and protocols between the local and national levels across Europe, increasingly based on principles of co-governance. These institutional mechanisms provide the basis for delimiting the nature and extent of the public service to be provided. It also includes a shared understanding of the resources underpinning the service. Such an approach has the effect of providing the clarity required at the local level in regard to the potential for public service improvement. This takes place alongside a national appreciation of the socio-economic and political environment in which the service is being provided. So as the World

Bank (2007), Grant and Dollery (2007), and (Wilson 2003) note, the political process does ultimately determine the nature and extent of political oversight at the national level and in doing so can establish the rules for such oversight. This however, is not always appreciated at local level.

The concepts of decentralised government and government from the centre are models that find actual application in a very limited set of circumstances. Rather what we may actually have is, as Rhodes, (1999, P141) argues:

*a more disaggregated system involving those actors, and potential actors, who share an interest in a particular industry and who interact with one another 'exchanging resources in order to balance and optimize their mutual relationships.*

Jenkins, (2004) also appreciates this perspective where he maintains that, increasingly, worldwide public services are locally delivered but with a minimum national standard applied. The recognition, within New Public Management, that government now operates within an environment in which it is one of a series of stakeholders in the policy process is now therefore, commonly acknowledged. Even within the framework of government itself, what now underpins the policy process is a regime seeking to deliver pro-active governance (Bogdanor, 2005) within a joined-up government structure. This structure is ideally based on a co-governance iterative process which recognises the policy interface between the local and national system. Implementation is also seen as central to that co-governance model. Geddes and Sullivan (2007) have developed this thinking by acknowledging that:

*...challenges to the role of government in society and the emergence of 'new governance' have stimulated new thinking about local leadership practice. (Geddes and Sullivan, 2007 p11).*

They suggest that the local-national relationship now needs to alter the thought process or understanding of that relationship by appreciating that local

government is increasingly to become the representative or “agent” of the diverse communities which government as a whole must now interface with. Loughlin (2000) had long recognised that this was the case when he suggested that both the regional and local policy arena would become *“the privileged loci”* of some forms of democracy existing within a central-local policy environment.

This model of policy-making and implementation brings with it the need for institutional arrangements where the objective is to deliver policy in a seamless fashion. A key aspect to Bogdanor (2005) is that there is no mystery to the objectives of coordination and integration. What is argued for is a very realistic process which is grounded in daily public service planning and delivery. Equally, it must be noted that his argument is founded on actual public policy perspective. This perspective is informed though his understanding the nature of much public service, i.e. that such services are citizen/user orientated rather than, as suggested by New Public Management, customer/contract based. Smith, (2006, p2) also suggests *“...central-local relations are not fixed but change over time”*, reflecting the reality that local-centre relationships are subject to the conflicting demands of standardisation and meeting local expectations. These conflicting demands therefore call, not for more autonomy but, for rather more joined-up government. Such an argument suggests a delimitation of autonomy which is fundamentally critical to the delivery of public services, regardless of the institutional arrangements in place to implement the delivery. This means that there is a need to have regard for the external, as much as internal, organisational impact arising from such delivery. In other words, the delivery process needs to incorporate a vertical and horizontal assessment of the intended policy effects in order to understand the potential policy outcomes. In

addition, in an institutional setting which is overlapping, diagonal perspective also has to be applied to the policy perspective influenced by spatial impacts. The acceptance of this perspective becomes even more relevant where the possible impacts are territorial in nature.

## **2.12 Towards identification of the characteristics of the local-centre relationship**

The objective of creating better and more responsive services to meet new and changing needs has been a central feature of the New Public Management process. The argument in regard to the creation of an effective policy process which will meet the expectations of the citizen do however require more than the simplistic objectives of providing services at a more cost effective level. It requires a public management process in which the policy-makers and those implementing the policies at the front line of public administration are equipped to be more flexible and adaptive to the relevant stakeholder environment. This will mean having an integrated policy regime which brings the territorial based expectations of a community into a policy process which is primarily focused on a particular challenge, often sectoral in dimension. Policy therefore, cannot simply evolve at a particular level, rather policy development is an evolutionary process that grows to fit with a particular environment and political/organisational context. This, in turn, will underpin a coherence which will allow local and national actors to adjust to environmental change over time. One of the critical features is to have in place coherent policy-making at both local and national levels. The 'fit' between these levels becomes a central aspect of the institutional environment. Hence the need to grapple with, and

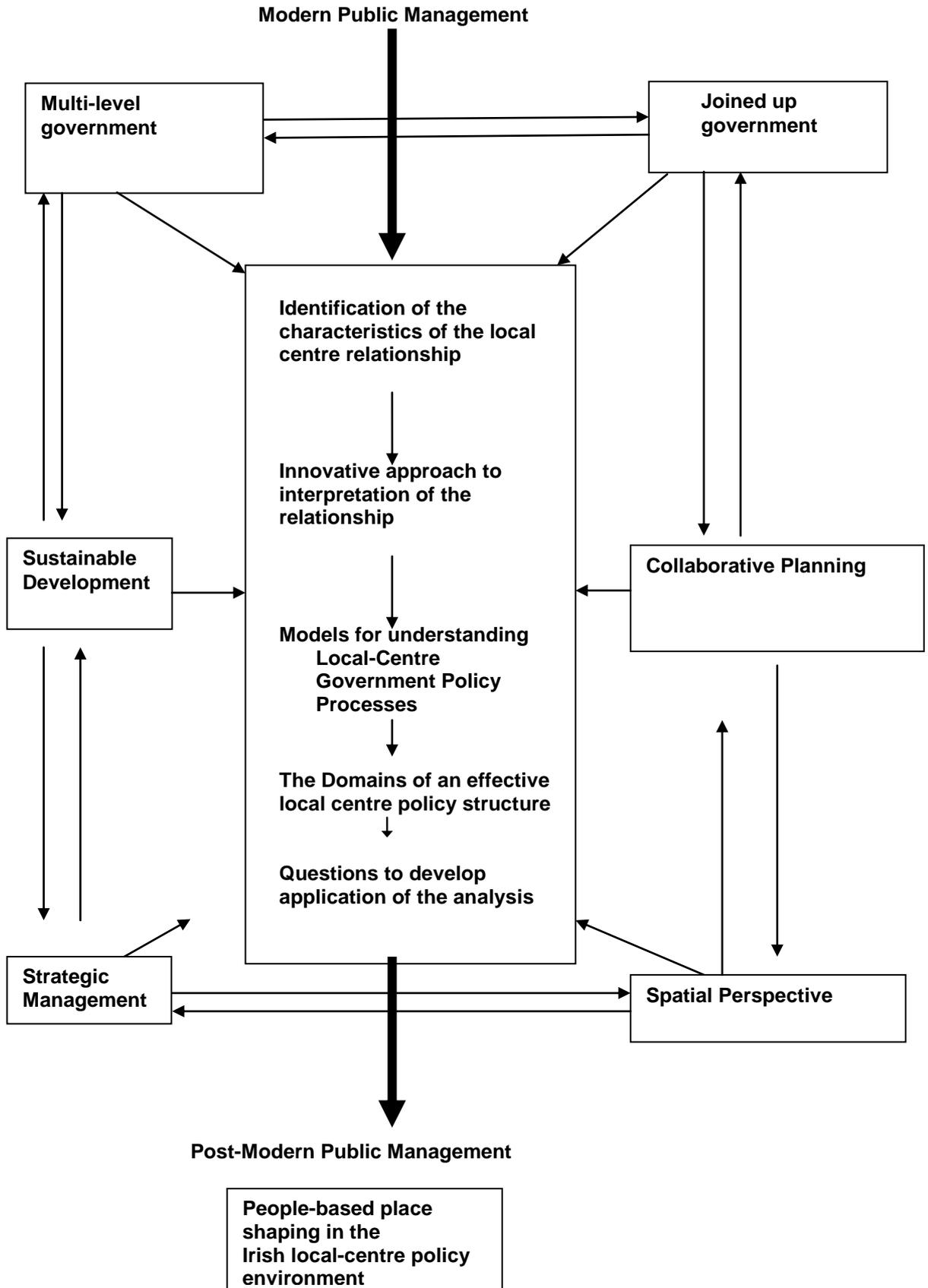
understand, the extent and nature of the central-local relationship and whether it is one which is State centred or decentralised.

It also suggests a policy development approach that is based upon territorial perspective. Such an approach places the policy process into a public service delivery framework that is based on spatial characteristics rather than solely on sectoral service themes. Public service is now designed through the targeting of a particular community, spatially determined or in sectoral contexts, with a view to achieving particular policy outcomes, rather than specific outputs. The nature of the relationship between the making of national and local policy necessarily moves from one of rigidity, based solely on structures (centralised or decentralised), to one of disaggregation based upon flexible or responsive service output determination. Such determination is informed by both the need for citizen based service design and a national or uniform application of public service standards. In other words, the implementation of policy might be ad hoc to allow for local flexibility but the policy outcome is not. Therefore, the characterisation of the policy environment as centralised or autonomous is no longer entirely valid. It is important to recognise the need for a policy arena that allows multiple stakeholder inputs through national and local partnership processes, while also seeking to sustain economic development within an open market environment.

The development of this understanding now allows for the structuring of an ontological framework (see Figure 2 below) which allows for the translation of the underlying features of each academic strand into the research framework which will inform the development of new models for understanding the nature

of the local-centre policy process. This framework creates the roadmap that moves the level of understanding from one set within individual academic strands into one which is seeking to integrate these strands. This integration allows for more perspective being applied to what is after all recognised by each strand as a dynamic environment. It allows for a thread of thinking which has seen the move from modern public management towards a post modern environment. This post-modern environment is the result of the transition from an understanding of public policy-making based upon a static view of the local and the centre to one which is fully cognizant of an environment which is unstable.

Figure 2: The Ontological Framework



To conclude, an understanding of the characteristics of the local-centre policy environment suggests a new set of considerations which will highlight the nature and complexity of the relationships that are critical to the local-centre policy environment. These have been informed by the thinking developed across the strands of policy set within a new public management environment which is now seeking to embed the relationship between public policy maker and the citizen rather than the public service provider and the customer. The shift in perspectives are summed up in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Overview of academic contributions**

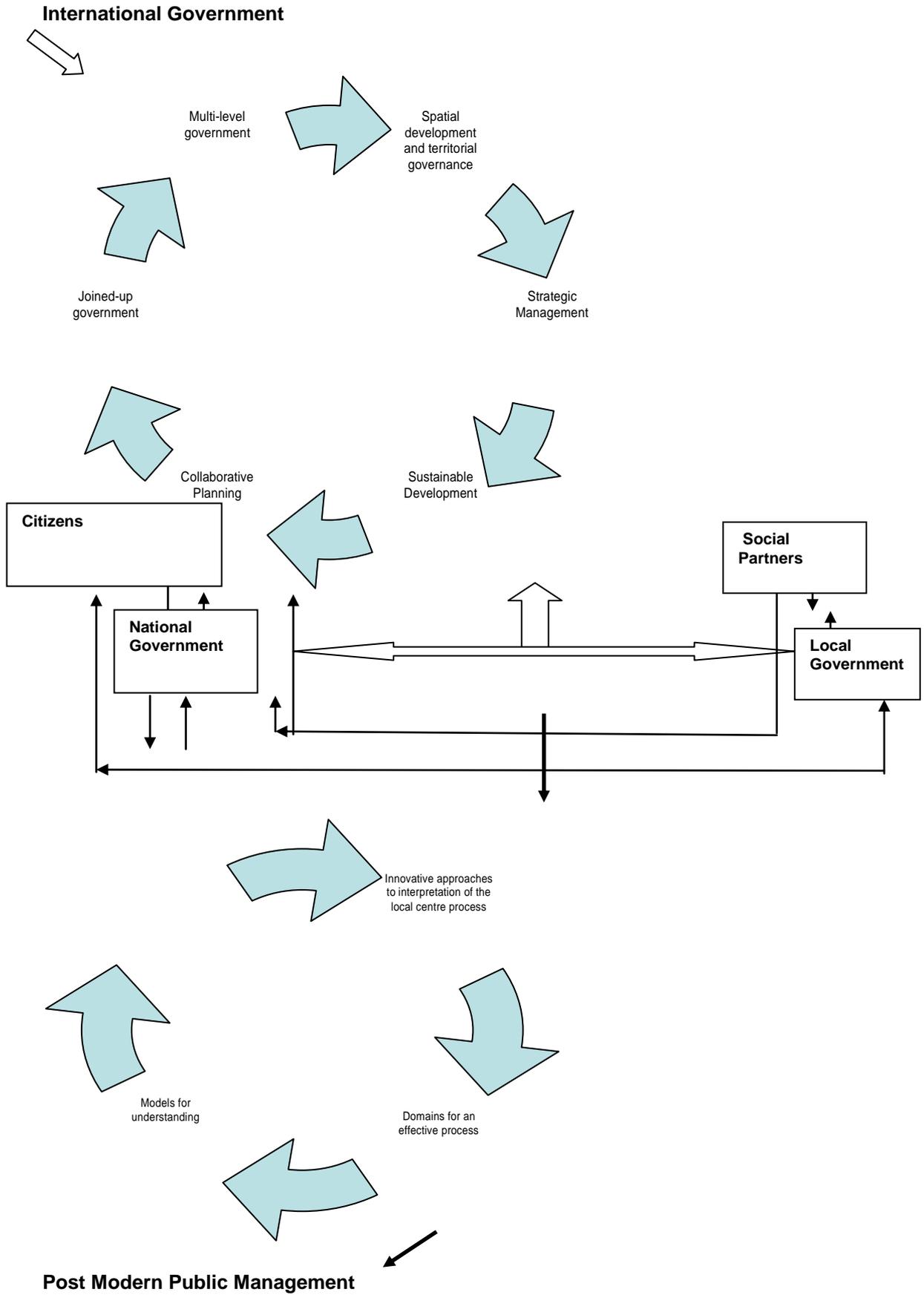
Characteristic	Academic proponent	Expected Impact
<b>Multi-level Government</b>	<p>Goldsmith (2002)</p> <p>Hajer (2003)</p> <p>Bullock et al (2001)</p> <p>Sommerville (2005)</p> <p>Wilson (2003)</p> <p>Lejano (2006)</p> <p>Hanf (1978)</p> <p>Lazer and Andre-Clark (2000)</p> <p>Hooghe and Marks (2001)</p> <p>Peters and Pierre (2001)</p> <p>Bjørnå and Jenssen (2006)</p>	<p>On-going institutional conflicts</p> <p>Public Service delivery by the centre alone no longer feasible</p> <p>Congested Policy environment</p> <p>Unstable institutional boundaries, variations in institutional scale and limited co-terminosity</p> <p>Contested and differentiated governance terrain</p> <p>Dichotomy of Institutional types</p> <p>Territorial and functional differentiation</p> <p>Leading change within their operational environment</p> <p>Type I and Type II Governance</p> <p>Negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions</p> <p>Centralising force within apparently highly devolved systems of governance</p>
<b>Joined up Government</b>	<p>Perri 6 (2002)</p> <p>Hajer and Zonneveld (2000)</p> <p>Ansell (2000)</p> <p>Smith (2006)</p> <p>Healey (1997)</p> <p>Pollitt et al (1998)</p> <p>Forrester (1993)</p> <p>Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (2006)</p>	<p>Horizontal and vertical governance frameworks creating whole of government responses</p> <p>Hierarchical and horizontal governance</p> <p>Local policy process exists within a wider socio-economic environment</p> <p>Dependency on a hierarchical relationship and a top down direction</p> <p>National policy processes setting strategic agenda tempered by local analysis, articulation and understanding of the local priorities</p> <p>Elimination of public policy contradictions</p> <p>The policy process builds on existing linkages to and around the public management process</p> <p>Public policy implementation is multi-dimensional, inter-sectoral and consists of complex layers of</p>

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Academic proponent</b>	<b>Expected Impact</b>
<b>Strategic Management</b>	Pollitt et al (1998) Bogdanor (2005) Bovaird and Löffler (2002) Healey (2007) Hague and Jenkins 2005) Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) Aars and Fimreite (2005) Lindblom (1959)	inter-action across and outside of the normal institutional boundaries Output based policy framework to public service provision Duplication across levels of government Provision of effective and efficient services Adequate levels of accountability and appraisal Fragmented specialisation within a strong local strategy making process Integration centres on co-ordination between policy fields Place identities are relational Processes of institutional reform Relational layers in the form of a networked polity Disjointed incrementalism
<b>Spatial Perspective</b>	Parr (2007) Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann (2003) Wong (1998) Bogdanor (2005) Lejano (2006)	Discordance between administrative and functional structures Integrating economic, environmental, cultural, and social policy agenda Co-ordination of different policy frameworks Provision of a completed national spatial coverage and consistent monitoring frameworks development of a national spatial vision for development Provision of more effective national solutions to the pervasive force of changing spatial structure Silos in New Public Management processes Spatial perspective and sense of identity The dynamics of the local interface

Characteristic	Academic proponent	Expected Impact
<b>Collaborative Planning</b>	Healey (1997) Jacquier (2005) Vetter (2007)	Joined up policy based on collaborative models is relational but within a territorial context Quality of life, for distributive justice, environmental well-being and economic vitality Appropriate checks and balances Participative democracy Co-governance or iterative models of policy development Public Private partnership Local authorities represent the synapse between the political-administrative system and the citizens
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	Gjelstrup and Sørensen (2007) Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann (2003) Dalai-Clayton and Krikhaar (2007) Healey (1997) Bogdanor (2005)	Facilitating vertical and horizontal interaction, coordination and cooperation Sustainable and balanced regional development Overcoming government fragmentation, by enhancing policy integration Policy needs to be multi-dimensional Mitigation of future externalities

It is no longer adequate to simply think of the policy relationship as being centralised or autonomous, or indeed variations thereof. The relationship, with New Public Management as a backdrop, is far more subtle and must be refocused (as delineated below in Figure 3) towards variations that feature aspects of both autonomy and centralisation along with disaggregation and co-governance underpinned by concealed administration. It is therefore no longer appropriate to reflect on the relationship in purely structural or service terms. The *process* of making policy through local-central government must now be central to developing an understanding of the reality of a local-central policy-making environment that underpins place-shaping in a post modern society. In such a context it is therefore not unusual to find that the nature of the relationship may be characterised within a framework that might allow for the central determination of service standards. Alternatively pre-determined service quality outcome parameters might be set within a formal constitutional model but might also be based on convergent service quality standards that are initially determined at local level. Given such conditions it is now appropriate to move towards the development of models which delineate the local-centre policy relationship. In doing so it will facilitate a consideration of the key issues that might be asked on the Irish policy interface. The capacity to understand the true nature of that relationship can thus be established. It will also allow for consideration of a model for the policy interface that might be more appropriate for Irish society in the twenty first century.

**Figure 3: Post-Modern Public Management**



In the next chapter, therefore, the characteristics and innovation that formed the basis for analysing the nature of local-centre policy relations above will be developed into a range of models which could be used to delineate the variety of the local-centre policy process. Within these models the fields of influence that determine the nature of the relationship will be examined. This will allow the research to begin to define the reality of the Irish policy environment and will begin to challenge the pervasive acceptance of Ireland as a centralised country. The ontology of Figure 2 moves the research towards a process which recognises the transition from modern public management to post modern public management as suggested in Figure 3. This allows for a new perspective on the nature of the local-centre policy interface which this chapter has demonstrated as key to understanding the local-centre policy process in Ireland.

## **Chapter Three: Models for the local-centre policy process**

### **3.1 Introduction**

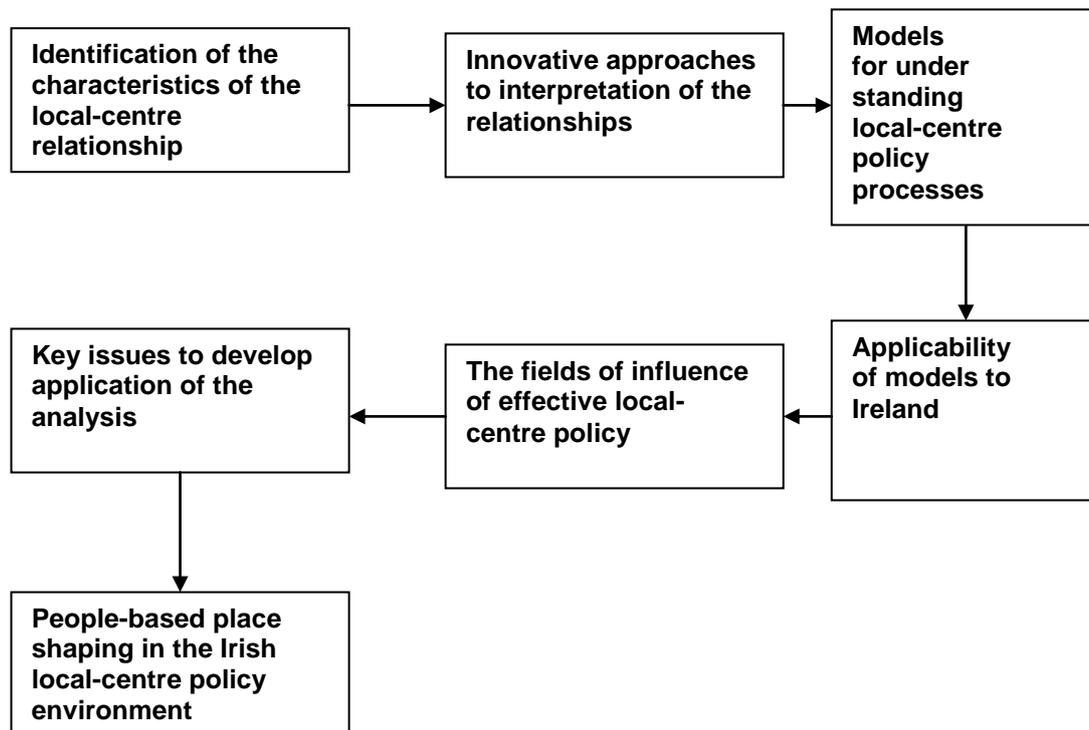
This chapter continues with developing an understanding of the local-centre policy relationship. In doing so it seeks to identify a number of appropriate models which might be applied to the local-centre policy framework. It develops this series of models with the objective of understanding the interface between State and local, territory and sector, government and governance. The chapter then presents a series of issues that can be used to construct the relationship between the local and national policy process as they apply in the Irish case. These allow for consideration of the current nature of the relationship as well as what might become a more appropriate model for the Irish local-centre policy environment. In doing so the key issues highlighted in chapter one provide the researcher with the skeleton on which to develop a robust hypothesis that will become the centre for debate in the remaining chapters. These issues (to re-state for ease of reference) include:

- The need to be address current thinking in public management and the strands of academic perspective which inform such thinking. This involves identification of the characteristics and fields of influence which now define the nature of local-centre policy development. Doing so establishes a greater understanding of the institutional relationships between the two levels of government, local and central. This is addressed in chapter three.
- Having addressed the influence on the local-centre relationship, new models to delineate the possible range of such relationships are developed. These models will be used in the remaining chapters to examine the public management structures in Ireland and to evaluate whether they reflect the nature of the changed policy environment.

- In addition, there will be an examination of policy-making in Irish local government. The applicability of the models will be determined, as will as the need to look at some variant that encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type. In that context, the researcher will consider whether it is appropriate to apply, in the recent efforts to reform the institution of local government, such an approach. This will be done in chapters seven and eight.

The focus for this chapter will therefore be on developing the thinking in chapter 2 into a series of models which will inform, by way of a series of questions, the analysis in the subsequent chapters as suggested in chapter one and repeated here for ease of reference in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Transition from Characteristics to Models**



### **3.2 Identification of the characteristics of the local-centre relationship**

In chapter two there is an acknowledgement that the challenge of public policy development seems to be one which allows for a level of local autonomy but within a national framework and which is inter-generational as well as cross boundary. This should in policy development terms allow for a multi-level dialogue with the local authority at the heart of the process. The process suggests that it will be set within a national context to allow for both national and international impacts. Thus the concept of the local-national policy interface becomes one which is based on shaping the direction of community or place.

The significance, as acknowledged above, of such an approach is that it allows the local, regional and central authorities to operate with shared objectives based upon both local and national needs and expectations. National and local institutions are a part of an organic form of governance which is inter-linked through the local policy process as well as driven by political practice. This brings with it the challenge of a move towards a continuing role for central leadership alongside local initiative.

In addition, the governance of territory increasingly must be factored into the corporate planning of any organisation with a public policy remit. This demands integrated planning processes, underpinned by complementary political and administrative commitment to reform the nature of the policy interface.

Strategic management of policy development across the layers of government, as acknowledged in chapter two, is fundamentally dependent upon relational layers in the form of a networked polity. The creation of collaborative

engagement based upon the territorial outlook of that networking is further underpinned by the sense of place and identity. These aspects of the relationships are becoming an increasingly important aspect which must be internalised into the local-centre interface. This requires wider negotiated responses to the local-centre relationship otherwise it will be difficult to make the local-centre relationship realistic. A policy process which is centred on the elites within the policy process will in the long term restrict the capacity for shared strategic goals and values to underpin the policy relationship and can thus create policy legacies. Unforeseen political risks therefore become more likely.

Policy Integration, a hub of the debate in chapter two, has to be understood as meaning inter-connection. Such an approach requires an alignment of the policy layers and processes of public management. There is thus the need to have a multiple interface across multiple institutional features within a public policy environment which is open and accessible. This thinking and analysis now allows consideration of the nature of the delivery process that needs to engage in vertical and horizontal assessment as well as diagonal overlapping policy development. The acceptance of this perspective becomes even more relevant where the possible impacts are territorial in nature.

### *3.2.1 Policy without politics?*

The concept of there being a single political sovereignty determining the strategic direction of a community is no longer entirely acceptable. Hajer, (2003, p175-195) nonetheless argues that:

*...solutions for pressing problems transgress the sovereignty of specific polities...and with the weakening of the state, it is far less obvious that the government is the sole actor to intervene in policy-making.*

Less obvious is the argument that the political process can be excused, or indeed excluded, from the policy process. The space within which the policy process is established is now, as Hajer,(2003, p175-195) suggests, an:

*...ensemble of mostly unstable practices that emerge in the struggle to address problems that the established institutions are-for a variety of reasons- unable to resolve in a manner that is perceived to be both legitimate and effective.*

Therefore policy development becomes, as argued in Chapter 2, the process through which the local-centre political relationship *and* the professional/administrative structures manage the unpredictability of post-modern society. If it is now accepted that public policy can no longer be developed within a hierarchy which is based, as Hooghe and Marks (2003) suggest, upon command and control but rather has to be framed within an organic context, what can be said about existing local-centre relationships and how might they develop? Ansell (2000) suggests that where the leadership of change is set within institutional settings that act as structures of care, there could be reasonable expectation of citizen focused services that are framed within a co-governance or joined-up environment. Pollitt, (2003) as a leading exponent of joined-up government also recognises the objective of achieving an integrated framework in which local and national/central government can take place. Healey, (2007) argues that policy development must be open to the externalising effects of sustainability and territorial perspective. This is so as both are increasingly a feature of the post-modern existence. Attitudinal openness from Healey's perspective, is as significant a factor to the reformed policy process as is structural revision, regardless of the level at which the structure is placed. Policy development therefore takes place across levels and

dimensions of the local-national-external interface and can be characterised to acknowledge both formal and informal processes that will underpin the policy process. This perspective does therefore naturally lead to the need to understand the concept of devolved governance. The multi-level dialogue and the processes of discourse that are to be determined for a multi-dimensional policy process can then be identified and evaluated.

### **3.3 Concealed administration- Balancing of centralisation and autonomy**

#### *3.3.1 Centralisation*

Policy-making needs to reflect both national and local variations which will result from socio-political characteristics pertinent to a particular society. Equally however, the use of the term “centralisation” provokes perspectives which seek to apply a fixed interpretation on the policy process, a factor which can hamper discussion and understanding of the true nature of central-local policy development. Centralisation is itself subject to many variations and differing interpretations which are determined by both the historical influences of the local and the state. Other influences such as international policy developments like sustainable development<sup>12</sup>, world trade talks, etc. can also be a significant top-down influence. Rhodes, (1999, p4) identifies a “*power-dependence’ model of inter-governmental relations*” where the interactions of the local and the national are “*simultaneously rational, ambiguous and confused...*” This suggests that the study of the local-centre policy arena is no longer about the use of central controls but about the complexity of the relationships that are a feature of the arena. Healey, (2006) and others such as Pearce and Mawson (2003), have developed their

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<sup>12</sup> See Annex A for further consideration of Sustainable Development.

arguments on collaborative models for governance on this basis while Rhodes, (1999, p24) concludes:

*...ostensibly hierarchical relationships dissolve under the exigencies of implementing a policy.*

More significantly however, is that one of the critical aspects to the local-centre relationship is what is described by Rhodes (1999), Fleurke and Willemse, (2006), among others, as the concept of concealed administration. What this means is that the state establishes the machinery of delegated enforcement through its agent, be it a state owned body or a local authority. The relationship is not one of equality. It is hierarchical, generally underpinned by function differentiation and there is a clear internal visibility of leadership on the part of the State.

Externally however, there may be a local political framework that provides a semblance of local autonomy. In European terms Goldsmith, (2002) and Loughlin, (2000), point to examples such as France and Switzerland where:

*central government control-by which is meant setting the rules of the intergovernmental game-is a crucial piece in the establishment of local government systems. (Goldsmith, 2002, p91)*

The mayor may be seen as the leader in policy and public service planning at the local level but the reality is that the administrative networking between the state and the local is in fact the principal form of governance. In fact it may be the mayor who is the central hub to this networking. This is also the case in Denmark where traditionally the autonomy of the local government system was sufficient to allow it to largely ignore national expectations but more recently now finds itself clearly within the policy field of the centre (CEMR, 2009). The introduction of outcome standards and financial control under the most recent

public management reforms in Denmark is moving to undermine the traditional independence of the local authorities.

Goldsmith suggests that central government, through concealed administration, can control through informal means. He highlights the application of control through financial overview and determination of access to resources. There is also the possibility of using administrative or regulatory controls. Both of these capacities to control are of their nature formalised through a constitutional basis.

The remaining control is more informal and is about:

*...the access permitted to local governments, collectively and individually, to central state decision-making processes, and the influences which they are able to exert in them. (Goldsmith 2002, p 91).*

Such systems, he suggests, are more analogous to systems in unitary states but essentially reflect a system of administration in which central influence is embedded through the use of administrative instruments rather than explicit external political direction by the state.

In the Nordic countries this process has been in place, in some cases for several centuries. Gidlund et al, (2000, p 19) for example explains:

*...autonomy is not only dependent on what the central level allows or stimulates, but also on different sorts of capacity and interest created, independently, at the regional level.*

This perspective is also reflected in Bjørnå and Jenssen, (2006) where they suggest a trend towards more rigorous central overview which is driven by a move towards the standardisation of service provision and a resulting need for greater coordination across institutional settings. The resultant institutional challenge is increasingly being met through the use of administrative instruments and national direction (sometimes as in the prefect system in Denmark and Norway or in Sweden through regional structures such as the

County Administrative Board). Such systems can be influenced by having a place-based perspective where the brokering of agreement to make policy by both the local and national levels of government is central to having responsive local governance. Such responsiveness is characterised by having collaborative capacity within the policy process. The actual regulating of a community is based upon local flexibility and the creation of a more equal balance of influence. Such systems, however, can also, in the absence of national guidance, result in fragmentation and dispersion when it comes to the delivery of public services.

This, it is argued by Bjørnå and Jenssen, (2006) mainly arises in institutional models which reflect a sectoral approach to the integration of government. This is particularly the case when a territorial perspective may be the more appropriate application. The solution, unsurprisingly comes back to the joining-up of public policy. Bjørnå and Jenssen (2006) see the planning of policy which explicitly has regard for joining up as central to local public service delivery. Joined-up policy must therefore be a key feature of the revitalisation of local government but led by the centre. This requires the setting of realistic expectations against the background of a blurred accountability that requires the integration of local choice with some limited application of standardisation. Whilst not immediately apparent in terms of underpinning a concept such as subsidiarity, at least it does allow for a meeting of local expectations within a shared agenda for improving well-being at both the national and local level. Thus the concept of concealed administration marks a re-focusing of the debate on the relationship between the centre and the local. It throws the debate on local-centre policy development into a new environment where the nature of

local autonomy shifts from independence to shared perspective. Fleurke and Willemse, (2006) interpret local autonomy as that which enables local government to determine its own work programme and strategic agenda within an environment where central direction is relatively unrestrictive. There is also limited dependency on others in the delivery of the local mandate. Gidlund and Jerneck, (2000, p18) further argue that *“At the local and regional level autonomy becomes synonymous with local self-government...”* Therefore to be independent, as local self-government might suggest, autonomy has to be a central pillar of the local institutional setting. Having sufficient local autonomy to be in a position to determine the appropriate policy approach to governance at the local level is however a constant challenge to the policy-maker.

These perspectives are presented as interpretations of an ideal model given that there is limited scope for such independence in the socio-economic context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Local autonomy can be better understood by applying an analysis of the local-national policy arena based on concealed administrative practices. How these subsequently relate to the activities of other authorities, regional and national may then be included in any such analysis.

Central supervision does impact upon the behaviour of the local political and administrative process. In order to understand the true level of autonomy there is the need to understand the extent to which concealed administration arises. In systems where concealed administration is limited, autonomy might be expected to be greater than in those where concealed administration is prevalent. Current public management arrangements across the OECD however suggest that this is no longer the case. Manor, (1999, p5) considered

that while some might suggest that autonomy and decentralisation are a feature of modern governance the reality is that when decentralisation is considered:

*...central government is not giving up any authority. It is simply relocating its officers at different levels or points in the national territory.*

Autonomy may require an approach to governance where there is a genuine devolution of policy development underscored by a complementary process of fiscal deconcentration and administrative release. Stoker, (2006) however argues that the answer to achieving greater public policy flexibility at the local level is not to follow the path to complete devolution. It is rather to create a local-centre dialogue that:

*allows scope for all institutions to play an active role ...involving a wider range of people in the oversight of the services that are provided through public funds and in the search for solutions to complex problems.*

So the reality of local-centre relations, as Stoker (2006) and Manor (1999) would argue, is that there is no right of autonomy to decide on a policy without reference to the horizontal and vertical layers of government i.e. the concealed administration is a cornerstone of multi-dimensional policy development across the layers of government. It is always a feature of the policy process. Equally, there is no right to determine policy without regard to the diagonal impact of a policy decision due to the multi-functional role which local government, as a political entity as well as an agent of the state, plays. Egan, (2004) underpinned this view when he suggests that the justification for integrated rather than autonomous patterns of policy development has to be based on the recognition that meeting the ideals of sustainability requires processes which make effective use of both human and natural resources. This means that those policy-makers responsible for the various institutional arrangements of the State, local and national, should have in place the administrative and political

arrangements to allow for policy inputs across the structures of both local and national government. Such perspective thus protects the natural environment, promotion of social cohesion and inclusion and the strengthening of economic prosperity. In other words, by applying a multi-dimensional approach to place shaping one can begin to move towards a model for the sustainable development of a society (within an institutional setting which is multi-layered and therefore inescapably not autonomous).

Nonetheless, it has to be recognised that while a local authority might be the central feature of an institutional setting which increasingly cannot be autonomous, it must also be positioned to act as the focus for local democratic practice. This is necessary to meet the concerns and expectations of a diverse local community whilst also acting as the focus for the State at the local level. Rhodes, (1999, p81) acknowledges that:

*Local discretion can be viewed as a multidimensional concept and a local authority dependent along one dimension can have a high degree of discretion along another.*

Equally, such dimensions to the local-centre relationship may be influenced by a process of exchange that can vary around the capacity of the local to divert the national from a specifically focused national policy agenda towards a locally driven set of expectations.

In other words, while a local authority might be dependent upon national resources, it can still achieve its objectives by embarrassing the centre into meeting its demands. Alternatively the centre could react by using its concealed administration to drive forward with a policy process that would not necessarily meet local expectations.

What this discussion implies is that it is much too simplistic to state that a system is autonomous or self-governing when other institutional/legal or administrative veto points can be applied to policy implementation, regardless of the level of discretion or indeed control. Rhodes, (1999) recognises this in the concept of concealed administration which he holds applies to all systems of local public management, regardless of actual structure or degree of perceived autonomy. He suggests that central authorities can use professional settings to achieve a particular outcome and may thus have recourse to the development of professional based networks even within nominally autonomous systems of government.

### *3.3.2 Innovative approaches to interpretation of the local-centre relationship*

Bearing in mind the insights from the above analysis one of the challenges confronting the development of a fuller understanding of the centre-local policy relationship, is the need to establish the fields of influence that can build up an understanding of the local-centre policy arena. Current understanding has been developed by particular influences which are drawn from the rational schools of policy-making. These largely find their origins in modern society rather than post modern society. As acknowledged in chapter two and re-stated at the start of this chapter, this thinking began to shift in light of experience from the New Public Management processes across the OECD. For example, the UK Government in 2000 published a national strategy on the issue of joining up the local policy process and integrating it within the national policy framework. The significance is that it argues for local policy reform taking place within a whole of government perspective that is driven by post modern influences. It provides an initial approach to a thinking process which ultimately culminates in the Lyons

Report of 2007. The approach taken draws upon the diversity of academic perspective on governance, the policy process and the experiences of New Public Management. It places the public management reform process in the United Kingdom within a dynamic post-modern environment. This is at once territorial and functional, whilst also centred upon participative and sustainability perspectives. The strategy includes a set of guiding principles which underpin a critical grasp of the arguments for joined-up government, i.e. collaborative planning, democratic input and spatial dynamics. More significantly, from the perspective of understanding local-centre policy processes, the suggestion is made that the principles and starting point for public management reform has to include an acceptance of central intervention. As Sullivan and Gillanders, (2005, P557) succinctly put it:

*...intervention by central government does not necessarily equate to control and that central government's power to shape the relationship is much more constrained within policy networks, as these networks are built upon relationships of power dependence between members.*

So a key question that now has to be answered is how those actors that are a part of the policy process within a multi-level governance framework can be a part of the iterative policy process if public management reform is to be successful.

Given, in effect, that there are several strands of participation within the post-modern policy framework, ranging from the national politician to the local, from central and participative systems of dialogue to local administration and participative governance, it is now possible to develop systems which can institutionalise these various approaches and apply them on a functional and territorial basis. Hooghe and Marks, (2001, P14) do acknowledge that:

*...the dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is both more efficient than, and normatively superior, to central state monopoly.*

It has already been noted that the New Public Management process has focused on the performance of the individual public servant and politician. It therefore cannot be considered as a model on which to continue appraisal of the public policy process. Bogdanor, (2005) argues that a joined-up approach will underpin multi-level governance. Such an approach does require systems which have shared aims and objectives and which impart a level of ownership for those stakeholders that are moving across organisational and political/territorial boundaries. Thus the basis on which an understanding of the centre-local policy relationship can be established is created. Stead, Geerlings, and Meijers (2004) similarly propose, in regard to the dynamics of coordination and collaboration, about where the levels of coordination and integration may be pursued within multilevel participative governance.

A challenge therefore arises in the need to understand the variety of influences or characteristics that define the relationships between the stakeholders within the local-centre policy process. This need to understand the influences will then facilitate development of a sustainable analysis that might be used to delineate the nature of the local-centre policy interface within certain prevailing conditions.

Frameworks for policy appraisal must therefore allow for ambiguity in the nature of the relationship between the centre and the local. This will result in greater flexibility in policy interpretation and endorsement and will as a result allow for greater flexibility in the analysis of the local-centre policy interface.

In that regard therefore it may in fact be the case that there are several models that could delineate the nature of the local-centre policy process. Thus the possibility of placing a local-centre policy arena within a series of models rather than one or two models, as traditionally would have been the case, is opened up to the researcher. This is particularly so when considered within a national application of service standards that could be applied within some of the characterisations that make up each model and not within others. Thus the researcher can develop an understanding of the nature of the policy relationship by being allowed to place the relationship within a wider range of models than simply focusing on a system as being wholly centralised or wholly autonomous. In doing so the researcher is positioned to draw in the external, more recently established, strands of thinking associated with the policy interface, i.e. collaborative planning, sustainable development, spatial perspective etc. and which the restriction to two models has traditionally excluded. This allows for a widening and deepening characterisation though development of a series of fields of influence that define the policy interface. This will enable the creation of more appropriate models on which to seek a new understanding of the Irish local-national policy arena.

Developing an understanding, it was acknowledged earlier, of joined-up local-centre relations as a focus for analysis is important when seeking to analyse the policy environment within the models. However this understanding must be understood by further examining the nature of the relationship through the various forms of policy dialogue that will take place within a post-modern public management context. This is also acknowledged above. It is not sufficient to simply sub-characterise each model by reference to an overall appreciation of

the nature of the relationship. It is necessary to identify the distinctions between the characteristics that are a feature of each model. This is the ultimate conclusion that may be drawn from having a newly developed understanding of the central-local policy environment. The making of policy is now therefore set within the models. Each may be analysed for the purpose of determining the type of system applicable to a particular country or policy system. Such an approach therefore allows for the creation of an understanding, in depth, of the relevance of one model or another to a particular set of circumstances existing in a country. It also provides the basis for a comparative analysis of a number of countries. In addition, the characterisation of each model allows the researcher to begin to determine the nature of the local-national government policy arena.

#### **3.4 A four model analysis as a focus for people-based place-shaping**

Four models can be derived from the above review of the strands of academic analysis; three of the models arise if the policy process within a multi-level governance framework is part of a centralised policy system, an autonomous policy system, or an iterative policy process system if public management reform is to be successful. The fourth model as will be explained displays characteristics where strategic application is largely absent. The four models therefore proposed are as follows:

- *Centralised policy direction*- A centre-local policy arena which is characterised as having a centralised policy direction. It will be one in which the central state sets national pre-determined service quality outcome parameters. These parameters are intended to meet nationally driven expectations or outcomes and will be subject to national evaluation and appraisal by means of accountability determined at the national level. The

centralised process will include a national application of public service standards along with national minimum service outputs.

- *Deconcentrated/autonomous*-A policy arena which is highly autonomous. This model will allow for local pre-determination of service quality parameters that are underpinned by local evaluation and appraisal processes. Local application of public service standards set within a local policy-making process will have local minimum service outputs which will be based on locally driven policy outcomes.
- *Iterative/co-governance policy application* -Convergent quality service standards developed through a formalised policy arena and based on both national expectations and local needs underpinned by an agreed/shared evaluation and appraisal regime which reflects a convergent application of public service standards and a shared service output determination.
- *Disaggregation/ambiguity*-. The policy interface reflects a lack of service standards and is based on ad hoc/informal evaluation and appraisal of policy. There will be a lack of application of public service standards with limited or ad hoc service output determination by either the local or the national policy arena.

#### *3.4.1 Models One and Two-The exercise of governance authority through central direction or through local autonomy*

The initial process of understanding the formal local-centre relationship was largely based upon the Weberian concepts of bureaucracy, specialisation, and sectoralisation and subsequently subjected to the rigours of NPM. Bullock, Mountford and Stanley, (2001) for example, acknowledge in regard to the UK, but with, it is suggested equal application elsewhere, that the civil service has

developed along strict departmental or ministry lines and therefore culturally will act within the ethos of a particular ministry. The structures are challenged if asked to think outside of their organisational limits and reward is recognised only in so far as the sustaining of the ministry culture is achieved. As a result interaction with other ministries and the wider public suffers because of the limited perspective applied to performance. It is contended, by Healey (1997), Lejano (2006) and others, that institutional models based on such thinking, given their development within this culture, are not capable of playing the role of policy facilitator. Earlier analysis and debate in chapter two acknowledges the primary role for the political and administrative pillars of the public service, when set within a multi-dimensional environment. The validity of the thinking associated with Healey et al, is derived from a systematic analysis of policy development which is set within a sustainable development framework driven by national and international demands. It is also one that is set in spatial terms. New models for central-local policy development are therefore necessary, from their perspective, and may be seen as arising from the process of sustainable development, i.e. a model of facilitative democracy based on a collaborative process within a defined but multi-spatial perspective. In addition new models become necessary given the earlier debate that policy-planning models could now grow out of a policy driven demand within a multi-governance environment rather than solely from vertical government. Thus the concept that central direction alone will not drive local policy to meet national expectations can be developed. A similar argument can however be made concerning the opposite case. Nonetheless, the process of rational policy-making and that of incrementalism, based upon the exercise of formal mechanisms of governance, still provides a useful benchmark by which to delineate a local-centre policy

arena. This is so as existing formal structures are founded, in part, on the understanding that electoral processes and management hierarchy are still relevant to most local government systems. However, as is clearly the case in Western Europe, the informal mechanisms of governance now play as significant, if not more significant a role, in the policy-making and implementation process (Loughlin 2001). In a pluralist society, powerful elites retain the balance of power reflecting, in most instances, their sectoral economic position. The formal element of the governmental process places greater emphasis on the powerful elite while the informal sector increasingly becomes the arena for the less powerful (Healey 1997). Thus the process of participation is created as a response to the inadequacy of the formal system of governance. Under these circumstances, the exercise of management and planning in this environment is based upon the facilitation of a node of interaction between the formal structure and the informal structure. Governance authority can thus become a potential point of conflict which those within the process must seek to resolve in order to continue the delivery of services. The point of conflict, if properly structured, can result in the development of further ideas as acknowledged by Hajer (2003) and others. The key issue then becomes one of an institutional capacity which is capable of engagement without necessarily being prescriptive. Newer participative structures rather than older formalised structures, it seems, are often better placed to create such capacity (Healey, 1997). This is because participative organisations can use the networks created with their strategic partners to continually enhance the quality of their relations with other partners. Older formal institutional organisations find it increasingly difficult to maintain, let alone create, new partnerships to respond to the challenge of change associated with new ideas being developed within a

collaborative process of planning. But older institutional arrangements remain in place and therefore with validity can be considered within an appropriate model. In other words much of the argument of Loughlin and others remain useful in informing a new perspective or model on a centralised or autonomous policy interface. The researcher is thus provided with the opportunity to move away from the limited delineation of public management systems as unitary, centralised or deconcentrated into one which is more policy and process defined and therefore more relevant in determining the robustness of the local-centre policy dynamic within a sustainable development framework. Such an approach, as a result, may allow for a more coherent comparison of public management systems and could allow for a rigorous interpretation of the local-centre policy models which present themselves throughout the literature review.

Systems of public management therefore, in regard to the local-national policy interface, can more appropriately be analysed. This should provide the researcher with a more robust understanding of the nature of the policy process and therefore should allow for a more substantive prescription of the various systems of policy that now exist rather than the more restricted, functionalist, interpretations of Goldsmith (2002) and Loughlin (2000) among others.

The principle that the delivery of public service policy development must now take place within a framework of multi-level governance is also well established. However, as is evident from the above debates on post modern public policy development, management and political practice is tending more towards multi-level dialogue but with increased direction from the centre. Sullivan et al, (2004) go so far as to define multi-level governance as being negotiated exchanges

between the local, regional and national institutions within an environment where the multiplicity of organisation and space/location are the norm. Peters and Pierre (2001) make a similar argument. Nonetheless multi-level governance through central direction remains a central feature to delivering on the various objectives of public policy reform.

Thus two models are possible, one of a policy interface based entirely on central direction (which is in part informed by participative conditions but not driven by such conditions) and a second which is based entirely on local autonomy where the application of collaboration is a matter resting entirely within the local management/political system. These models may be characterised as follows in Table 3.

**Table 3: Characterisation of Models 1 and 2**

<b>The exercise of governance authority through central direction-Characteristics</b>	<b>The exercise of governance authority through local autonomy-Characteristics</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National pre-determined service quality outcome parameters will be set by the national policy arena.</li> <li>2. Policy evaluation and appraisal will be led by a central policy process.</li> <li>3. National application of public service standards to meet national political expectations will be applied to the policy process.</li> <li>4. National minimum service outputs will be applied.</li> <li>5. National direction will determine decisions to provide a public service.</li> <li>6. Service design will be determined to meet a national need and uniform delivery across a state will be applied.</li> <li>7. Resourcing will be determined at national level.</li> <li>8. Consultation processes centralised, if applied.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Service quality outcome parameters will be set by the local policy arena.</li> <li>2. Policy evaluation and appraisal will be led by a local policy process.</li> <li>3. Public service standards to meet local political expectations will be applied to the policy process.</li> <li>4. Local minimum service outputs will be applied.</li> <li>5. Local direction/expectations will determine decisions to provide a public service.</li> <li>6. Service design will be determined to meet a local need without regard to uniform delivery across a state.</li> <li>7. Resourcing will be determined at local level.</li> <li>8. Consultation processes localised, if applied.</li> </ol>

### 3.4.2 Model Three - Iterative/co-governance application

The World Bank in 2007 suggested that if local government, wherever it might be, wishes to have autonomy from the national level, it needs to have powers that underpin local discretion in at least three areas; local regulatory control; control over the local procurement process and; control over local appointments and employment policies. Depending on the perspective applied, (Bjørnå and Jenssen, 2006, for example) it has been argued that the local authorities throughout the European Union have limited control over all or any one of these areas. This is due to the need to receive final approval from the State, in many instances, to the making of local laws, capital purchasing and loans, and the recruitment of personnel. Ahem (2005) argues that:

*Over-dependence on central transfers can also undermine the accountability of sub-national governments to the local electorate, and facilitate shifting of blame for breakdowns in service delivery to upper tiers of government.*

Thus there can be a reduction of innovation at the local level, an increase of central constraints on resources, and the setting of standardized service levels which may not be appropriate to local expectations or priorities.

Ahem (2005) suggests that local government systems need to have greater clarity in regard to national expectations and the availability of resources to meet these commitments. This is a feature of the system in the United Kingdom, specifically England where central government sets clear targets in service provision which are then embedded into local authority corporate plans. The centre, via regional offices, agrees its expectations with the local authority to meet national policy objectives. The increasing use of multi-area and local area agreements, where regional government offices through the Local Strategic Partnerships, set the service agenda for the local authorities, has, as

Lyons (2007) acknowledged, necessarily reinforced the level of central influence on the local authority policy environment. Similar characteristics exist in the Nordic countries (CEMR, 2009) which traditionally would be seen as having high levels of autonomy. Such levels of autonomy are however increasingly constrained by national policy applications which are enforced to varying degrees by central government appointed prefects who carry powers of supervision over the local authorities. The Council of Europe in 2007 has also noted the trends towards clarity of mandate been set through direction of a central authority. In some instances it also occurs through a negotiated national framework directly between a central co-ordinating ministry and a national-based local authority representation.

What such trends indicate is that the local policy process needs a significant level of direction from the national level due to the nature of the policy environment in which both levels function. The provision of clarity within the policy arena is seen increasingly as the responsibility of the centre. The local level is however expected to provide an understanding of local expectations. These feed into the national process thus providing greater appreciation of the challenges within which a national and international policy perspective has to be applied. Given this, and the recognition of applying policy into a spatial context which is local, it is increasingly necessary for the centre to appreciate the dynamics of local territoriality and the sense of identity associated with such perspective. So centralization: *"... is deemed to enhance the integration, decisiveness, uniformity and cost efficiency of public services."* (De Vries, 2000 p197)

Alternatively, it could be argued that (Lyons, 2007), in fact, local authorities have the initiative to underpin local discretion in the areas highlighted by the World Bank (2007). The practical effect of the policy role of the centre is to simply act as a rubber stamp to decisions which will already have originated from the local level and have been subject to discussion between senior officers in local government and their counterparts in the centre. All of which might suggest a high level of local autonomy.

The argument here however is that, in a unitary system of government where the centre itself is the dominant player it is nonetheless one of a number of players. A somewhat more complex explanation is therefore required. The issue of whether autonomy exists or not is one which is no longer wholly valid. This is so given the nature of the collaborative processes that are now necessary within a post-modern public policy arena at the national-local level. The fact is that decisions over the extent and nature of the public services generally are subject to external stakeholder influence at both levels as well as internal negotiation between the layers.

The debate on policy integration between the local and national is moving from issues influenced by structural perspective towards understanding the nature of the policy process. The long-standing view of centralised regimes suggests that sub-ordination of national policy to local delivery pressures will not arise due to the capacity of the centre to determine the level of resources available to the local government system. In a centralised policy arena therefore the central authority will wholly subordinate the local policy process such that all expectations are national in origin. The opposite it is argued would apply in

autonomous systems where local determination results in the subordination of national policy expectation. In such circumstances the allocation or origin of resourcing is not an issue. The capacity to interpret local expectations drives the policy interface. In iterative systems the coordination of policy is an overriding objective of both the local and national policy systems. The effect is to create a shared set of strategic values and objectives. This occurs within an overall framework in which expectations and resource issues are clarified, standards in service provision agreed and the means of implementation established. This happens generally through a local implementation process embedded within the local authority. In a disaggregated policy model the subordination of policy will almost always be dependent upon the capacity of one or other level to influence the allocation of resources. As increasingly such allocations are determined in line with national exchequer pressures arising from international demands such as those under Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in the European Union, such systems will see an increasing level of subordination of local policy notwithstanding local expectations.

Drawing upon the various perspectives set out above it is possible to begin to develop principles for a whole of governance approach to the local-centre policy interface. The principles which would be expected include:

- Recognition of the central role of the citizen and the objective of delivering higher value public services to the citizen rather than the customer;
- Equality of universal public service provision;
- Fairness embedded into the policy process;
- Transparency in the preparation and implementation of policy;
- Cost-effectiveness in policy delivery;

- Accountability in policy delivery across the institutions of public management and through the democratic process;
- Evaluation and appraisal of public management across the institutional layers.

Many of the above features are based on human behavior which influence the individual and his/her role in the organisation of the local-centre interface. In parallel with understanding these behavioral features, the processes underpinning an ideal local-centre interface would therefore have a focus on a range of methodological approaches which would include addressing:

- The strengthening of institutions and their governance
- Making environmental sustainability central to all sectoral policies
- Development of international thinking on in public management
- Recognition of the principle of local self-government.

Thus the debate, as suggested and developed in chapter two, on the nature of the policy process can be moved from the limited models that followed the reforms of new public management into a more dynamic appraisal that respects the considerable shifts in academic perspective that has occurred within a post modern public management context. The characterisation therefore of iterative/co-governance therefore may be delineated as in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Characteristics for iterative policy**

<b>Iterative/co-governance application-Characteristics</b>
1. Convergent Service Quality Service Standards between the centre and the local
2. Shared centre-local policy evaluation and appraisal.
3. Convergent application of public service standards
4. Shared service output determination
5. Agreed local-national decisions to provide services nationally but levels determined locally
6. Agreed delivery processes following negotiation
7. Agreed resourcing
8. Installation of shared institutional arrangements/national-local compacts
9. Joint participative-elective inputs to policy process
10. Joint determination agreement and process
11. Consultation top-down/bottom up/diagonalised
12. Integrated collaborative Planning
13. Framework for spatial direction negotiated across local, regional and national/ International levels
14. Citizen centred policy with participative structures.

*3.4.3 Model Four: A non-interactive process of disaggregation and ambiguity*

Recent thinking as is evident from the above debates suggest a policy-making process based on an interactive process within a socio-economic context. This context includes formal and informal organisational and societal institutional arrangements. In addition, Rhodes (1999), Lejano (2006) and others consider that there are at least three common criteria for creating a process of interaction i.e. the changing of behavioural and other cultural identities or practices of those individuals and organisations within the process; the development of new networks which will vary over time as particular economic, social or political conditions change and; the clear recognition of the role which all potential stakeholders have.

Organisational culture therefore, in a collaborative process, is dynamic, being shaped as it is by external influences on a constant basis. The challenge is to create an organisational framework which is based within an unstable operational environment, and so has to have the capacity to recognise the need to change the culture of the organisation. However, in a policy environment where organisations, at both local and national levels seek to maintain a static culture in a dynamic environment, the likely model for the local-national policy interface is unlikely to 'fit' in the co-governance model. Both levels can find that their policy role becomes reduced, particularly as newer organisations are created to respond to their perceived inability to translate change into their operations. In such a context local government is but one of a series of floating players sharing a common concern to create a sustainable community.

A clear and basic requirement in public policy-making is to provide for the development of ideas. Albrechts, Healey and Kunzmann, (2003) suggest however, that where sectoralisation occurs such ideas will be based upon the inherent biases which frame the culture of the particular sector. In a society which prioritises such sectors, the on-going development of thinking within these sectors will reinforce the process of prioritisation creating, as a result, further peripheralisation of those sectors and actors which are not in the initial process. This leads to exclusion and, through a process of such exclusion, the original purpose for policy in even the priority sectors, can be lost thus resulting in policy breakdown. Public policy-making can, as a result, be undertaken in a manner which conflicts with the actual needs of a society and its long term development. Developing a framework for integration and attempting to deal with the challenges raised by local/national complementarities in spatial terms

therefore requires a process of socioeconomic thinking based upon an appropriately defined relationship in which formal mandate is complemented by informal dialogue.

Local and national policy makers need to establish new forms of policy co-existence in a shifting socio-economic environment in order to lead in place-shaping. But what seems clear from the process of change associated with public management is that local government will be evaluated more by the quality of process than output, by the depth of organisational networking and the ability to create a common strategic intent for the community being served. Policy development at the local level therefore becomes an outcomes based process rather than the output based process envisaged under the reforms associated with New Public Management.

A limited capacity to acknowledge the impact of the above influences will limit the leadership role in policy development. This raises very real questions about the nature and extent of representative democracy at the local level. Nonetheless, a key challenge for public policy-making at the local level is the extent to which local authorities can lead an integrated policy-making process. It is a process which underpins policy coordination across several layers of government and is not just about horizontal coherence but also about vertical, and perhaps more critically, diagonal coherence from one layer of governance to another. Equally similar challenges could be placed before the central policy arena.

This requires the policy maker to work outside of his/her immediate operational mandate but within agreed relational networks. A failure to do so will result in unnecessary institutional barriers being created which affect service delivery that has to take place within a territorial context. The creation of an integrated policy framework therefore is subject to an institutional interplay which is based upon the loss of autonomy. This results in reduced levels of accessibility to decision-making for both local and national levels. This brings with it calls to delimit available resources. In turn, the degree of compatibility between the local and national policy process, which must be based upon both political factors and the contextual environment in which the iterative process is established within a socio-economic policy framework, will be lost.

The net effect of the above is the creation of a disaggregated policy process which can be marked by high levels of ambiguity and poor awareness of management and political responsibilities across the layers of government. This becomes particularly marked in policy arenas that reflect the need for diagonal interaction as well as vertical and horizontal policy engagement. Given the above the model can be characterised as follows in Table 5. It contrasts with the deconcentration of Model 2 in that systems where levels of autonomy are high will have the freedom to determine the policy priorities which drive the local policy process. In a model where the main characteristics are disaggregation and ambiguity, the local policy maker is expected to follow national priorities but these priorities are not underpinned by compulsory national standards or pre-determined outcomes which are translated into an implementation framework. As a result there can be considerable scope for local interpretation of national policy and how it might be delivered locally.

**Table 5: Characteristics of Disaggregation/ambiguity**

<b>Disaggregation / ambiguity -Characteristics</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lack of quality service standards</li><li>2. Ad hoc/informal evaluation and appraisal</li><li>3. Lack of application of national service standards</li><li>4. Ad hoc service output determination</li><li>5. Broad national guidance provided with local decision to provide or otherwise a particular public service</li><li>6. Ad hoc resourcing</li><li>7. Lack of clarity in the elected-participatory institutional setting at local/national level</li><li>8. Dual professional/elective hierarchical arrangements.</li></ol>

#### *3.4.4 Institutional characteristics of the four models*

Developing an understanding of joined-up local-centre relations as a focus for analysis is important when seeking to analyse the policy environment within the models. However this must be understood by further examining the nature of the relationship through the various forms of policy dialogue that will take place within a post-modern public management context. This is acknowledged above. It is not sufficient to simply sub-characterise each model by reference to an overall appreciation of the nature of the relationship. It is necessary to develop the nature of the distinctions that exist between each model. This is the ultimate conclusion that may be drawn from having a newly developed understanding of the local-centre policy environment. The making of policy is now therefore set within each model and thus may be analysed for the purpose of determining the type of system applicable to a particular state. This allows for the creation of an understanding, in depth, of the relevance of one model or another to a particular set of circumstances existing in a country or, on a comparative basis, a series of countries. In addition, the characterisation of each model allows the researcher

to begin to determine the nature of the local-national government policy arena, thus underpinning the relevance of a particular model to a particular state, region or local authority system.

### **3.5 The fields of influence of effective local-centre policy**

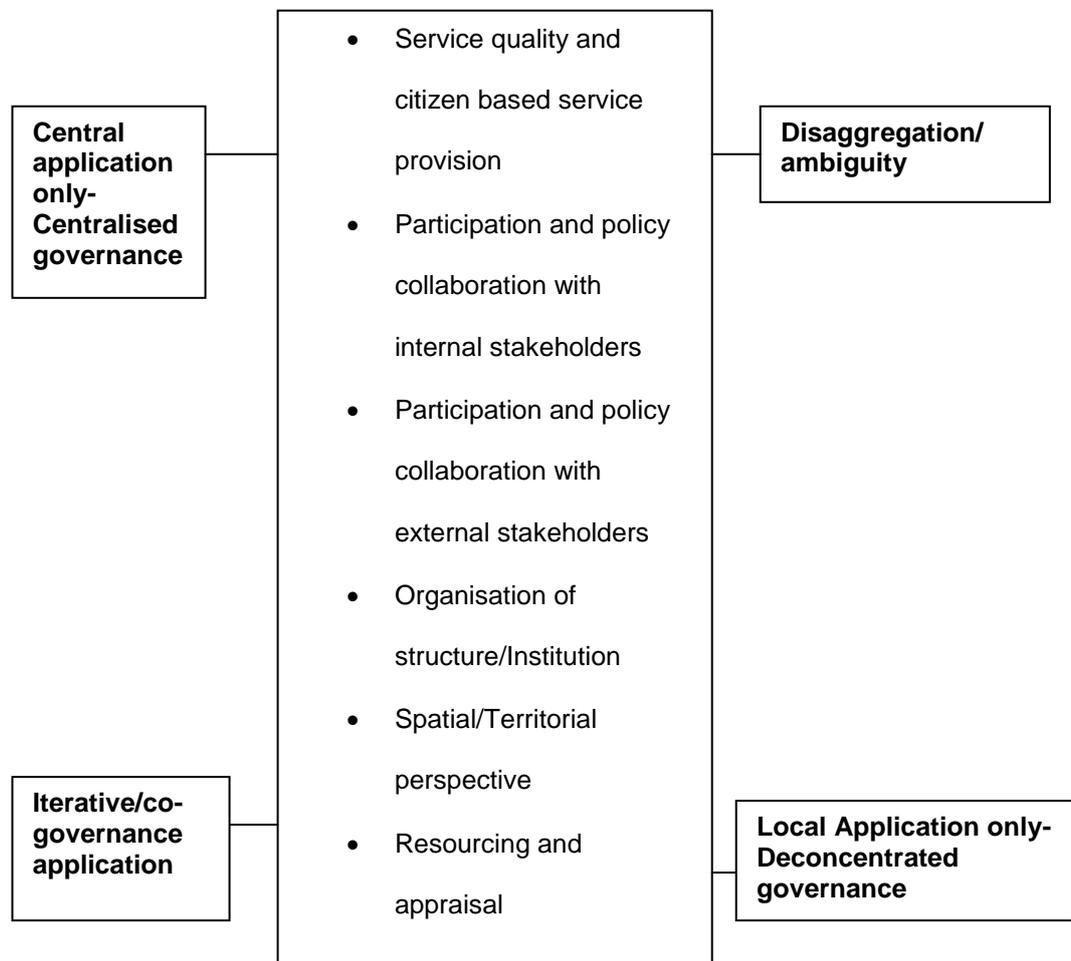
The benefit of applying the above thinking is that it arguably provides a truer reflection of the nature of the local-centre policy system and can allow for the cross comparison of local government systems generally.

In addition, it affords the researcher the opportunity to take a more considered perspective to the policy process at the local level whilst allowing for the influences of sustainability and organisational analysis. It also allows for real policy application within a framework grounded on academic perspective and institutional norms which are being applied daily to an understanding of public service design and evaluation. Thus the opportunity to consider the Irish local-centre policy relationship is provided to the researcher and a perspective which provides a greater understanding of the dynamics associated with that relationship may thus be developed. The argument can therefore be underpinned that it is valid to consider the local-centre relationship of a country such as Ireland within the above models. This allows the researcher to place the nature of the local-centre relationship within a more appropriate setting than that of the current delineation as a wholly centralised State.

In applying such an approach there will be a number of strategic policy fields of influence that can be identified and developed from the strands identified in Chapter 2. These fields of influence, which follow, may be set within the four

suggested models into which an analysis of the nature of the local- centre policy process can be considered. These are set out in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5: The fields of influence of the local-centre policy interaction**

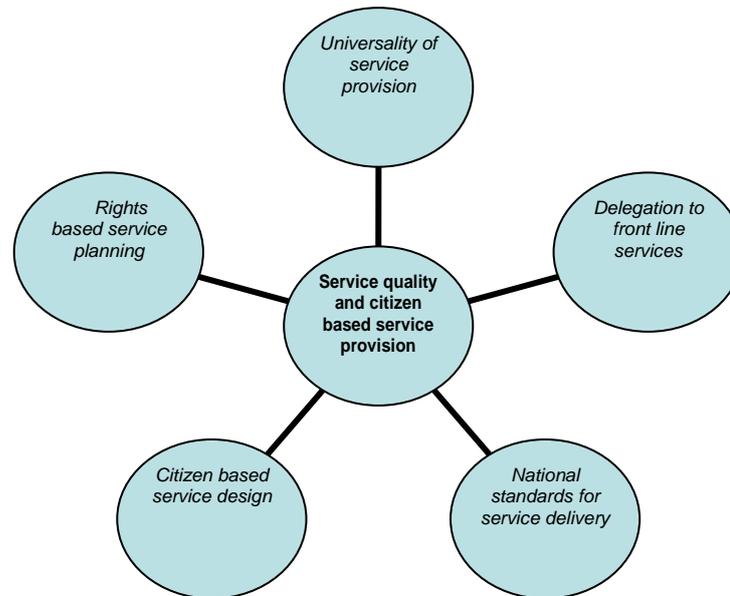


Each field of influence is in turn defined by a series of characteristics which are based on the principal influences. The academic research indicates that these individual characteristics can be further detailed when the process characteristics are interpreted within the sub-fields for each model i.e. in a review of a local-centre policy interface it could be expected that the following detailed characteristics would likely arise. These in turn provide the researcher with the framework to analyse the case study material which is drawn from the Irish local -centre policy interface. Their significance as a series of underlying themes is that the case study research is positioned within a more

comprehensive analytic structure than would otherwise be possible if the simpler unitary/autonomous evaluation of Goldsmith (2002) and Loughlin (2000) was to be used.

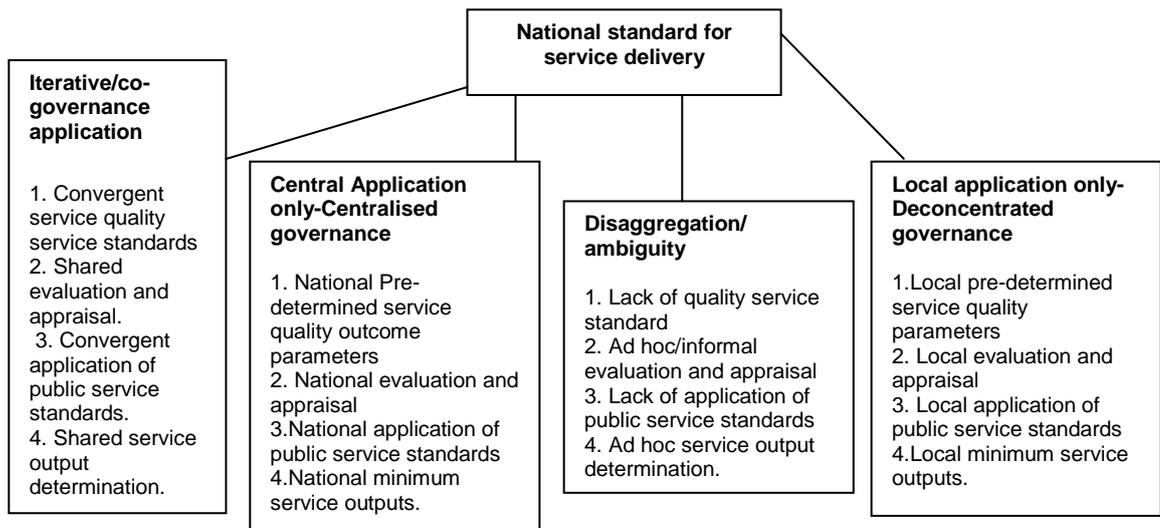
### 3.5.1 Service quality and citizen based service provision

**Figure 6: Service quality and citizen based service provision**



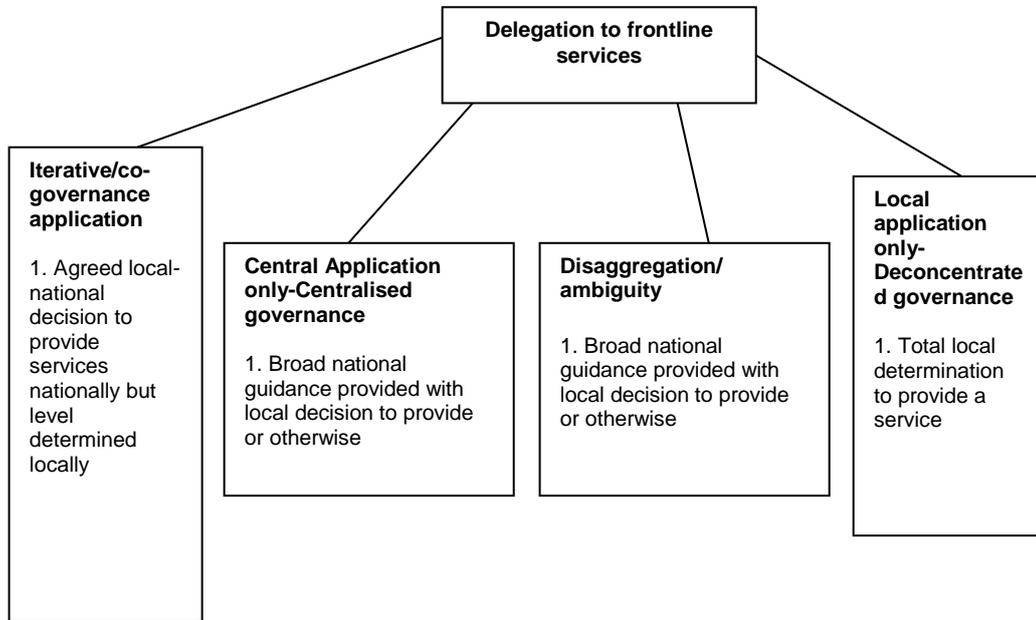
1) *National standards for service delivery*-Centralised policy systems would be expected to include national standards and minimum quality parameters set within national policy expectations. There is also generally a relationship with the capacity to access central resources but this is not always the case. In autonomous systems national standards rarely feature. This is also the case for disaggregated systems. Co-governance systems will have negotiated quality parameters.

**Table 6: National standards for service delivery**



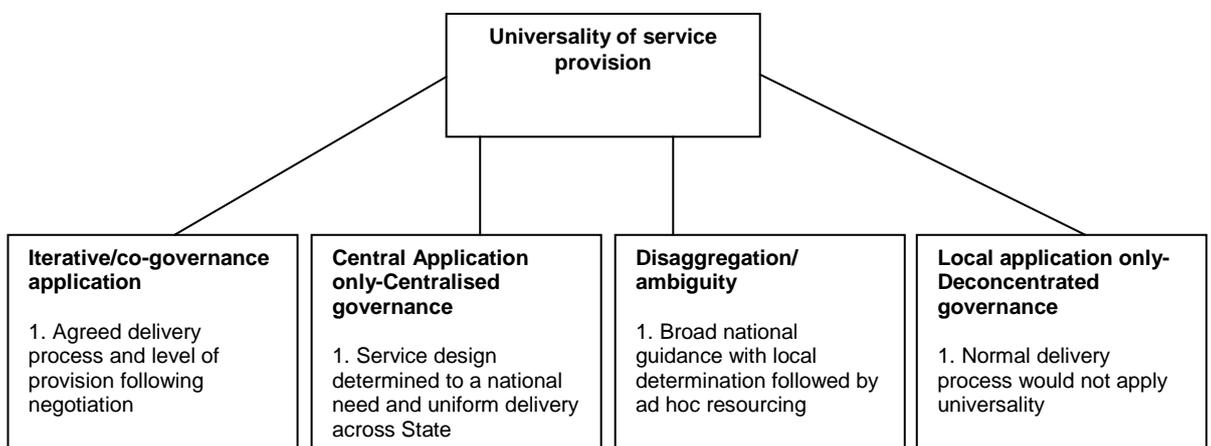
2) *Delegation to front line services*- In a centralised policy arena there will be limited local determination in regard to the provision of a service. In effect the national policy process determines decisions to provide a service with limited input from local government. The opposite will be the case in systems that are primarily local or autonomous. The decision to provide a service is totally a local determination. In a system based on the co-governance characteristic there will be agreed local-national decisions, arrived at through negotiation between the national and local government systems, to provide services nationally but level and standard will be determined locally. In a disaggregated system broad national guidance might be provided with local decisions to provide or otherwise a service resting within the local policy arena.

**Table 7: Delegation to frontline services**



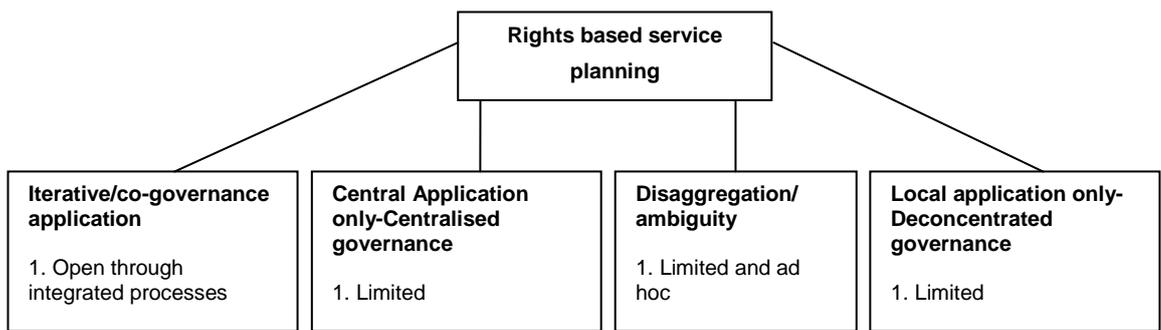
3) *Universality of service provision*-In centralised systems the nature and extent of universality will be determined at national level. In local policy systems universality will be limited while in a co-governance model negotiation on appropriate levels will take place as a part of a compact between the levels of government. Universality will not feature in a disaggregated system.

**Table 8: Universality of Service Provision**



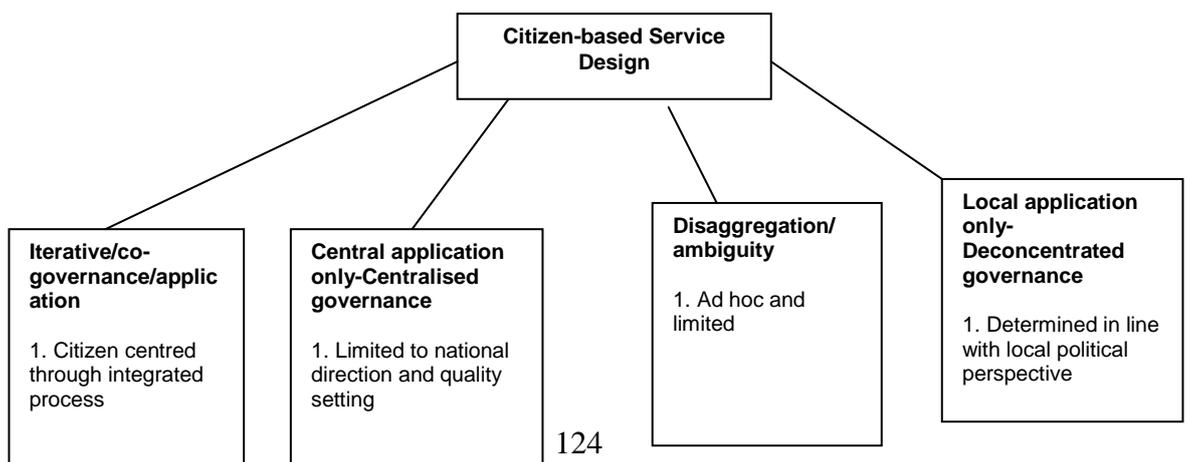
4) *Rights based service planning*-The approach to establishing a policy arena that provides for rights based service will be limited in the case of both a centralised policy arena and one which is primarily driven at local level. This arises through the focus on the determination of access to a service being solely within the ambit of the national policy or local policy arena. In the case of co-governance the national-local policy environment will be open through integrated processes and dialogue, to setting service standards based on right rather than on political/administrative allocation. In a disaggregated system the approach will tend towards being ad hoc.

**Table 9: Rights based service planning**



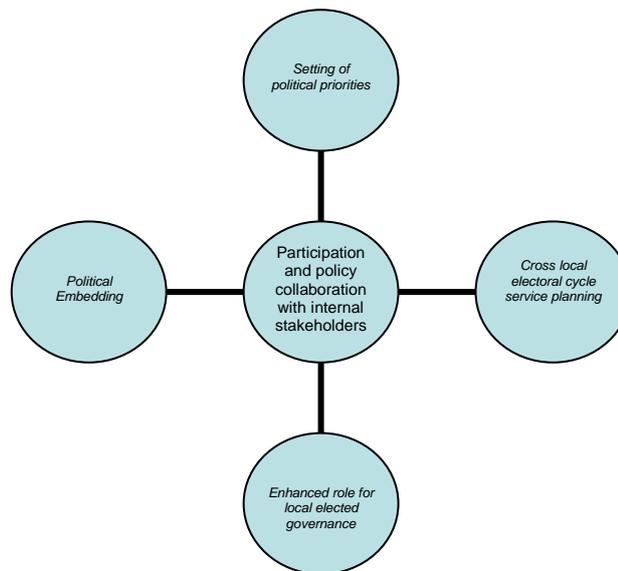
5) *Citizen-based service design*-Citizen-based design can be a feature of all models but is more likely to arise in a co-governance model or a national model which has a strong partnership process in place.

**Table 10: Citizen-based service design**



### 3.5.2 Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders

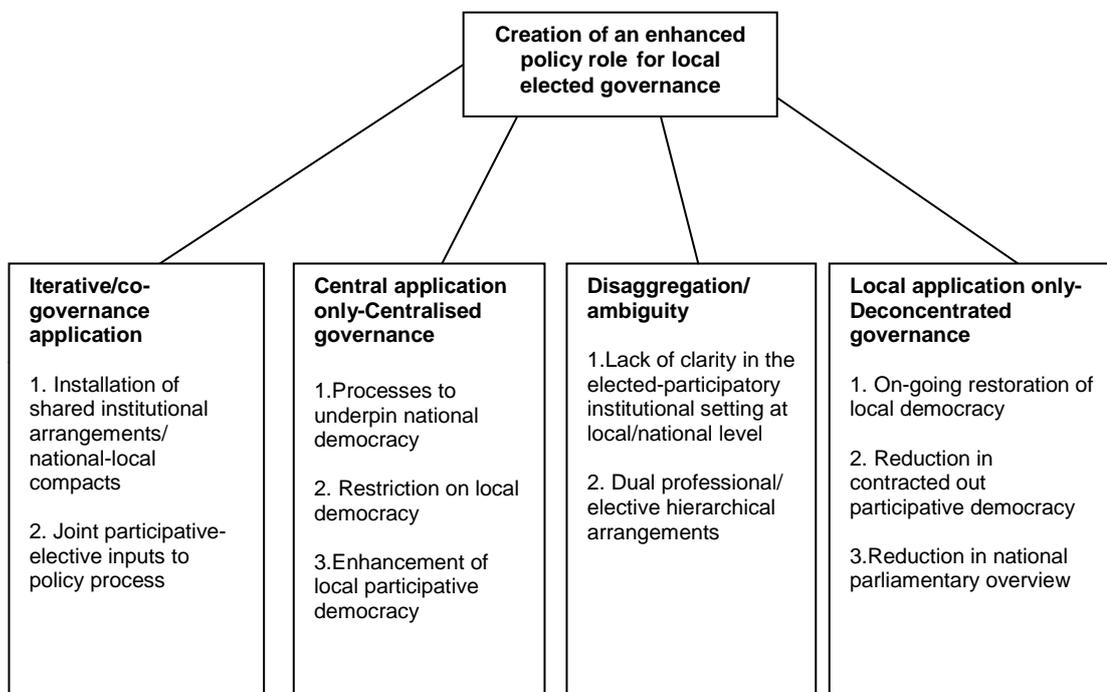
**Figure 7: Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders**



1) *Creation of an enhanced policy role for local elected governance*-In a policy arena where centralisation applies, processes to underpin national democracy operate alongside restrictions on local democracy. National parliamentary overview would be an expected feature along with, in some cases the enhancement of local participative democracy rather than local elective democracy. In an autonomous or deconcentrated arena on-going restoration of local democracy is a feature of the policy arena. This might have the effect of reduction in contracted out participative democracy alongside a reduction in national parliamentary overview. In a co-governance relationship the installation of shared institutional arrangements would be underpinned by the mutual adoption of national-local compacts and joint participative-elective inputs to the policy process. In a disaggregated system the lack of clarity about the elected-

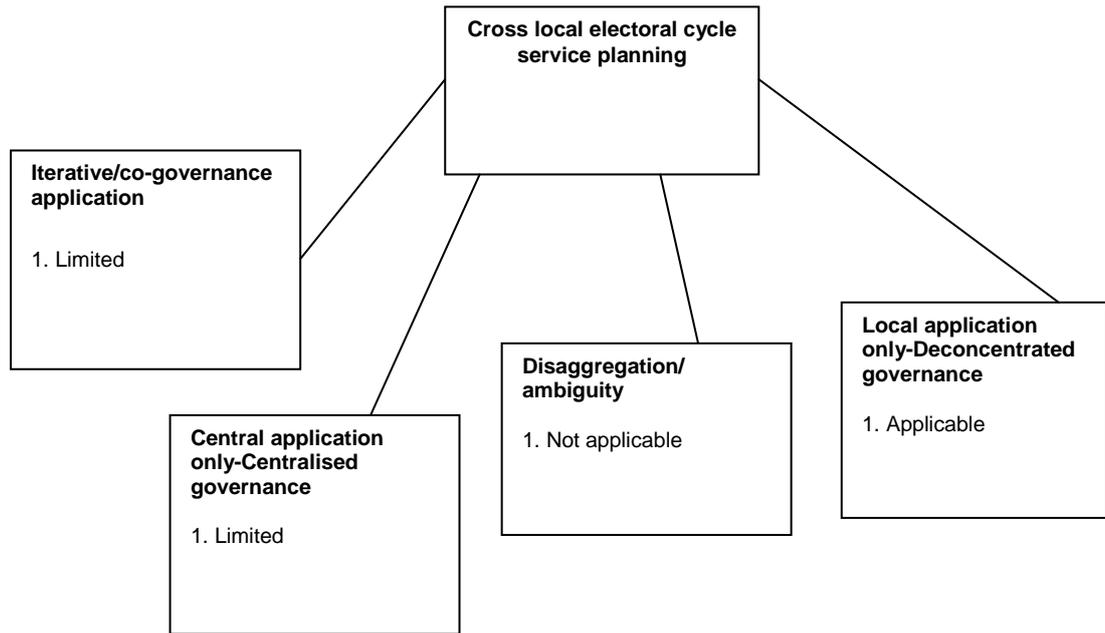
participatory institutional roles and relationships at local/national level will be an observable feature of the policy arena as will dual professional/elective hierarchical arrangements.

**Table 11: Creation of an enhanced policy role for local elected governance**



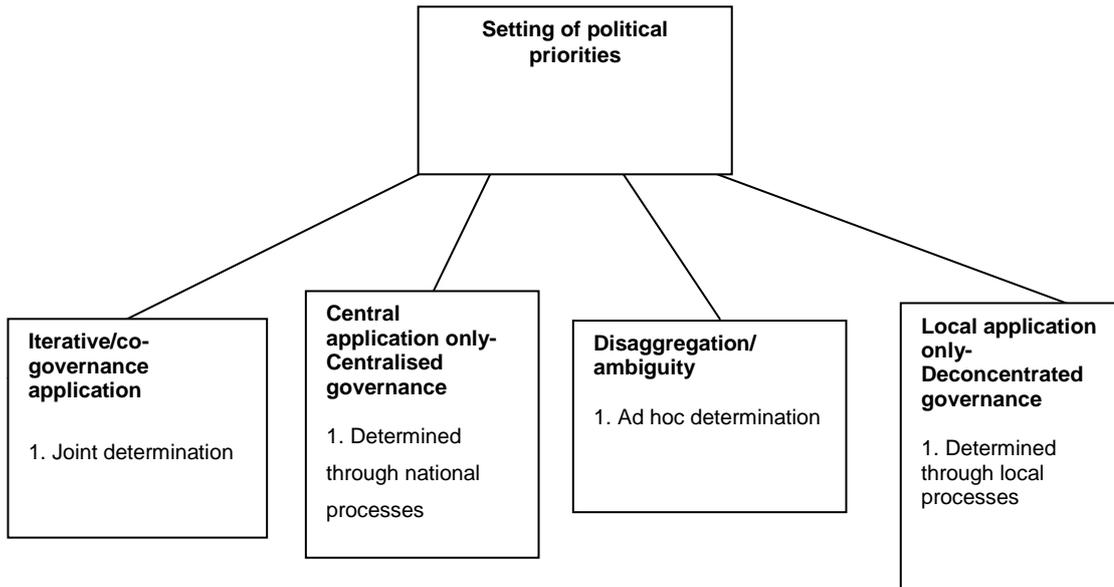
2) *Cross local electoral cycle service planning*- National planning in centralised systems will tend to be undertaken with limited mainly political concern applying to the effect on the local electoral cycle. In autonomous systems the local electoral cycle will be the primary driving force behind the capacity to apply long term strategic direction while in co-governance systems there will be limited concern. In a disaggregated system the effect of policy on the local electoral cycle will be influenced primarily by the national level.

**Table 12: Cross local electoral cycle service planning**



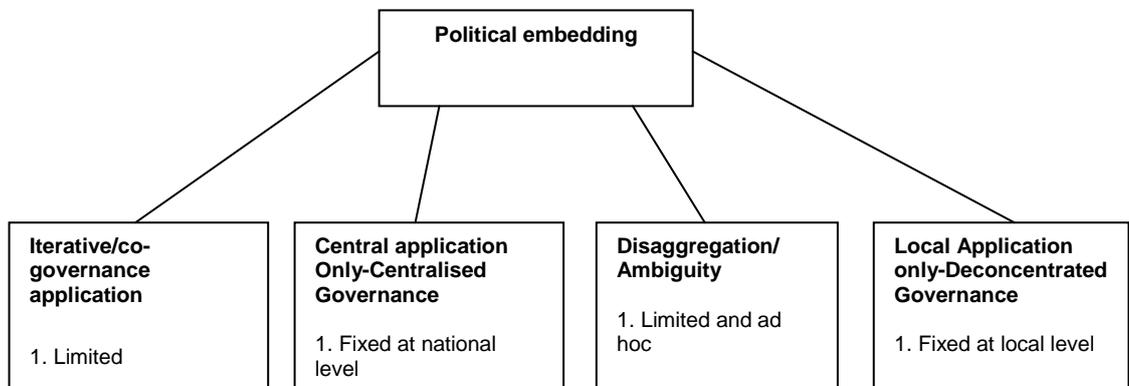
3) *Setting of political priorities*-In a centralised system national priorities will drive the implementation of local service delivery while the opposite will be the case in autonomous systems. In co-governance examples the setting of political priorities will be negotiated. In a disaggregated system political prioritisation will vary and be subject to the need to react to specific issues arising over time.

**Table 13: Setting of political priorities**



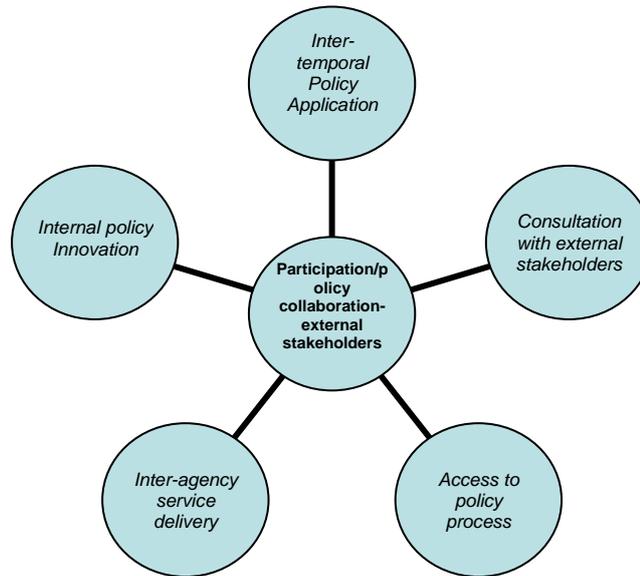
4) *Political embedding*- Local political engagement with the national policy process will be limited and thus embedding of national policy expectations also restricted in the centralised model. The opposite will apply in autonomous systems which can be marked by specific disengagement of local expectations from national objectives. In co-governance systems embedding will tend to be high due to the shared engagement in the policy process. In a disaggregated system there will be a mixed approach to embedding due to the need to access resources from the centre.

**Table 14: Political embedding**



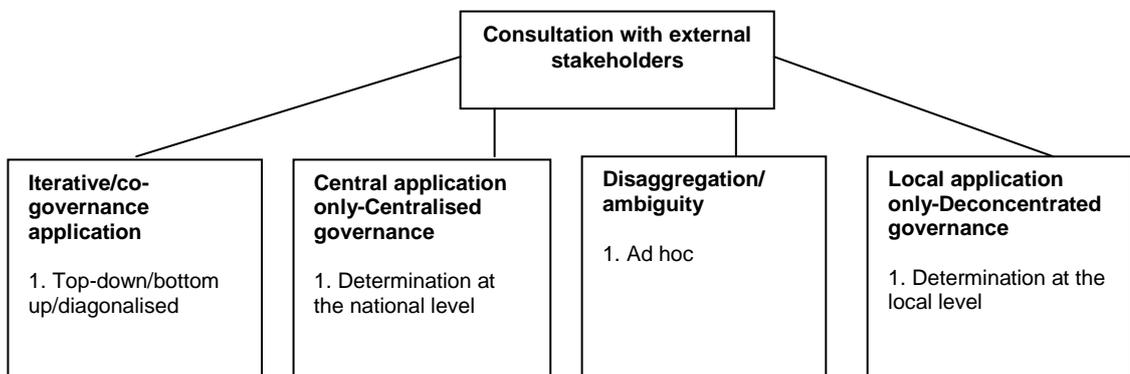
### 3.5.3 Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders

**Figure 8: Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders**



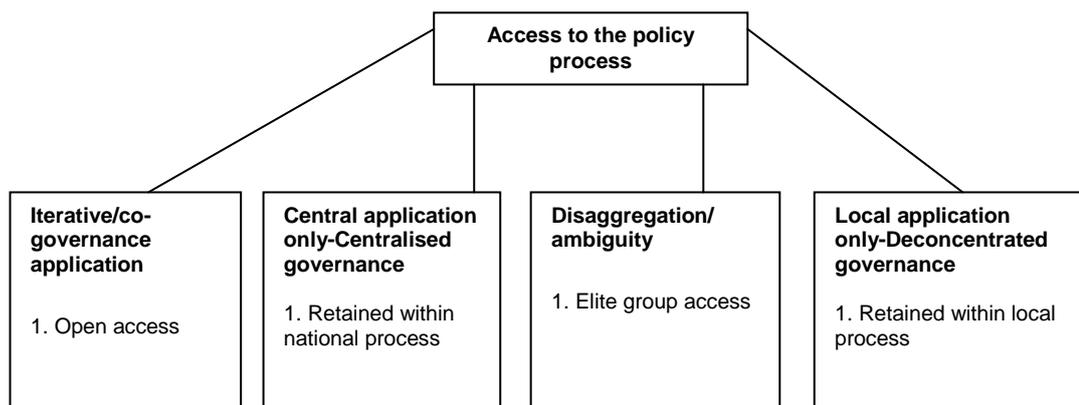
1) *Consultation with external stakeholders* -In a national system determination at the national level will result in the nature and type of sector/lobby to be consulted or engaged in the policy arena. The engagement itself will primarily occur at national level. In an autonomous system determination at the local level will be followed by actual engagement at the local level. Top-down/bottom up/diagonalised forms of engagement will apply in an iterative or co-governance policy model while such engagement will be totally ad hoc in a disaggregated system.

**Table 15: Consultation with external stakeholders**



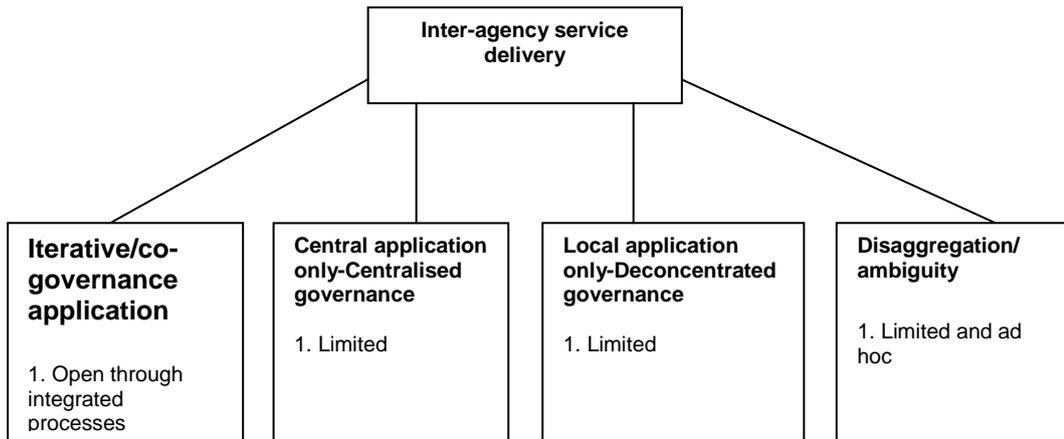
2) *Access to policy process*-This will be determined at national level in centralised systems and tend to limit local access save where the immediate response to a political or managerial priority requires local delivery. Access may be granted on the basis of professional criteria. In autonomous systems access will be determined by a perceived need to engage on the local policy makers initiative. National inputs may be limited. In co-governance models access will tend to be subject to agreement appropriate to a particular policy arena while in ad hoc systems the decision to allow access will generally be informed by professional standing rather than a pre-determined decision by management or political leader.

**Table 16: Access to the policy process**



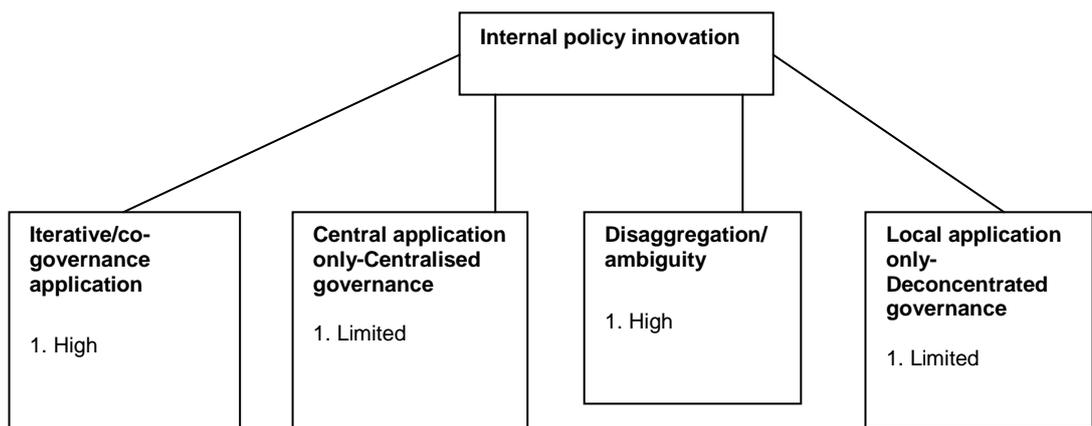
3) *Inter-agency service delivery*-In both centralised and autonomous policy systems inter-agency cooperation will be limited as the policy systems will seek to restrict service out-sourcing in order to retain control over resources. In a co-governance model it will be open and based upon the capacity of a policy originator to determine the level of service and the standards associated with provision. Inter-agency cooperation in a disaggregated system can be high due to the need to deliver complementary services which are outside of immediate policy control.

**Table 17: Inter-agency service delivery**



4) *Internal policy innovation*-Limited internal policy innovation is associated with both central systems and local autonomous policy systems. In co-governance innovation will be high as it tends to be rewarded through the release of resources to the innovator. It can also be high in disaggregated systems where the policy environment is seeking to maximise access to resources from the centre.

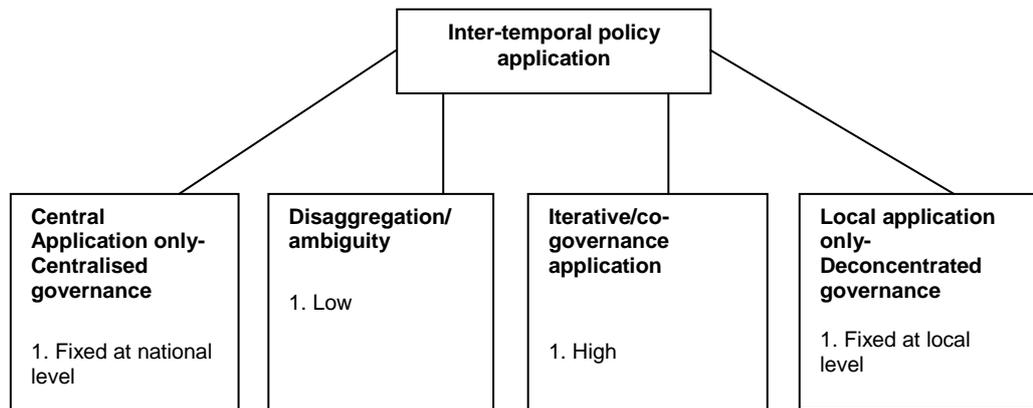
**Table 18: Internal policy innovation**



5) *Inter-temporal policy application*-National sustainable development objectives will tend to apply in centralised systems while they will tend to be fixed at local level in autonomous systems. This poses the risk of considerable

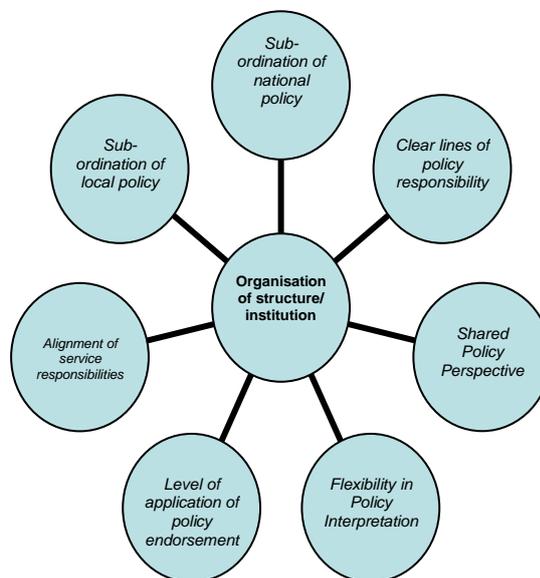
conflict between the layers of government. In co-governance systems strategic planning will generally apply and thus inter-generational planning will be a feature. The opposite will be the case in a policy framework which is ambiguous and disaggregated.

**Table 19: Inter-temporal policy application**



### 3.5.4 Organisation of structures/Institutions

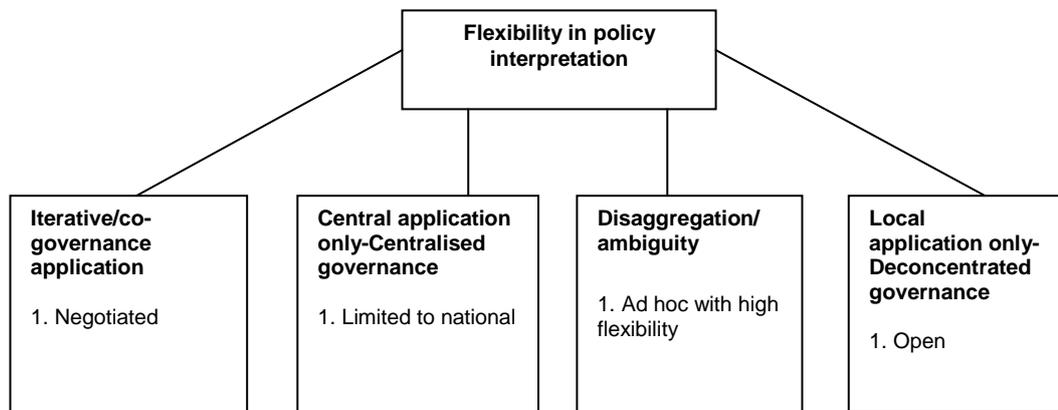
**Figure 9: Organisation of structure/institution**



1) *Flexibility in policy interpretation*- There will be limited flexibility at local level in centralised systems. In autonomous and disaggregated systems flexibility can be high while in co-governance systems there will be limited

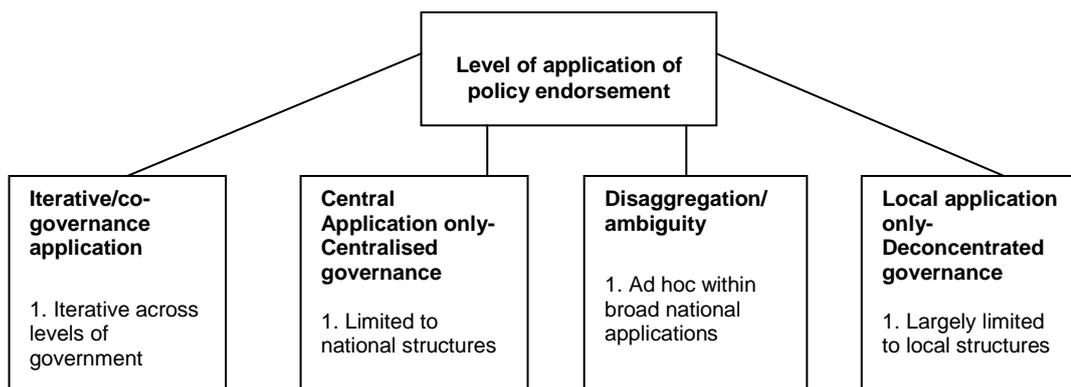
flexibility unless it is negotiated through existing co-governance institutional settings.

**Table 20: Flexibility in policy interpretation**



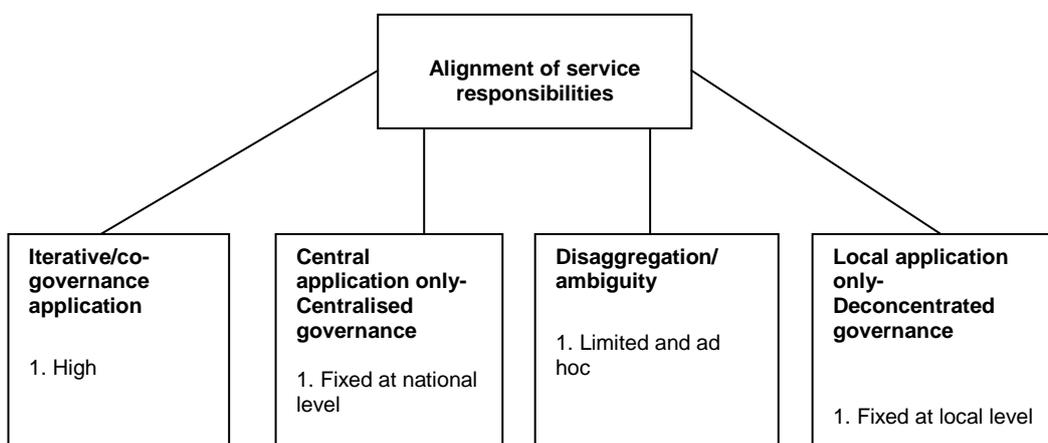
2) *Level of application of policy endorsement*-Local policy initiatives will, in centralised systems, tend to require national approval before implementation. A failure to receive endorsement will tend to restrict the capacity of the local policy arena to move ahead. The effect is to reduce innovation at local level. The opposite will be the case in an autonomous system. In co-governance systems endorsement will be limited to broad strategic objectives which are agreed between the local and central policy makers. In a disaggregated system there will be limited engagement on the part of the centre which tends to be restricted to correction of an inappropriate policy position or initiative through reaction rather than prevention.

**Table 21: Level of application of policy endorsement**



3) *Alignment of service responsibilities*- In line with the universality of service provision characteristic, in centralised systems the nature and extent of service alignment will be determined at national level. In autonomous policy systems alignment will be limited while in a co-governance model, negotiation on appropriate levels will take place as a part of a compact between the levels of government. Alignment will only feature in a disaggregated system on an ad hoc basis.

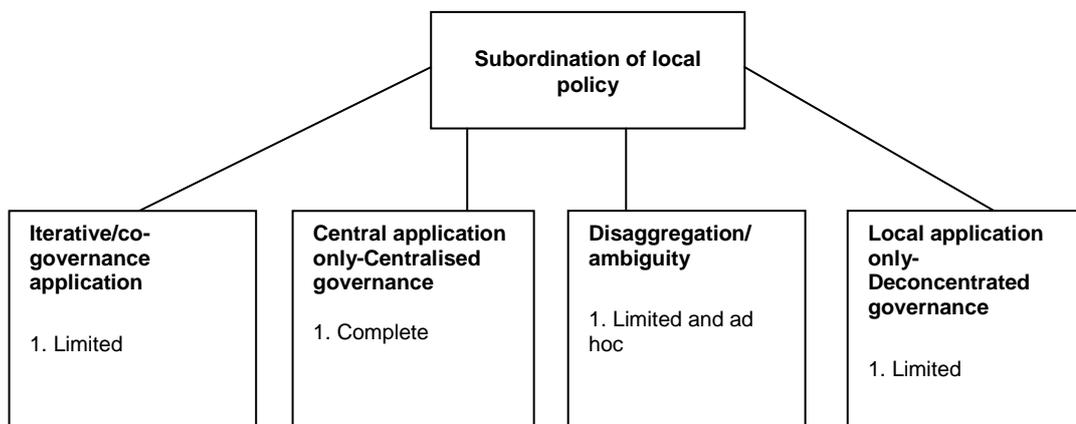
**Table 22: Alignment of service responsibilities**



4) *Subordination of local policy*- Complete subordination of local policy-making, i.e. the local policy maker will directly follow the direction of the centre, will apply in a policy arena where central determination of policy and its implementation applies. In a deconcentrated system where autonomy levels are high there will be limited opportunity to sub-ordinate the local policy process.

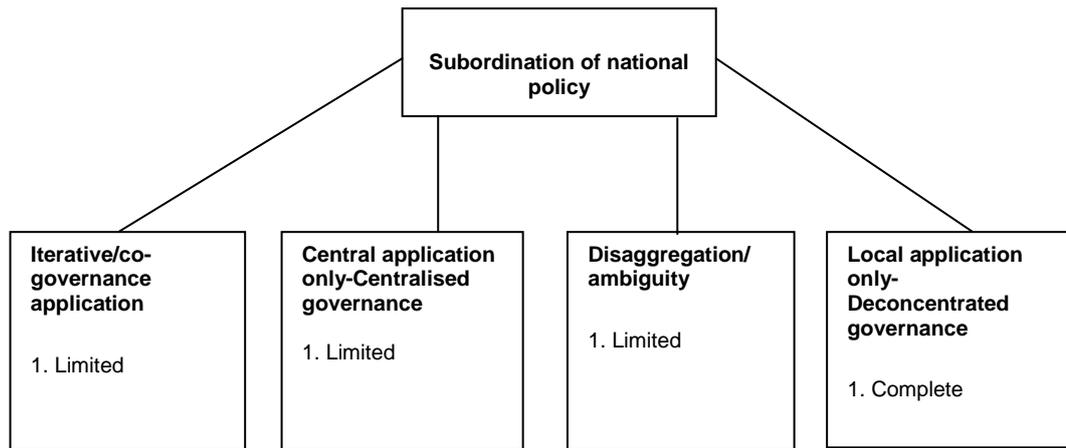
This will also be the case in a co-governance model albeit that the outcome is more likely to be informed by a negotiated agreement on policy objectives. In a disaggregated system where ambiguity will exist between the levels of government, there may be limited sub-ordination with the exception of international demands. Increasingly however this may shift to greater limitation due to the need to retain control for resource decisions at national level.

**Table 23: Subordination of local policy**



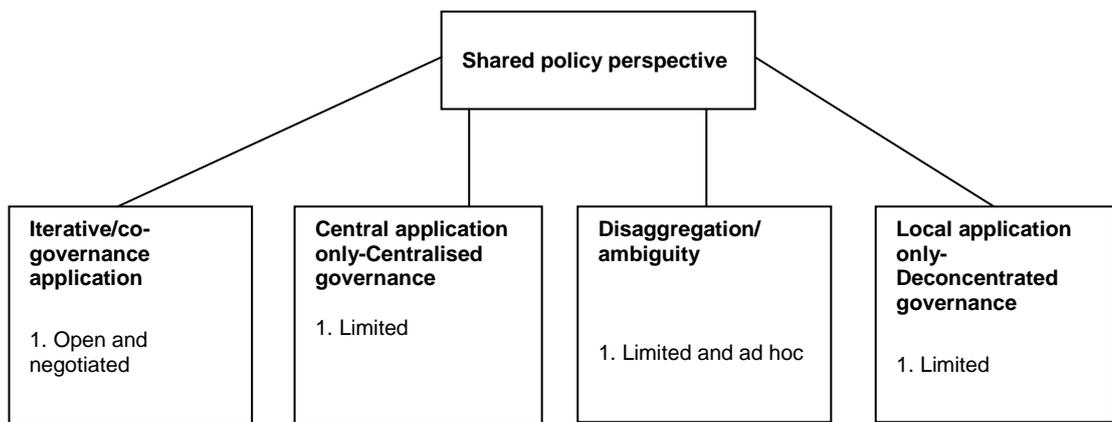
5) *Subordination of national policy-* In a deconcentrated or autonomous system central policy direction will be limited as determination on policy direction and implementation will largely remain within the local institutional setting of the local authority. In the case of the co-governance model, as is the case for local policy sub-ordination above, the impact is limited due to the negotiation of a shared policy arena. Equally, the impact on a system which is disaggregated will be limited unless there is a clear conflict with the national policy arena. The effect may be to see a reduction in resources. Alternatively extra resources may become available where a particular authority operating within a disaggregated model is seen as innovative by the centre.

**Table 24: Subordination of national policy**



6) *Shared policy perspective*- As would be expected given the above characterisations there is limited sharing of policy perspective in both local and central determined policy arena. Such policy is an inherent characteristic of a co-governance model while it tends to be ad hoc in disaggregated models.

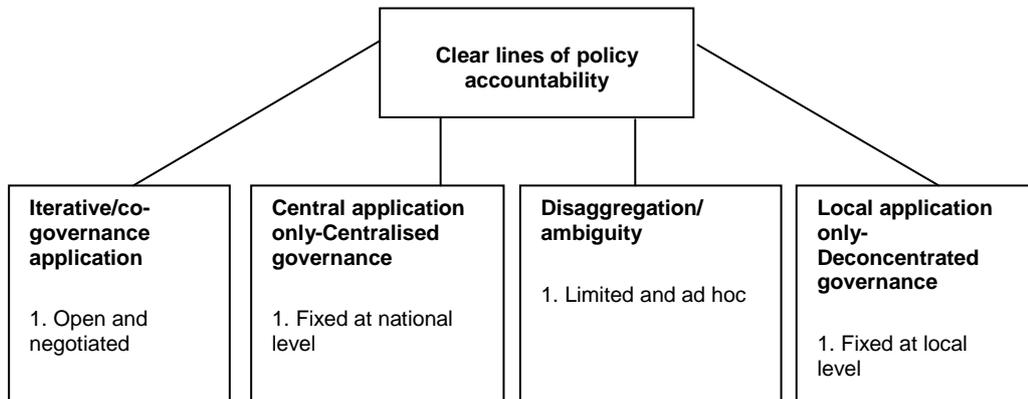
**Table 25: Shared policy perspective**



7) *Clear lines of policy accountability*- Lines of accountability in centralised systems will be clearly delineated and remain at the centre with limited responsibility resting at the local level. In such systems the local is expected to follow and report in line with national evaluation obligations. The opposite will be the case in autonomous/ deconcentrated systems. In a co-governance model

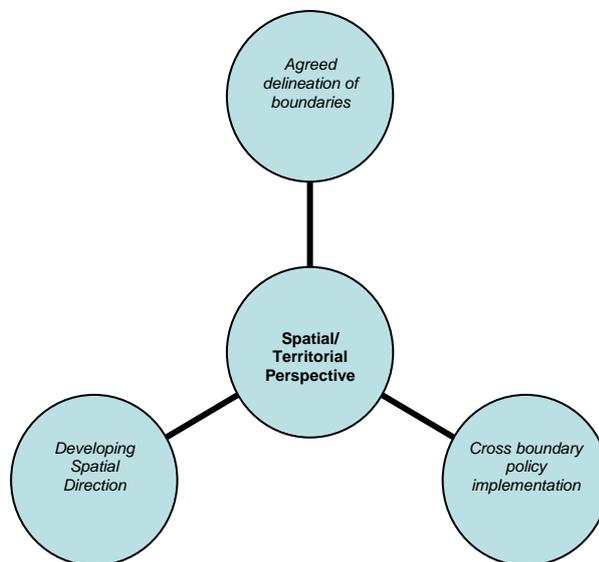
the accountability will be an inherent feature in an open and negotiated process and will be clearly established in a shared compact between the centre and the local. An ad hoc and limited clarity, generally based on specific lines of financial accountability, will apply in models based on disaggregated structures.

**Table 26: Clear lines of policy accountability**



### 3.5.5 Spatial/Territorial perspective

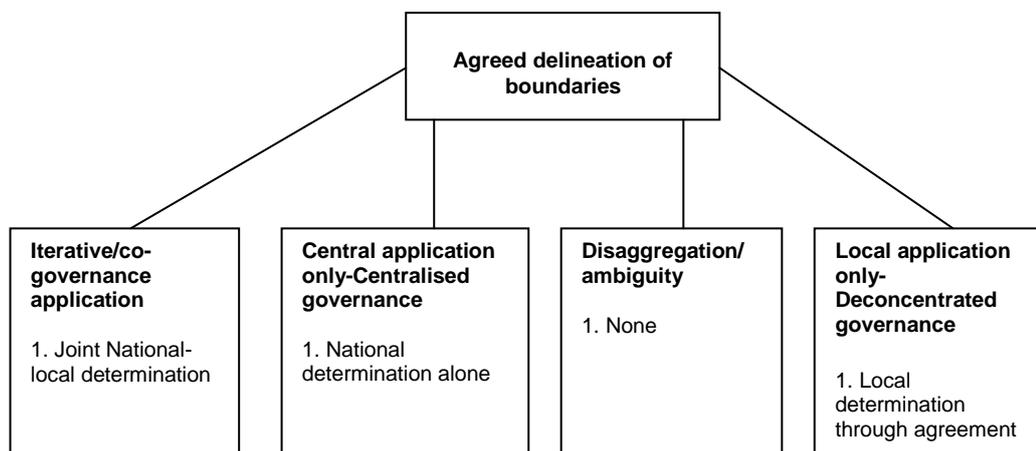
**Figure 10: Spatial/Territorial perspective**



1) *Agreed delineation of boundaries*- In centralised systems the delineation of boundaries will be determined by the national authorities with limited reference

to local expectations. The institutional arrangements are determined to meet with national policy requirements. Variations to boundaries therefore arise when policy expectations at national level shift or when there is a change in the national political arena. In autonomous systems, the determination of boundaries will be subject to local decision-making. Such boundaries are unlikely to change significantly over time due to the local political need to preserve constituency profiles and economic capacity. In co-governance models the likely effect is for boundaries to become diluted over time through the formation of inter-regional networks or infrastructure networks based upon achieving economies of scale. The re-creation of boundaries may be virtual in that the citizen may not recognise the changes in boundary. In a disaggregated system boundary setting tends to be ad hoc and responsive to local shifts in political circumstance and perceived need to be politically responsive at national level.

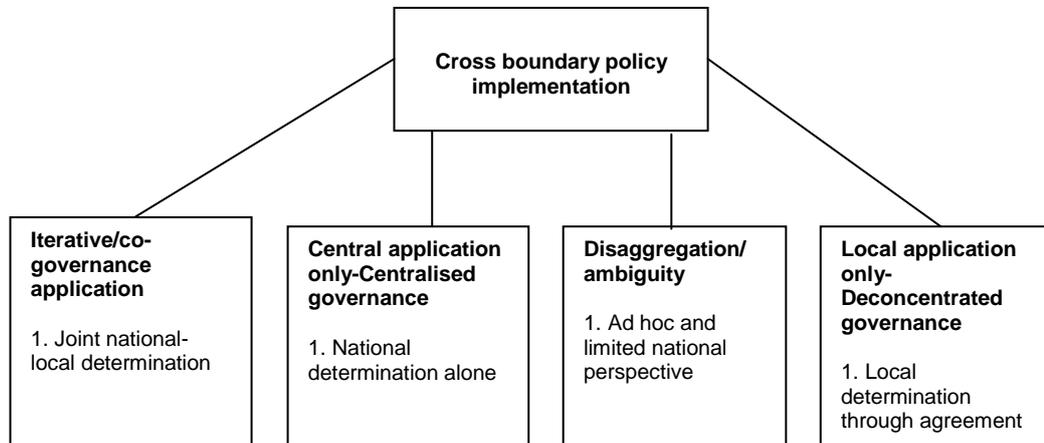
**Table 27: Agreed delineation of boundaries**



2) *Cross boundary policy implementation*- In a centralised system cross boundary integration will be driven by central institutional demands while in autonomous systems cross boundary implementation will be driven by

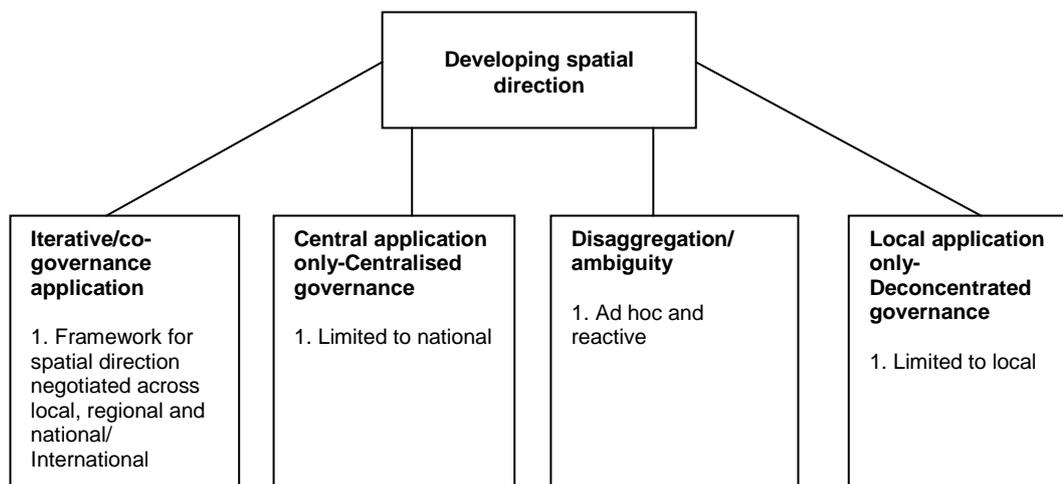
economic pressures to achieve cost efficiencies. This also applies to co-governance and disaggregated models.

**Table 28: Cross boundary policy implementation**



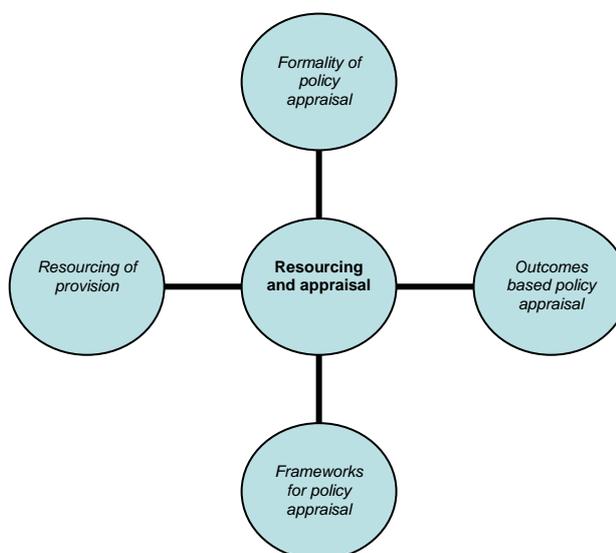
3) *Developing spatial direction*- In central systems spatial planning will be hierarchical with the obligation for local planning to integrate into the national planning policy. Direction will apply from the centre even if it does not meet with immediate local expectations. The opposite will be the case for an autonomous system. In co-governance models the process will be negotiated. There will be a significant absence of engagement within a disaggregated system, engagement such as it is will generally be driven by a need to access resources.

**Table 29: Developing spatial direction**



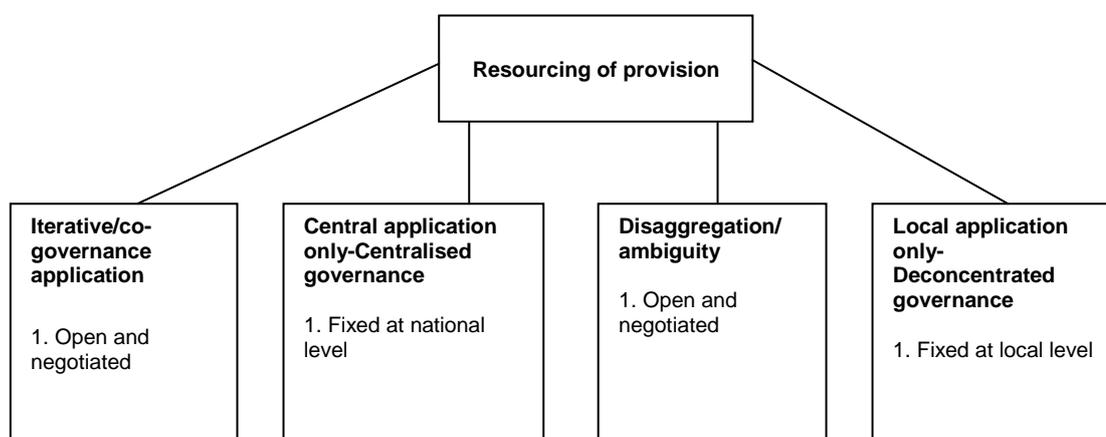
### 3.5.6 Resourcing and appraisal

**Figure 11: Resourcing and appraisal**



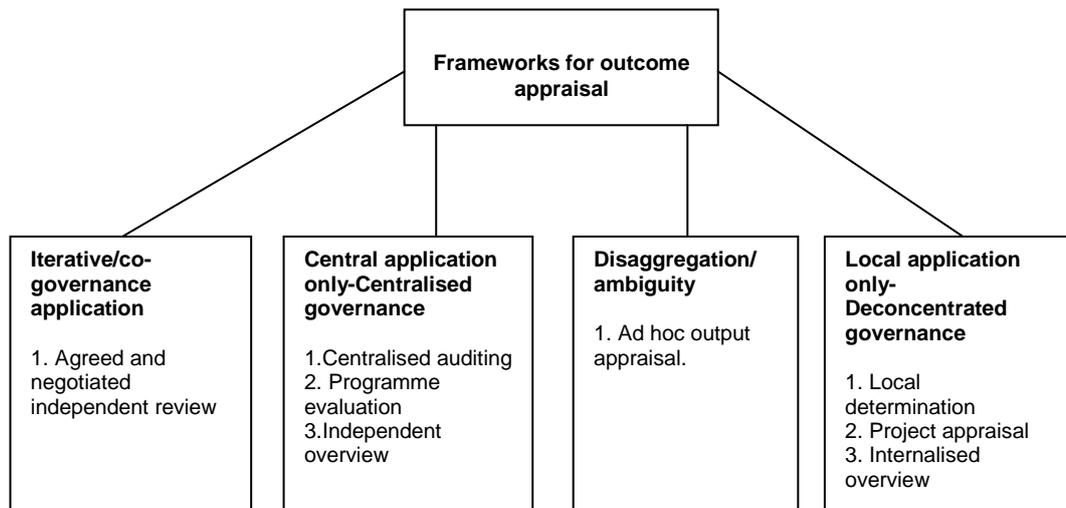
1) *Provision of resourcing*- Decisions regarding resources will be largely determined by national policy expectations in centralised systems. The opposite will be the case in autonomous systems while it will be negotiated in co-governance systems. Generally disaggregated systems are identifiable by the degree to which there are various financial support mechanisms available to support once-off initiatives.

**Table 30: Provision of resources**



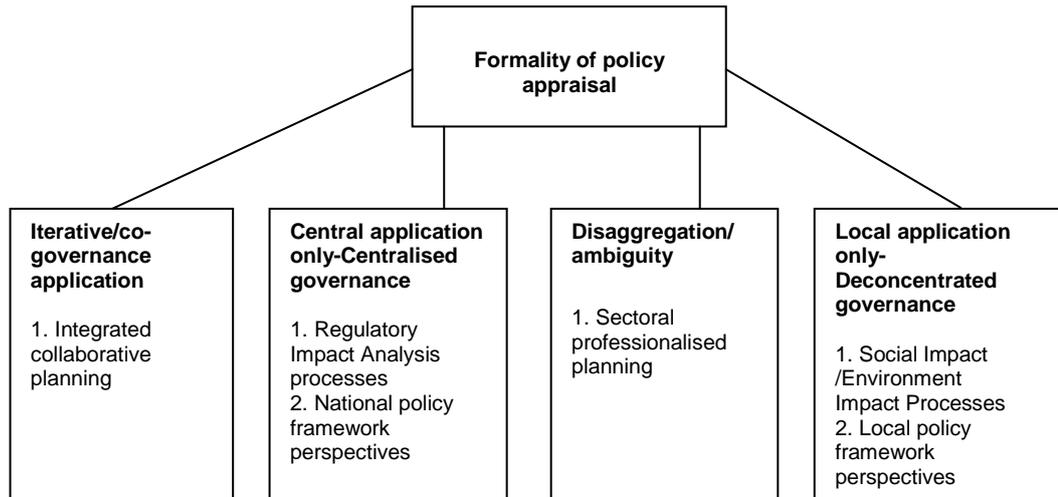
2) *Frameworks for outcome appraisal*- Outcome appraisal tends to be limited in autonomous and centralised systems due to the impact of New Public Management and its emphasis on outputs. In co-governance and disaggregated systems outcome appraisal is not unusual due to clarity in local expectations being defined within corporate planning processes.

**Table 31: Frameworks for outcome appraisal**



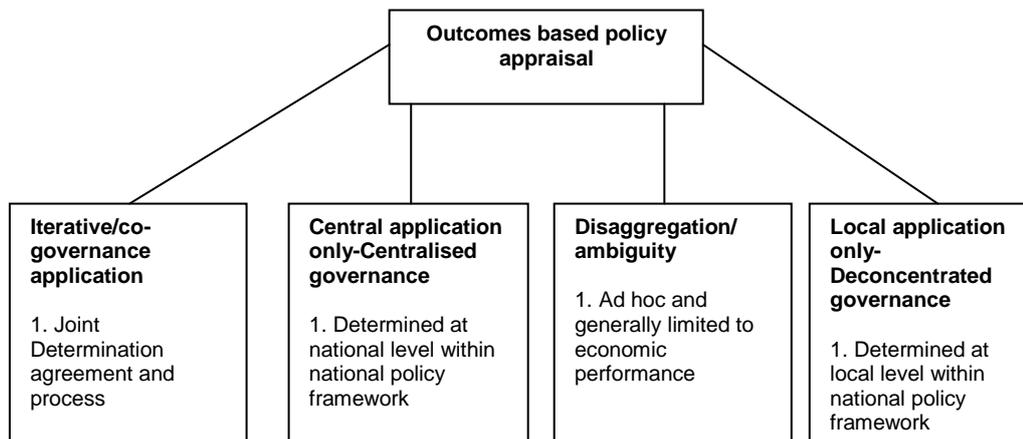
3) *Formality of policy appraisal*- Appraisal processes will be formalised within centralised systems and co-governance systems. Both will be based on output parameters while in addition co-governance systems will allow for outcome appraisal. In autonomous systems policy appraisal processes may be in place if provided for in local corporate planning. Systems which are disaggregated will have systems in place if set out in their corporate planning processes.

**Table 32: Formality of policy appraisal**



4) *Outcomes based policy appraisal*- As for formality of policy appraisal, it would be expected that outcome based appraisal will arise in instances where a system provides for a formal outcome based process. In centralised systems there is limited reference to such appraisal.

**Table 33: Outcomes based policy appraisal**



### 3.6 Models for the post-modern policy framework

In summary, the argument has been established, through the literature review, that simply categorising the local-centre policy relationship within a centralised model or an autonomous model can no longer fully delineate the nature of the

policy relationship. The complexities of the post modern environment, developed through examination of the influencing strands acknowledged above suggests that there is at least a four model range of fields of influence. These could provide the researcher with the capacity to examine the Irish local-centre policy arena. To do so a series of issues now needs to be clarified through which the examination can take place. Overall however, the models developed in detail above now may be summarised as in Table 34.

**Table 34: Local Government Concept Models**

<b>Local Local-Centre Policy Field of Influence</b>	<b>Central Application Only-Centralised Governance</b>	<b>Local Application only- Deconcentrated Governance</b>	<b>Iterative/co-governance Application</b>	<b>Disaggregation/ Ambiguity</b>
<b>Service quality and citizen based service provision</b>	National pre-determined service quality outcome parameters will be set by the national policy arena.	1. Service quality outcome parameters will be set by the local policy arena.  2. Public service standards to meet local political expectations will be applied to the policy process.  3. Local minimum service outputs will be applied.	1. Convergent Service Quality Service Standards between the centre and the local.  2. Agreed delivery processes following negotiation.	1. Lack of quality service standards.  2. Lack of application of national service standards  3. Broad national guidance provided with local decision to provide or otherwise a particular public service.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</b>	Consultation processes centralised, if applied.	Local direction/expectations will determine decisions to provide a public service.	1. Joint participative-elective inputs to policy process  2. Joint determination agreement and process	Lack of clarity in the elected-participatory institutional setting at local/national level.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</b>	Consultation processes centralised, if applied.	Consultation processes localised, if applied.	1. Consultation top-down/bottom up/diagonalised.  2. Integrated collaborative Planning	Lack of clarity in the elected-participatory institutional setting at local/national level.
<b>Organisation of structure/organisation</b>	National direction will determine decisions to provide a public service.	Will be determined to meet a local need without regard to uniform delivery across a state.	1. Installation of shared institutional arrangements/ national-local compacts.  2. Shared service output determination.  3. Agreed local-national decisions to provide services nationally but levels determined	1. Ad hoc service output determination  2. Dual professional/elective hierarchical arrangements.

<b>Local Local-Centre Policy Field of Influence</b>	<b>Central Application Only-Centralised Governance</b>	<b>Local Application only- Deconcentrated Governance</b>	<b>Iterative/co-governance Application</b>	<b>Disaggregation/ Ambiguity</b>
<b>Spatial/Territorial perspective</b>	<p>1. Service design will be determined to meet a national need and uniform delivery across a state will be applied.</p> <p>2. National application of public service standards to meet national political expectations will be applied to the policy process.</p> <p>3. National minimum service outputs will be applied.</p>	<p>Service design will be determined to meet a local need without regard to uniform delivery across a state.</p>	<p>1. Framework for spatial direction negotiated across local, regional and national/ International.</p> <p>2. Citizen centred policy through integrated processes.</p>	<p>Service design will be determined to meet a local need without regard to uniform delivery across a state.</p>
<b>Resourcing and appraisal</b>	<p>1. Resourcing will be determined at national level.</p> <p>2. Policy evaluation and appraisal will be led by a central policy process.</p>	<p>1. Policy evaluation and appraisal will be led by a local policy process.</p> <p>2. Resourcing will be determined at local level.</p>	<p>1. Agreed resourcing</p> <p>2. Shared centre-local policy evaluation and appraisal</p>	<p>1. Ad hoc resourcing</p> <p>2. Ad hoc/informal evaluation and appraisal</p>

### **3.7 Developing the research hypothesis through modelling the centre-local relationship**

Developing the above models of local-centre policy-making from the strands of academic perspective set out in the literature review allows for an exploration of the process of local-centre interaction. In taking such an approach there is now a basis for understanding the complexity, range and variety of the policy interface between the local and the centre in Ireland. In chapters 4 to 7 the primary research will focus on the Irish case and how it relates to the models developed following the literature review and expanded upon above. In that context it is now possible to pose the hypothesis that it is no longer valid to delineate Ireland as a centralised country. The nature of the policy relationship suggests a greater complexity to the local-centre policy interface in Ireland and therefore the argument that Ireland is centralised must be challenged.

There is now a clear line of argument throughout the above analysis that each model draws upon a range of academic perspectives including public management, strategic planning, spatial planning, organisation thinking and socio-economic perspective.

It also allows the bridging of the gaps between the organisational perspective, the public management concept, the spatial and socio-economic argument, and, inter-temporal dynamics of sustainable development. It is therefore valid to propose new models within which the relationships across centre-local government can be established and therefore to move beyond the current characterisation of the relationship as being centralised or autonomous. This allows the researcher to begin to focus on the Irish case.

In light of the above, what needs to be addressed in the Irish case might centre on whether it is possible to apply the models developed above. The key questions based on the key issues developed at the start of the chapter therefore are:

- Are the above policy characteristics and fields of influence applicable across the local-centre government policy relationship in Ireland?
- Is it possible to establish, within the above frameworks, a greater understanding of the institutional relationships between the two levels?
- Do the public management structures in Ireland sufficiently reflect the nature of the changed policy environment which is highlighted in the research, analysis and argument.
- Is there one of the four models that is completely applicable or is there a need to look at some variant that encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type.

In that context, the researcher will examine, in the remaining chapters, whether it is appropriate to apply, in the recent efforts to reform the institution of local government, the models developed above. This includes specific examination of the individual characteristics developed above in order to determine the nature of the Irish local-centre relationship within each characteristic. In doing so the validity of applying each characteristic to the Irish case is explored..

The issues are therefore based on the relationships delineated above and set out as follows:

**Table 35: Area of Inquiry for consideration in the Irish case**

<b>Filed of Influence</b>	<b>Area of Inquiry</b>
<b>Service quality and Citizen based service provision</b>	<i>Delegation to front line services National standards for service delivery Universality of service provision Rights based service planning Citizen based service design</i>
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</b>	<i>Enhancement of local elective governance Cross- local electoral cycle service planning Setting of political priorities Political embedding</i>
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</b>	<i>Consultation with external stakeholders Access to policy process Inter-agency service delivery Internal policy innovation Inter-temporal application</i>
<b>Organisation of structure/institution</b>	<i>Flexibility in policy interpretation Level of application of policy endorsement Alignment of service responsibilities Subordination of local policy Subordination of national policy Shared policy perspective Clear lines of policy accountability</i>
<b>Spatial/Territorial Perspective</b>	<i>Agreed delineation of boundaries Cross boundary policy implementation Developing spatial direction</i>
<b>Resourcing and appraisal</b>	<i>Provision of resourcing Formality of policy appraisal Frameworks for outcome appraisal Outcomes based policy appraisal</i>

It is necessary thereafter to seek to examine what is appropriate in institutional terms for a country like Ireland, having regard for international influences but which appreciates both the national and the local institutional context. This can allow the researcher to consider the above models and to ground their potential for defining the local-centre policy relationship on a robust basis. The following chapter will set out the basis for the approach taken in light of the on-going development of the thinking set out above.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter two introduced, in broad terms, the approach being taken in this thesis, delineated the theoretical significance of the local-centre interface and acknowledged the challenge of developing a research framework in this complex sphere. This chapter elaborates the methodology which will enable empirical assessment of the theoretical insights and discusses the epistemological and ontological scaffolding on which the study is built. It outlines the research design which involves development of an evaluation framework as well as a detailed case-study through which the framework is applied.

### **4.2 Purpose and contribution of the research**

Moore (2006) suggests that those who complete research projects do so for a variety of reasons. The purpose may be to solve a particular problem or issue confronting the researcher in academic life. It may be that it is an attempt to resolve a need arising for a particular community or simply a response to clarifying an individual's own inquisitiveness. Such needs were motivating factors for undertaking this particular research. It will be argued that the research is a critical contribution to understanding a central feature of the public management process in Ireland and elsewhere. One goal is to enhance the extent to which academic rigour is applied to understanding the role of local government in Ireland. The researcher has worked in the area (as an academic, as a policy advisor and as an official at both local and central level) for some thirty years and has played a role in shaping the various policy arenas affecting local government over the past decade. Such experience and understanding

provide distinctive credentials for in-depth research which will fill that analytical gap. Further motivators were the researcher's awareness of the impact of the on-going reform of public management policy processes on communities throughout the State<sup>13</sup>, the paucity of research on the local-centre relationship and the need for a critical assessment of the reform outcomes. From chapters two and three an understanding has been gained of the characteristics of local-centre policy inter-action. The literature review has also enabled the researcher to develop a perspective on the relationships within the layers of public management. The resulting characterisation of public service delivery moves beyond the simple functionalist perspectives of Goldsmith (2002) and others. Drawing on both personal observation and academic insights, the researcher identified the need to focus the research around more than the simple delivery of local government functions, or regional strategy development or the constitutional based leadership of the centre as is the case in earlier, less developed efforts, in this area. Such delivery now takes place within a complex framework but the tendency of the limited research on the sphere in Ireland to date has been to take a static perspective rather than a dynamic approach. For the researcher it became clear that application of a dynamic research process would be necessary to acknowledge the complexity of local-centre policy relationships in a post modern environment.

### **4.3 Research design**

A research project seeking to examine a relationship based upon the policy interface between the different layers of government presents methodological

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<sup>13</sup> For example the Cohesion Process initiated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to create single unified structures to deliver rural development and social inclusion programmes across the State in 2006.

challenges. The dynamic nature of the local-centre interface intimates a research methodology which will capture its multifaceted character while reflecting the pragmatic and grounded reality in which policy-making takes place. The absence of a research-based benchmark for the local-centre relationship necessitates a methodology which allows for a growth in understanding and perspective. Not only is policy-making a dynamic process but the operational environment is constantly changing in response to changing circumstances as well as the reform effort. Therefore, data is fluid. Thus, the research design to be selected must allow for the dynamic environment and use data collection and analysis methods which are themselves dynamic.

Furthermore, the models (as set out in chapters two and three) that seek to capture the different strands to the relationship in question will be tested within an ever shifting research context. The design therefore of a dynamic research methodology for such an environment is central to achieving a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of the local-centre relationship. Consequently, the research approach selected must be iterative, organic and process driven. All of this suggests a methodology which combines qualitative judgement and interpretation with some quantitative evaluation. This enables the reader to appreciate the centrality of local-centre policy processes to the public management of the Irish state.

The debate (elaborated more fully in the literature review in chapters two and three) around the local-centre policy relationship concerns a system of public management which is changing from a system which *responds* to shifts in its operational environment to one which applies *pre-emptive* public policy-making.

To capture this fluidity the research seeks to design and apply iterative models of the policy process between the local and the national. These models suggest an on-going engagement. Such engagement is clearly subject to external forces such as international competitiveness as well as internal concerns such as service delivery levels. The analysis of public service reform, therefore, needs to be based on an approach that accepts the existing models of the local-centre interface yet seeks to challenge current thinking. The research design is thus founded on an epistemology that serves to understand the development of significant inter-institutional dynamics across layers of government. As highlighted in the literature review, this study is underpinned by an understanding that the philosophy of public management has changed dramatically. This change reflects the post-modernism of fragmented public management within weakened centralised public service delivery and the plurality of the policy process with multiple stakeholder engagement (Teisman and vanBuuren, 2007). The widespread acceptance of concepts such as individual choice, customer satisfaction, responsiveness and participation have changed the ontology and epistemology of public management.

The changing nature of both the policy process and the local-centre relationship aligns with a social constructivist ontology as Creswell (2007) might acknowledge. The social constructivist perspective recognises the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. The advantage of a social constructivist approach is that it allows for the flexibility needed for research which is based on working with and alongside those central to the public policy layers. Equally it allows the research process to integrate the

findings from the primary research in a manner which will facilitate an exploration of the policy process.

However, the research methodology cannot simply take a structuralist approach. In the case of local authorities or indeed thematic policy applications generally, the researcher must also understand the *organisational culture* of the systems and the capacity of both the political and administrative/managerial hierarchies to be open and honest about the research subject.

A single case study, supported by face to face discussion, allows the researcher to confront such challenges but only on the basis that he/she brings the capacity to define research topics broadly initially, and to manage the need for an analysis which inevitably will arise when engaging in face to face research. Therefore there is a need to be able to place the research study or the face to face interview into a construct which can be developed from a comprehensive knowledge of public administration practice generally.

What is critical therefore is that the research framework allows for the creation of a process which can take a focused approach to interpreting the knowledge that is garnered, initially through the literature review and document analysis and then through the other primary research before returning to the literature to frame the models. Such an approach seems appropriate to frame a study which focuses on a dynamic entity. There is also, as Creswell (2007) would suggest, a need to bridge the gap between the use of qualitative and quantitative perspective if there is to be real added value to undertaking a research project of this nature. There are limitations to research solely based on interpretative methods derived from limited research. Therefore, the qualitative

elements will be supplemented by some quantitative data. Analysis of the development of trends over time through quantifiable change can contribute significantly to understanding the nature and the impact of change.

The challenge therefore, in developing a methodological approach, is to structure a dynamic appraisal process. This requires the qualitative judgement necessary to interpret the policy linkages between the local and the centre. Such qualitative judgement should nonetheless be informed, so far as possible, by a quantitative and developed analytical framework. Public management, as is evident from literature review, now exists within an environment which requires the public manager to address multiple themes, scope (*the range of responsibilities*), relativities (*the extent of responsibilities*) and perspectives (*how the institution applies those responsibilities*). Approaches to research on such an environment should therefore seek to move the process of analysis from simple quantification towards one which analyses public management as a process. Analysis of such a process accepts its functionalist obligations but also the inter-relational environment in which it operates, one which is fragmented organisationally and subject to political disaggregation.

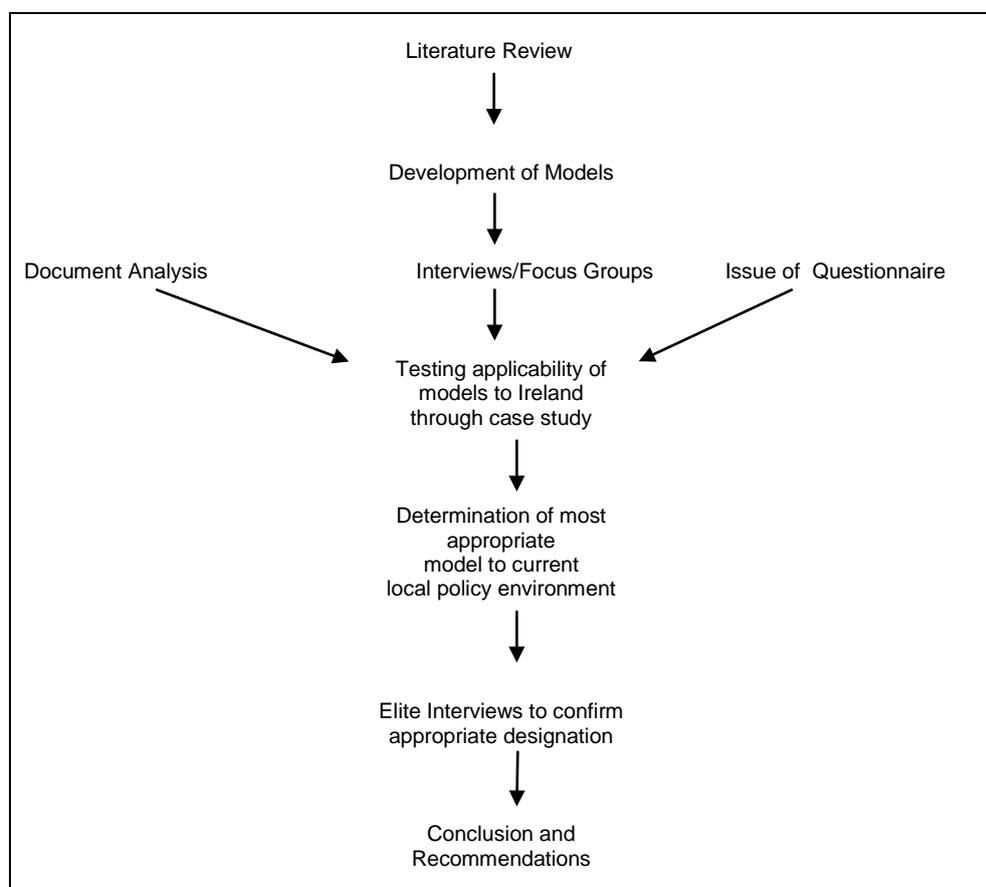
A mixed methods approach therefore seems most suitable given the multi-layered nature of public policy-making. Such layering impacts on the political, economic and social position of the individual, the organisation or institutional layer. Bryman, (2008 p603) establishes the term 'mixed methods research:

*...as a simple shorthand to stand for research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project.*

This approach draws upon already well established research methodologies which allow the researcher to develop thinking and apply this within a dynamic

research environment such as that encountered in this particular instance. The mixed-methods research process taken for this research is broadly delineated in Figure 12 below. Four key forms of analysis provide the initial foundation and subsequent evaluation which allowed the researcher to establish and confirm the models for the local-centre policy interface. Once these were established the process allowed for a testing of the models through completion of a case study, a further feature of research within the mixed -method developed by Bryman. This is an appropriate approach given the need to ground the mixed-method findings within the reality of the Irish local-centre policy interface. This in turn allowed for consideration of the appropriateness of the models to Ireland. The basis for delineation of an ideal Irish model could then be derived and this was subsequently underpinned through a series of elite interviews.

**Figure 12: The Mixed-Methods Research Process**



#### **4.4 Application of the mixed methods approach**

A deliberate consequence of the above choice of methodological approach is that the findings of both the literature review and document analysis could be complemented, from the start of the research process, through access to those within the layers of policy development at both local and national level. This allowed, as suggested by Bryman (2008 p603), the flexibility that is required to integrate research which is based on working with and alongside those central to the public policy layers. Equally, such an approach facilitates embedding the dynamism of the policy process into a robust research methodology.

The research framework allows for the creation of a process which can take a focused approach to interpreting the knowledge that is garnered, initially through the literature review, and then through the other primary research before returning to the literature to finally frame the models. This allows for the on-going development of an understanding of the layered dialogue and relativities within the public arena which are central, as Gjelstrup and Sørensen (2007) argue, to understanding the local-centre policy process.

##### *4.4.1 Approach to the literature review and document analysis*

A comprehensive review of literature and other written material played a central part in developing the researcher's understanding of the nature of the local-national relationship. This yielded understanding of the strands of thinking within which models delineating the nature of the interface could be established. In addition, the review identified the extent to which an academic research gap

existed and the contribution that the current study could make. A comprehensive document review was undertaken of specific reports and related material published by both local and national authorities in Ireland. This material provided key contextual and factual information, as synthesised in Table 36.

**Table 36: Document Analysis**

<b>Information Source</b>	<b>Basis for contribution</b>
Corporate and business plans of local authorities.	<i>Provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of strategic planning, corporate planning and management organisation.</i>
National policy positions of representative bodies such as the City and County Managers Association and the Association of County and City Councils, the Association of Municipal Authorities.	<i>Provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of joined up government, policy-making in a multi-level environment, contributions to sustainable development and spatial perspective.</i>
County/Local Area Development Plans adopted under the 2000 Act; (including Part V reviews).	<i>Provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of joined up government, policy-making in a multi-level environment, contributions to sustainable development and spatial perspective.</i>
Most recent Estimates of Local Authorities issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	<i>Provides quantitative data on resourcing and staffing of local government.</i>
Completed doctoral thesis held at the Institute of Public Administration, Dublin.	<i>Provides internal research (albeit that much is not for public consumption).</i>
Confidential research material prepared by the researcher for both national departments and local authorities	<i>Provides internal research (albeit that much is not for public consumption).</i>
Other research material available to the researcher through previous professional activities.	<i>Provides evidence of joined up government, policy-making in a multi-level environment, contributions to sustainable development and spatial perspective.</i>

A feature of the review of the above material was the fact that, notwithstanding the general availability of much of the above within the public arena, there is relatively little evidence of it being used to underpin an academic perspective within an informed research framework, a gap which this study will fill. In addition, comparative material, drawn from Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom, courtesy of the Local Government Denmark Association, the Municipality of Roskilde and the Universities of Roskilde, Denmark and Thomsø, Norway and the Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, United Kingdom, was made available to the researcher.

The above primary and secondary material was used to complement the academic analyses of the centre-local nexus examined in the literature review.. In some instances the documents provided an alternate perspective which could be used to delineate a more accurate picture of the Irish local-centre policy interface. Creswell (2007), Yin (2003), and Bryman (2008) establish the validity of such an approach. This approach was relevant to the research as it allowed for the application of a qualitative perspective based on the actual local government policy environment in Ireland.

## 4.5 Gathering the data

Primary data for the study were collected through a questionnaire and open interviews which provided the framework for a specific policy case-study , the findings from which were subsequently corroborated using elite interviews.

### 4.5.1 The Scoping Questionnaire

The use of questionnaires is a well established approach to underpinning literature and document analysis. As Yin, 2003 p83 acknowledges:

*You would be more confident ...if your study showed that information from interviews, documents, and archival records all pointed in the same direction.*

The information drawn from the questionnaire allowed the researcher to gain the confidence that the insights derived from the literature review and document analysis was in fact pointing in a similar direction. Given the need to engage with the widest possible community of interest in the research process, the objective of accessing as wide as possible a perspective from the local government system was considered. A critical aspect of this was the development of the questionnaire which not only elicited information and viewpoints but helped to select an appropriate policy sphere for consideration within the case study . This does not avoid the criticisms which can be made that, in part, the research is informed by at times anecdotal perspective. However, in the absence of substantive quantitative evaluation, a hallmark of Irish public management identified by the OECD (2008), Bryman (2008) does acknowledge that when set within a mixed-methods research framework such an approach does allow for perspective which can legitimately be structured to maximise the reliability and validity of key concepts.

All thirty-four local authorities were written to via the county/city managers in the county/city councils. The director of services of the city and county development boards were copied for information purposes on the 24/01/06, feedback was requested from the authorities by 05/02/06. The broad objective of the questionnaire was to identify potential linkages between the national and local level in the context of the development and implementation of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This particular policy was identified in the document analysis as being, at the time the only national policy which makes a specific policy objective to integrate the policy-making framework at both local and national level. The questionnaire addressed issues such as vertical and horizontal policy communication, diagonal issues, scope for local policy interpretation, resource accessibility and clarity of policy direction from the centre. The questions reflect a need in the research process to gain an overall understanding of the mind set of local policy leaders within the management structure in local government.

The questions probe management experience in the centre-local policy interface. The data collected were collated into a cumulative return across each of the questions (see Annex H). Analysis of the data was based on direct interpretation of the quantitative material returned. Qualitative interpretation was restricted to interpretation of additional information arising from comments included by the returnees, correlated with the quantitative responses. Both Fischer (2007) and Bryman (2008) argue that a fully developed approach involving mixed method analysis should be based upon findings that can be substantiated through direct interaction with the policy actors under research. Research perspectives therefore that are established through such methods as interview and questionnaire "*...capture the interaction among manifold actors engaged in*

*public governance*" (Fischer 2007 p84) sufficiently well to underpin a research argument.

The added value provided by the questionnaires allowed the researcher to begin to create a framework within which the models could be developed in regard to the Irish case alongside completion of the document review. This approach allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the real relationship between the national policy arena addressing social inclusion, with its implementation at the local level by those directly responsible. It also allowed the researcher to continue to develop the ultimate models put forward following the literature review and document analysis.

The total number of local authority respondents was twenty two i.e. a 65% return. The findings based on the analysis of the questionnaires are detailed in chapter six and *Annex H* along with the responses and findings from the other primary research undertaken.

#### *4.5.2 Interviews and workshops*

The scoping questionnaire was followed by a series of face to face semi-structured interviews with senior personnel at both local and national level, and two focus groups. This allowed the researcher to clarify with key personnel, issues that arose from both the development of the model and the response to the questionnaire and to confirm the validity of using a case study based on social inclusion as a central aspect of the research methodology. Subsequent to the completion of the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews, the literature review and document analysis material was re-examined and the models refined.

The use of semi-structured interviews and workshops as an approach is valid as a research process as Yin (2003), Bryman (2008) and others have argued. Rubin and Rubin (1995) acknowledge that the use of such interviews will allow a researcher to build ideas in areas where existing research may be limited. Devine (1995) notes the challenge in the use of unstructured interviews in regard to the avoidance of bias and naivety. Equally there is the recognition that such an approach is often the only option available to gain real substantive access to those that may be critical to the research process. There is a key challenge in that those being interviewed may only wish to provide an answer that they think the researcher wants to hear. Given the seniority of the individuals concerned in this instance, the researcher was presented with the opportunity to integrate both qualitative and quantitative perspective. Fischer (2007 p69) acknowledges that this allows the professional analyst, through practical experience as well as academic standing:

*...to properly understand and appreciate these craft-oriented aspects of policy analysis and to be able to competently judge the quality of the end product..*

Thus, the capacity to apply critical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire is established within an academic as well as practical framework. The approach taken thus provides the researcher with a defensible model for appraising the environment under consideration i.e. the local-centre policy relationship. This is particularly the case where limited access to existing research, or the lack of research in the first instance, may be the context in which a case study is being undertaken.

A sample of key informants, selected on grounds of role, relevant experience, geography and gender, was identified for the face to face interviews.

**Table 37: Interview criteria**

Interview Group	Basis for Interviewee selection
6 Senior Civil Servants within a range of Central Government Departments	The interviewees were the most senior personnel involved in the implementation of the policy actions associated with the case study in three of the fifteen Departments. In addition two of the civil servants provided secretarial support/chaired/chair the institutional arrangements established to oversee the local-centre policy interface.
11 Senior Local Government Officials	The interviewees are drawn from both rural and urban authorities at Manager/Director level. They represent one third of the county/city authorities in Ireland.
3 Regional Government Officials	The interviewees are chief officers of three of eight regional authorities including the most rural and most urbanised.
3 Senior Planners	The three planners were met as a focus group and include the then Chairman of the Irish Planning Institute. The planners were interviewed given their specific responsibilities for spatial development under the Planning and Development Acts, (2000-2007).
2 State Agency Officials	The interviewees (having local policy responsibilities) were drawn from enterprise development agencies.
5 International Academic Community	The interviewees were identified given their contribution to local-centre reform analysis in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Norway.
3 National Academic Community	The interviewees were chosen given their contribution to the analysis of reform processes in Ireland.
6 Middle and Other Grades in both local and national government	A focus group of middle ranking officials was undertaken to seek opinions of personnel working in the case study area. It included personnel drawn from both rural and urban authorities including those represented at the senior officials interviews.

As is evident from Table 37, the basis for the selection of the interviewees was that the individuals identified, given their position in management or at implementation level, could make a reasoned contribution to underpinning the researcher's understanding of current and historic features of the central-local interface. It includes key individuals in central government that have played and continue to play a key role in the reform process. The senior local government officials are those that played a complementary role at various levels within the local government system. It also includes various individuals that have acted or

act as advisors on policy in local and national government, those that have made an academic contribution to the area and those other stakeholders that have been or are impacted by the relationship. Thus, in accordance with recommendations of methodology experts such as Creswell, Bryman and Brewer, the most critical players in the sphere under analysis, i.e., the reform process, were selected for interview so as to contribute to the researcher's understanding. Interviews took place in the offices of the individuals concerned (from November 2007-June 2008). The workshops took place in the Galway County Council offices (in February and March 2007) and in the offices of the Local Government Management Agency, Dublin. Recording equipment was not permitted by any of the interviewees.

The data from each face to face interview and workshop was logged in written form and based upon an open interview in order to allow the subject take an open view on the nature of the relationship between centre and local government. The interviews were evaluated within the framework provided by the models set out in the literature review and the examination of the nature of the local government system and its role which is set out in the thesis.

#### **4.6 The policy case study: method and application**

The researcher, in selecting the mixed-method, sought to create a three pillar combination of normative understanding, empirical underpinning and pragmatic awareness: normative understanding through what an ideal model should be (as set out in the literature review-chapters two and three); empirical underpinning through the experience and real data that can be embedded into an understanding of the ideal model (chapters five and six); pragmatic

awareness through the applicability of those experiences, data and understandings that are based upon observation, application and evaluation of the models to define the local-national interface (see chapters seven and eight). In order to apply this three-pillar analysis by identifying and benchmarking the model(s), a specific focus of analysis was sought.

This social constructivist approach as Creswell (2007) acknowledges, becomes more relevant when exploring the relationship between post-modern public management structures and the delivery of policy outcome rather than policy output. This might provide a forward looking perspective which could provide a more productive arena for debate. Ansell (2007) underpins this as an approach when he suggests that good research is research undertaken with people rather than on people. The organisation of interviews and workshops to facilitate development of a case study provided the researcher with the opportunity to construct a structured process of engagement with people. Accordingly, the research process is iterative and provides a practical analysis which can be seen to contribute something of value to those engaged in the research process *and* in the multi-faceted policy process. To achieve an even more-depth analysis of the centre-local policy relationship, it became apparent that a specific policy sphere would have to be selected. Clearly, it was necessary to consider the relationship with a view to *what is* and *what ought to be* but it is also necessary to reflect on *why it is thus*. This intuitive approach is valid given the diversity of the local-centre policy interface and the limited extent of research to date. Yin notes that:

*Research may follow intuitive paths, often perceived by others as sloppy. However, the goal may justifiably be to discover theory by directly observing a social phenomenon in its raw form. (2003 p6).*

Nonetheless, what can be done to shift our level of understanding of a system which we can no longer view as one which is marginalised by the rigours of centralisation as Kirby, (in O’Broin and Waters, 2007), and indeed others, might suggest?

The undertaking of research through the use of a case study is therefore to be seen as the most appropriate means towards advancing an understanding of the policy-making process and the local-national interface in Ireland:

*Case study research (as Yin (2003 p xi) argues) continues to be an essential form of social science inquiry. The method is appropriate when investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances (a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and (c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence.*

The iteration associated with the research methodology, through the case study approach, must address the logic of organising institutional layers across several institutional settings. It has to have regard for the diagonal nature of service delivery as well as that of horizontal and vertical integration. Research through case study must therefore move beyond the boundaries that have grown, prior to and, from the modernisation of service delivery and the reforms of public management, regardless of the state or the constitutional setting applicable. Yin acknowledges the validity (within such an environment) of the case study approach within a multi-method research process as:

*The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artefacts, interviews, and observations. (Yin, 2003 p8).*

Such evidence may largely provide a qualitative basis on which to ground the research but it can do so with validity as it ultimately allows for the challenging of models and theories. Development of research in such an environment must, as Ansell (2007) suggests, include engagement with key actors within the

hierarchical and diagonal policy arena. The diversity of the context demands a capacity to capture the fullest possible variety of evidence.

Quantitative data within a case-study may provide the researcher with a set of apparent facts based on qualitative interpretation. These facts facilitate the researcher to establish a view at a juncture in the policy-making spectrum which may be informed by influences driven by a particular stake-holding. This view or perspective must be considered with a level of caution in order to avoid bias. Yin (2003, p37) acknowledges that this has to be the case even in areas where there is limited scope for qualitative (and not just quantitative) evaluation. Nonetheless, he recognises the value which a case study can bring to a research process which is necessarily mixed method in application. Rhodes (1997, p20) complements this perspective by arguing that:

*Case studies are neither descriptive nor divorced from theory: they are a valid way to test theories.*

This shifts the research agenda from one which is about the *acquiring* of knowledge through the case study to one which is also about the *use* of the knowledge acquired to achieve understanding.

#### *4.6.1 Social inclusion policy: an arena for analysis*

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), in seeking better and more responsive public services, emphasised the significance of public and regulatory reform by acknowledging that government (the elected representatives, officials, managers and staff) needs to be more adaptive and open to change and experimentation but within:

*A whole of government approach... required to ensure that coordinated and integrated public services are delivered...the lack of strategic planning at national level and the limited support (including resources) for coordination at local level.*

(NESF 34, 2006 p7)

The Forum suggests a model of public service delivery in Ireland which may necessarily require more delegation of decision-making in regard to specific service delivery. Such delegation needs however to allow for the setting of minimum standards in service delivery by the national level and for it to be subject to national policy expectations and the need for adequate accountability of resources. In doing so the NESF highlights the lack of integrated strategic planning at the national level and calls for the creation of a coherence indicative of Lejano's perspectives, also in 2006, on the creation of institutions of care within a clearly delineated public service from the local to the national. The Forum's perspective presents as a starting point in the consideration of public service planning and shows some awareness of the changed policy environment which Vetter (2007), Lejano (2006) and others highlight in their research.

Much prior attention has been placed on the local-centre financial relationship in Ireland which has been portrayed as the epitome of centralising NPM approaches. This study moves beyond that interpretation and in order to illustrate the change in the relationship examines the social inclusion policy sphere.

The choice of the case study i.e. *Social Inclusion: From a national intent to a local implementation*, is underpinned by the fact that the role of local government in social inclusion has expanded from a relatively non-existent role prior to the local government reform process of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as

Ó'Riordáin (2000) and Norris (2001) acknowledge, to one which can now be regarded as broadly similar to other European local government systems (Ó'Riordáin, 2007)). The argument for doing so is further underpinned by the extent to which social inclusion now plays a core role in the delivery of local government services. This occurred against a backdrop of attempts to embed NPM processes into the centre-local policy environment. In June 2010 some 9.7% (not including management staff in the community and enterprise function) of local government staff are employed within the Community and Enterprise function, almost wholly on social inclusion actions. In addition, some 12.4% are working in housing<sup>14</sup>. One in five staff therefore are directly concerned with social inclusion issues in local government. Social inclusion is the only area of local government where specific statutory provision, underpinned by both local and national resourcing, has been put in place under the Better Local Government Reform process.

The development of the new role in social inclusion presents the opportunity to examine the relationship between the centre and the local in an area unencumbered by either existing policy practices and legacies such as planning, or by a regulatory framework which is largely driven by the European policy framework<sup>15</sup> such as environment and competition, the effects of which are already relatively well documented in Ireland and elsewhere. Equally it allows consideration of the shift from customer back to citizen.

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<sup>14</sup> Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group, July 2010.

<sup>15</sup> European treaty provision for social inclusion was only specifically provided for with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty which came into force in January 2009. Prior consideration of social inclusion was informed by the provisions of EU Social Policy, the purpose of which was to facilitate competition and the open market under the original provisions of the Treaty of Rome.

More significantly the choice is also influenced by the development of the National Partnership Process and the embedding of local government into the strategic objectives of national partnership (Ó'Riordáin 2007) (See also Annexes J and K for a detailed delineation of the embedding of such responsibilities). In addition, the development of the role is also measurable in the allocation of resources as discussed in Callanan and Keogan (2003) and Ó'Riordáin (2008). Furthermore the reform process for social inclusion focuses not just on function but also on structure within the local authority and the relationship of both function and structure to the national policy process, the first such attempt to do so in Ireland. This sphere represents an opportunity to consider a fundamental shift in the nature of local-centre relations. It also provides the opportunity to place the relationship within a policy framework, as set out in the document analysis, which is not simply understood by reference to simple function or service user but rather the citizen and the role local government can play in ensuring the citizen is fully integrated within social, cultural and economic life. Social inclusion is indicative of the local-national policy context as established in the document review, one which is spatial and subject to a diversity of external influences, local, national and international.

Equally, the period of implementation of the policy framework (commenced in 1998) provides sufficient longevity to establish the depth of the reform process and thus to provide the researcher with a substantive base on which to establish and benchmark the real relationship rather than the more traditional perspective which has gone unchallenged to date.

The above can ultimately be considered within the framework of a case study which examines the role that the local-centre relationship has had in translating the broad intent of national legislation into actual delivery, in the absence of actual direction from, but with the active collaboration of, the centre. The argument for the use of social inclusion may therefore be summarised as follows in Table 38.

**Table 38: Basis for case study**

<p><b>Applicability to the academic strands established in Chapter 2</b></p>	<p><i>Social inclusion is a central feature of each of the academic strands applied. It is a policy application addressed within multi-level government, joined up government, collaborative planning and strategic management. It is a central pillar of the policy development associated with sustainable development and spatial planning and territorial governance.</i></p>
<p><b>Capacity to access primary research in Chapter 5 and 6</b></p>	<p><i>Social inclusion is the only new policy field added to the role of local government in the past decade in Ireland as a part of the local government reforms. It is the only area of policy given specific expression under the foundation law of local government, the Local Government Act, 2001. It has both horizontal and vertical policy application. In addition, it has diagonal policy application through the national partnership process in Ireland.</i></p> <p><i>As a result a new organisational application supported by a statutory policy process has been put in place. The existing principal policy arena of local government, i.e. spatial planning, and housing policy have been amended to integrate with this new policy arena. Thus access to a range of primary material has been established over the past decade.</i></p>
<p><b>Research demonstration effect in Chapters 5 to 7</b></p>	<p><i>The development of both life cycle analysis arising from this new policy arena and the embedding of a horizontal policy field across other local government policy fields provides a demonstration application for these other policy arenas at both local and national level.</i></p>
<p><b>Applicability to models in Chapters 5 to 7</b></p>	<p><i>As social inclusion is applicable to each of the academic strands, to horizontal and vertical integration and to diagonal applications across the public management arenas, the applicability to the four models is established on a firm framework.</i></p>

#### **4.7 Follow up elite interviews**

Having designed a research process that would underpin the thinking established through the literature review and subsequent methodological applications, a further series of eight elite face to face interviews was undertaken in July-August 2010. The principal benefit of undertaking these interviews is that they contributed to triangulation and validation of the emerging evidence by ascertaining the views of several of the most significant actors in the local-centre policy process. Bryman acknowledges the appropriateness of using such a method. Such interviewing, based on the qualitative judgement of policy leaders rather than the researcher's own informed opinion as:

... there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view..." (2008 p437).

This is of course provided:

... the approach is structured to maximise the reliability and validity of key concepts.

The completion of the elite interviews acknowledges that the interview framework was determined by the findings of the literature review and subsequent analysis. There was therefore a framework on which the research process was based. A key objective was to use the qualitative perspective of the interviewees to assess the relevance of the models and their appropriateness to the Irish case. This included addressing appropriateness for the wider policy arena and not just the social inclusion sphere. These face to face interviews included previous interviewees and, in light of retirements and career moves, a number of new interviewees, drawn from both national and local government. The local authority personnel were at manager level and included people with both urban and rural responsibilities and experience. The managers interviewed have served or continue to serve as managers in two cities and seven counties. The senior officials at central level served in senior

positions in three departments and one national agency. The remaining official served at senior level in both local and regional authorities. Each one would have had and continue to have a role in the reform processes of the past decade and more recent efforts to underpin centre-local policy structures.

The second round interviews also allowed for consideration of more recent policy initiatives and their implications for the developed models. Such initiatives include the drafting of the White Paper on Local Government which is due for publication by the end of 2011, the publication of the Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group, July 2010 and the Report of the Limerick Boundary Commission, September 2010. Importantly, while the scoping questionnaire relates to the initiation of the research programme in 2006, the implementation of the policy process did take place over the subsequent three years. The validity of the initial data analysis would therefore be buttressed or challenged by the elite interviewees who have unique implementation experience associated with the policy field.

#### **4.8 The Research Environment**

Post-modern public administration processes operate in a world which is fundamentally more varied and complex than heretofore. This is evidenced by the extensive range of stakeholders and layers of governance which are now the hallmark of public management. Creswell (2007), Yin (2003) and Bryman (2008) acknowledge the need to place the research process within the political, social and cultural context of both the researched and the researcher. Qualitative research allows for an interpretative perspective that straddles those contextual features of post modern society. Such an approach requires a

process rather than a fixed methodological approach. Bryman (2008 p437) underpins this approach by declaring:

*The approach is structured to maximise the reliability and validity of key concepts.*

By applying the above multiple methods/case-study approach, the researcher ensured the flexibility required to develop the thinking which must necessarily accompany the development of models in the first instance, and their application in the second. The process facilitated exploration of the detail of the local-national interface, and not just a fixed perspective which might have failed to reflect shifts in the socio-political environment. The elements of the research approach ensured the establishment of a robust model, against which a realistic interpretation of the local-national interface could be defined, analysed and contextualised. The cross-methodological framework integrated the varying situational, structuralised and layered relations of contemporary public management and enabled robust academic analysis of how the processes of governance can more practically be developed to meet the demands of a changing environment.

#### **4.9 Ethics and Limitations in the research process**

The research has been carried out within accepted norms of the National University of Ireland. The approach has been informed by existing applications of an ethical approach to research which applies in the professional life of the researcher. The ethical practices informed by a long-standing role, both as a former senior public servant, and as an external appraiser of public policy, ensured that the research was carried out with meticulousness, integrity and diligence which respected the trust placed in the researcher by the key informants. The development of a case study, the undertaking of interviews, the

interpretation of primary material has had to be undertaken in the knowledge that much of the material must, in many instances, be regarded as confidential. These constraints were overcome through the retention of source material which is confidential, the identification of interviewees through narrative and empirical designation rather than name and specific grade albeit that the traceability of such persons is ensured through appropriate record keeping.

The avoidance of bias was a further critical consideration. The iterative nature of the interaction with the thesis supervision was a key aspect to ensuring that bias impact was restricted. More significantly, given the methodology, the need to retain a clear distance with professional and other experience became apparent early in the research sequence. It is notable that the final elite interviews placed a completely alternative perspective before those interviewed, thus forcing a re-consideration of own pre-conceptions. Finally, accessing into external perspective from Denmark, the United Kingdom and Norway also provided the opportunity to develop a transparent consideration of the research material.

Given the relative paucity, of Irish-based academics review available, a mixed-methods research methodology was applied. Such an approach provides access to sources including documentation, records, interviews and participant observation, as well as academic review. Through the use of case study the needs of the research community can be brought to complement the needs of the practitioner. The objective of the research was not necessarily to *solve* the problem of the local-centre relationship but to *understand* it and the complex circumstances confronting the policy maker. This means that both quantitative

and qualitative research require some level of interpretation. This may pose a challenge to the researcher as the policy-maker will always come to a particular issue or range of considerations with the already gained experience (As Healey (1997) and others acknowledge) of having to address change within an existing politico-administrative environment. The public official or politician will naturally therefore be seeking an outcome which may already be pre-determined by them thanks to a particular starting point within the policy spectrum. This form of limitation has to be expected. The difficulty is that if the researcher simply accepts a starting political or administrative bias as a fundamental principle, there is the real risk that the research will itself become a work which is undermined by that very same bias. The researcher may be a supporting advocate under normal conditions but the advocacy must develop with the thesis and not pre-date it. Herein lies a challenge for this particular research as the culture of public service has been, and remains wary of the research community (Ó'Riordáin, 2004). This can limit approaches to research and thus undermine the ontological and epistemological scaffolding upon which the research itself is based.

There is added "concern" that much of the research takes place within a relationship which is based on mutual trust and openness developed through professional engagement. A key element in creating the trust required is the bringing of a high level of knowledge to the research relationship. This is a critical challenge in an area of public management which is under researched in Ireland relative to other countries and systems. Equally, there was a need to respect the position of those subject to the research process. The approach to

the research therefore had to demonstrate both the independence of the observer and the awareness of the evaluator.

#### **4.10 Approach to the management of interviews**

One of the critical challenges in undertaking the following research was to have access to both senior local and national policy-makers. In effect the research would not have been possible without such access. The researcher was fortunate in having been able to have such access given the long-standing relationships between the researcher and those contributing their perspectives and experiences. Nonetheless this access was subject to some conditions. The electronic recording of interviews did not take place. Interviews were noted by the researcher and these notes were summarised at the end of each interview to ensure that the contributions were appropriately captured. Direct attribution of statements is limited, due to the need to ensure confidentiality. In particular, the concluding elite interviews were necessarily restricted to this approach given the relative ease with which such persons can be identified. The option was given for direct attribution but in no instance was this agreed to by the contributors. The researcher was therefore obliged to refrain from directly referencing specific locations highlighted during the discussions. In addition, commentary made in regard to or about specific persons has had to be edited to avoid identification.

#### **4.11 Conclusions**

The mixed methods approach selected allows the integration of the literature with the reality of local and central government processes in Ireland. In doing so it brings together for the first time in the Irish case, the thinking of the post

modern policy environment with the practice of local-centre policy development in Ireland. It presents the researcher and the reader with the opportunity to think of the policy system within a structured framework where simple acceptance of the Irish case being wholly driven by central direction is no longer appropriate. This approach allows the research to focus on the true complexity of the local-centre relationship. It does so by creating a research design based on well established grounds. The research design allows consideration of:

- Current thinking in public management and the strands of academic perspective which inform such thinking. This includes identification of the characteristics and fields of influence which now define the nature of local-centre policy development. Doing so establishes a greater understanding of the institutional relationships between the two levels of government, local and central in Ireland.
- New models to delineate the possible range of local- centre relationships. These models are used to consider the public management structures in Ireland and whether they sufficiently reflect the nature of the changed policy environment.
- Assessment of whether one of the models developed is completely applicable to Ireland or whether there may be a need to look at some variant that encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type. In that context, the researcher considers whether it is appropriate to apply, in the recent efforts to reform the institution of local government, such an approach.

The study combines accepted international perspectives on the nature of post modern policy processes and successfully embeds these within a clearly Irish focused policy environment. The remaining chapters apply the chosen methodology to test the hypothesis elaborated in Chapter 3.

## **Chapter Five: Key characteristics of the local government system**

### **5.1 Introduction**

#### *5.1.1 Local government in Ireland*

There are thirty four county and city councils in the Republic of Ireland. In addition, some 80 towns have a local town or borough council. Essentially the town and borough councils are a part of the county structures, having in place unified management and technical/administrative arrangements. They do, however, all have separate political and corporate identity. People living within the electoral boundaries of the town and borough councils areas can vote for representatives at both urban and county level. Nonetheless, much of the policy development that takes place does so within the city/county council structures with the town/borough councils being restricted to limited application within their specific areas. In general, Irish local authorities at city/county level have a range of service responsibilities that are similar to other local government systems in Europe. The main differences in such responsibilities apply to education<sup>16</sup> at primary and post primary level (which in Ireland is mainly decentralised to local boards of management and not to local authorities as in some other European states) and public health care. The full range of services provided by the Irish local government system, are set out in Annex B. Substantially though, as Ó'Riordáin (2007) sets out, local government in Ireland provides the following:

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth acknowledging that the Vocational Education Committees are in law subsidiary committees of the relevant local authority but are considered as independent from the authority in most of their operational matters and therefore are normally not included in the Irish local government system for comparative purposes with other European systems.

**Table 39: Functions of Local Government**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a local democratic framework and through it an entry to national politics;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates, on behalf of the State, the co-ordination of local, rural and community development.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides the local representational role and underpins local identity;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides the spatial planning context within which development takes place;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides direct public services to residents, visitors and investors within a local context;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulates in various instances economic and environmental issues as well as providing local consumer protection;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivers on an agency basis for the State, national services more appropriately delivered at a local level;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates public and private investment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides the local platform through which social and cultural diversity is facilitated and nurtured.</li> </ul>	

These roles include local service provision, regulation and consumer protection, advocacy and representation, the cumulative effect of which is to differentiate local government from all other organs of public management in the State. This is so as other State Agencies and Government Departments tend to function within specific mandates set at the national level. Local government however is responsible for a range of services and other responsibilities that establish the local authorities as multi-purpose bodies. As a result they have several separate legal identities (i.e. in addition to being local authorities they are also planning , housing, fire, water, and road authorities, all of which have separate legal standing). They operate, in this regard, within a multi-legislative environment rather than having to work to a specific mandate set within a single legislative basis. Most other public bodies in Ireland operate within a single, parent body of legislation. In broad terms, the average population and area of an Irish local authority is bigger than the European average while expenditure compares to the non-Scandinavian local authorities of the European Union.

**Table 40: Per Capita Expenditure of Local Government**

Country	Population Mil	Number of councils	Average Size- Inhabitants	Average Area sq KM	Per capita Spend €	% Spending as a proportion of GDP
Germany	82.3	12,379	6,650	29	<b>2,108</b>	7.2
Austria	8.3	2,356	3,530	36	<b>2,410</b>	7.4
Denmark	5.5	98	55,710	440	<b>13,255</b>	32
United Kingdom	60.8	434	140,050	562	<b>4,345</b>	12.9
Finland	5.3	415	12,740	815	<b>6,528</b>	19.2
Netherlands	16.4	443	36,970	77	<b>5,286</b>	15.3
Sweden	9.1	290	31,540	1,552	<b>8,945</b>	24.5
Belgium	10.6	589	18,030	52	<b>2,113</b>	6.7
<b>Ireland</b>						
<b>County/City</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>128,150</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>3,068</b>	<b>7.1</b>
<b>All (incl town councils)</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>38,220</b>			

Source: Public/Local Expenditure 2009: CEMR-Dexia-2006 Data

It is however important to acknowledge that the above averages are impacted by the heavy expenditure by local government on engineering related programmes in Ireland. This arises from the role local government is playing in implementing the National Development Plan 2007-2013. For example, in 2009 total local government spending was in the region of €11 billion of which €5 billion was used for current expenditure<sup>17</sup>. A sum of €2 billion was provided by way of grant income for current expenditure purposes from the State, the balance i.e. €3 billion, being generated through local taxes and service charges. The state grant included approx. €1 billion of local motor taxes collected by the local authorities and lodged by them into the Local Government

<sup>17</sup> The €6 billion capital spend is primarily resourced through national grants, local borrowing and local development levies. It is mainly allocated to housing, roads, water and waste water services, and leisure facilities. Such spending in other European countries is undertaken by either agencies of local or national government or private providers and therefore the capital spend on such facilities does not apply directly to the local authorities in other countries. Irish local government is unusual in that it remains a developer of such facilities rather than a facilitator of same.

Fund. This fund operates as a distinct national funding mechanism, separate from the National Exchequer which provides the balance. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, rather than the Minister for Finance, is responsible for the Local Government Fund. In broad terms therefore locally based charges and taxes provide approximately 80% of current revenue expenditure, albeit that a quarter of this is determined through national allocations.

Overseeing these functions and expenditures the Irish local authorities have some 1,500 county/city councillors (883) and town/borough councillors. In European terms this level of representation is low as indicated in Table 41 below.

**Table 41: Councillor Ratio**

Country	Units of Administration	Elector / Councillor Ratio
France	36,880	116
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>34(County/city)</b> <b>85 (City/Town)</b> <b>5 (City)</b> <b>80 (Town)</b>	<b>3,585</b> <b>1,240</b> <b>4,262</b> <b>711</b>
Italy	8,215	397
Spain	8,149	597
United Kingdom	472	2,605

Source Jenkins, S., Big Bang Localism-A Rescue Plan for British Democracy, Localis Policy Exchange Ltd. London 2004 and others.

More critically, each council has a county/city manager and a team of directors who oversee the administrative/technical services of all the local authorities in each county/city and town. These permanent officials are generally local government career officials having, in most instances, started their careers as university graduated entrants to the system. As acknowledged in the OECD

2008 Report there is relatively good cross over promotion, in Ireland, of personnel from one local authority to another. There is however, limited cross over from one public authority to another while movement from the centre (unlike Napoleonic countries) to the local is rare<sup>18</sup>. This has resulted in the creation of a cadre of local government management personnel with limited knowledge of national and public authority corporate processes. This lack of knowledge is reciprocated at national level where there is an almost non-existent body of experience or understanding of local government in national corporate processes (OECD 2008)<sup>19</sup>.

The functions of local government are identified for financial management purposes through eight programme groups. There is a tendency, in the limited academic overview of local government in Ireland that is available, to focus on these eight broad programme groups rather than reflecting on the individual activities which make up the groups. Thus what is written can seem to miss the full extent and range of tasks and functions of the Irish local government system. In particular, given the increased range of functions of local government over the past decade (and the approach to date of embedding them within existing programme groups rather than the creation of new groups), there appears to be limited appreciation of the recently expanded role of local government<sup>20</sup>. Irish local government bodies, under the provisions of the Local

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<sup>18</sup> Of the thirty four county and city managers in place in June 2010, four are former senior civil servants.

<sup>19</sup> There is one former local government official in senior management within the Civil Service. A Director of Community and Enterprise was appointed to the position of Assistant Secretary in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs in July 2010.

<sup>20</sup> For example: O'Broin and Waters, 2007.

Government Act, 2001<sup>21</sup> are now free to run, facilitate or lead, activities as diverse as local radio stations, Irish premier league soccer teams and various industrial activities including electricity generation, crystal glass production and ferry services. The services are broadly identified as follows in Table 42 with a more comprehensive listing in Annex B.

**Table 42: Functions of Local Government**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme Group 1 Housing and Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social housing maintenance repair and improvement</li> <li>• Housing Estate Management</li> <li>• Provision of Rental Accommodation</li> <li>• Supports for the housing of Older People</li> <li>• Supports for the housing of Persons with a disability</li> <li>• Supports for the housing of Travellers</li> <li>• Supports for Homeless People</li> <li>• Agency Services – Health Services Executive</li> <li>• Provision of emergency accommodation</li> <li>• Provision of support services for refugees and others.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme Group 2 Roads and Transportation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Primary Roads planning and provision</li> <li>• National Secondary Roads planning and provision</li> <li>• Major Urban Roads planning and provision</li> <li>• Minor Urban Roads planning and provision</li> <li>• Public Lighting – Maintenance</li> <li>• Major Urban/Regional Roads planning and provision</li> <li>• Management of Facilities</li> <li>• Regional Airport planning, provision and operation</li> <li>• Regional Harbour planning, provision and operation</li> <li>• Operation/Maintenance of Traffic Safety Education and School Wardens</li> <li>• Motor Taxation and Driver Licensing</li> <li>• Provision of Urban and Rural public transport</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme Group 3 Water and Sewerage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Water Schemes Operation / Maintenance</li> <li>• Waiver Schemes</li> <li>• Water Fluoridation</li> <li>• Public Sewerage Schemes</li> <li>• Operation/Maintenance of Drainage Network</li> <li>• Operation/Maintenance of Public Conveniences</li> <li>• Supports for Private water and Waste Water Schemes</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme Group 4 Planning and Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of RAPID/Clár Initiatives (urban/rural regeneration)</li> <li>• Planning Control</li> <li>• Forward Planning</li> <li>• Statutory Development Plans including preparation of a Housing Strategy</li> <li>• Promotion of interest of local community</li> <li>• Tourism Promotion and Marketing</li> <li>• Conservation of Architectural Heritage</li> <li>• Provision and Management of Industrial Estates</li> <li>• Provision and Management of Retail Facilities</li> <li>• General Promotional Work</li> <li>• Regional Development - Regional Authority, Regional Assemblies,</li> <li>• Contributions to Enterprise Boards</li> <li>• Contributions to Local and Community Development</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> The Act provides, under Part 9, for a general competency to undertake functions necessary for the development of their communities. This follows, under the Local Government , Act 1991, Part II, the abolishment of the concept of Ultra Vires and the introduction of a general competency clause which pre-dates other similar initiatives in the UK, France among others.

	<p>and other bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other Miscellaneous Contributions</li> <li>• Management of a Social inclusion Unit</li> <li>• Directorate of Community and Enterprise</li> <li>• Provision of Broadband</li> <li>• Coastal Zone Management</li> <li>• Prevention of coastal erosion</li> </ul>
<p><b>Programme Group 6 Recreation and Amenity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance/Operation of Archives</li> <li>• Operation and Maintenance of swimming pools</li> <li>• Operation and Maintenance of libraries</li> <li>• Purchase of Books</li> <li>• Operation of Parks/Open Spaces</li> <li>• Operation of Recreation Centres</li> <li>• Maintenance/Operation of Art Galleries</li> <li>• Maintenance/Operation of Museums</li> <li>• Maintenance/Operation of Theatres</li> <li>• Maintenance/Operation of Golf Courses</li> <li>• Provision of Sports facilities/Playgrounds/Skate parks</li> <li>• Support for Sports Organisations and facilities</li> <li>• Provision of Cinemas and mobile cinemas</li> <li>• Provision of Marinas</li> <li>• Provision and management of Angling facilities</li> <li>• Contributions to Other Bodies - Arts Act</li> <li>• Regulation of Public Events</li> <li>• Other Recreation &amp; Amenity including Arts Promotion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Programme Group 5 Environmental Protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste Disposal Provision and Improvement of Waste facilities</li> <li>• Refuse Collection</li> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Street Cleaning</li> <li>• Trade &amp; Other Waste Management</li> <li>• Litter Prevention Service</li> <li>• Environmental rehabilitation</li> <li>• Burial Grounds - Upkeep</li> <li>• Civil Defence</li> <li>• Regulation and Management of Dangerous Buildings</li> <li>• Buildings Standard Regulation</li> <li>• Water Safety</li> <li>• Fire Fighting</li> <li>• Fire Protection</li> <li>• Provision of Buildings Fire protection</li> <li>• Provision of Equipment Monitoring and Enforcement</li> <li>• Provision of Equipment</li> <li>• Pollution Abatement</li> <li>• Emergency Planning and Management</li> <li>• Environmental Promotion &amp; Competitions</li> <li>• Energy conservation and management</li> <li>• Generation of electricity</li> <li>• Provision of district heating</li> <li>• Manufacture of Gas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Programme Group 7-Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of Residential Homes and Special Schools</li> <li>• Crèche Provision and Child care</li> <li>• Provision of School Meals</li> <li>• Contribution to Vocational Education</li> <li>• Provision of Higher Education Grants</li> </ul>	<p><b>Programme Group 8 Miscellaneous Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coroners and Inquests and Management of Courthouses</li> <li>• Management Property</li> <li>• Management Register of Electors</li> <li>• Management of Weights and Measures</li> <li>• Monitoring of Slaughterhouses and Meat and Milk/Dairies</li> <li>• Provision of Weighbridges</li> <li>• Provision of Pounds for Wandering Animals and Dog Control</li> <li>• Provision and Regulation of Casual Trading including Farmer Markets.</li> </ul>

(Source Ó'Riordáin 2007)



### *5.1.2 Other institutional features*

Local authorities are corporate bodies and may therefore sue or be sued. They are, as noted earlier, made up of the local elected representatives and a management team supported by both technical and administrative staff. The work of the elected members is generally focused on policy matters known as reserved functions. This work is mainly carried out by the elected members who sit on a number of committees, primarily the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) which includes the Chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) and the County/City Manager. Strategic Policy Committees, which consist of elected members and nominees of the local social partners, are in place in each city/county authority. These structures essentially act, to varying degrees of success (Callanan 2005), as the policy development arena for the local authorities. More recently local authorities have established local audit committees which include both councillor and non councillor membership.

In addition, the integration and co-ordination of public services at the county/city level is generally provided for through County/City Development Boards (CDB). The Boards include representatives of the local authority, the local development sector, the local state agencies and the community and voluntary sector. The development boards have been central to the national modernisation programme for local government and, as is evident from the OECD (2007) Review of the Public Service, to the re-establishment of local government as the key local body through which local economic, social and cultural development takes place. In this role local government has seen an expansion of its functions from being a direct provider of services to now including facilitation of local co-operation among the state and non-state sectors, and of providing the local

institutional mechanism for ensuring co-ordination and integration of public service provision.

The boards are supported by directorates for community and enterprise in each local authority and through these directorates the development of local social inclusion units has occurred. The directorates are also responsible for the community and voluntary fora in each county/city on which nominees of community and voluntary groups sit.

### *5.1.3 National representation*

At the national level the elected members are represented by the Association of County and City Councils (1 staff member), the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland (1 staff member), and the Local Authority Members Association (no full time staff). The local government management staffs are supported at the national level by a number of specialist bodies, most notably the Local Government Management Agency (121 members of staff) which includes the Office for Local Authority Management (OLAM). OLAM specifically supports the County and City Managers Association (CCMA), the representative body for local government management. As is self evident from the level of staff resources available to the representative associations, national level representation on the part of the elected members is weak. On the other hand the resources that are available to the management side have been strengthened to a significant extent as a part of the modernisation process.

## 5.2 Institutional Arrangements for local government in Ireland

Article 28 A of Bunreacht na h-Éireann (The Constitution of Ireland) provides:

*The State recognizes the role of local government in providing a forum for the democratic representation of local communities, in exercising and performing at local level powers and functions conferred by law and in promoting by its initiatives the interests of such communities.*

The 1,500 councillors are thus elected by popular mandate every four years in accordance with Article 28A. This includes some 753 in the 29 County Councils, 130 in the five cities, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, and 617 in the remaining 80 town and borough councils. As, constitutionally, the only local democratic forum, the local government system is central to the operation of the state at local level in Ireland, albeit that it, as the Constitution provides, is dependent upon the central law making role of the Houses of the Oireachtas. All functions and the exercise of powers under Article 28A of the Constitution, on the part of local government:

*...shall...be so determined and shall be exercised and performed in accordance with law.*

Fifteen central government departments, which have overall responsibility for the development and delivery of public policy in the state, are organized on a sectoral basis (see Annex B for more detail). Given the broad range of functions undertaken by local government most central government departments have a level of engagement with the local authorities. These range from holding direct national policy responsibility such as the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to indirect policy responsibilities such as Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The broad areas of central policy responsibility that have an impact on local government are set out in Table 43 below.

**Table 43: Government Department-Impact on local government**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Local Institutional Role</b>	<b><i>Impact at local policy level</i></b>
Taoiseach	None	<i>Yes -through implementation of Towards 2016 (T2016).</i>
Enterprise Trade and Innovation	County/City Enterprise Boards	<i>Yes- through co-financing requirements for local enterprise and expectation of coordination with State industrial development agencies. Provision of central pillar of Board Representation.</i>
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	The Department operates a nation wide structure of offices and support services.	<i>Yes-through cooperation with Teagasc, Coillte.</i>
Tourism, Culture and Sport	None	<i>Yes-through local sports partnership and swimming pool initiatives, and co-financing of local sports development, cultural development and National Lottery projects.</i>
Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	Regional Fisheries Boards	<i>Yes-Co-financing of Communications and energy networks including management of local broadband initiatives.</i>
Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs	Local Integrated Development Companies	<i>Yes-Co-financing of local, rural and community development programmes. Provision of central pillar of Board Representation.</i>
Defence	The Department has no local area structures but the Defence Forces operate through a network of military establishments. Civil defence is organised through the local authorities.	<i>Yes- Co-financing of civil defence. Co-ordination of emergency management at County-City level.</i>
Tánaiste, Education and Skills	Vocation Education Committees Institutes of Technology Fás.	<i>Yes- Co-financing of education provision including schools, special schools, colleges and out reach third level centres.</i>
Environment, Heritage and Local Government	Local and Regional Authorities	<i>Yes-Primary implementation of national initiatives in the Department through the local authorities.</i>

<b>Department</b>	<b>Local Institutional Role</b>	<b>Impact at local policy level</b>
Finance	Regional Assemblies	<i>Yes- Co-financing of local Public Private Partnerships, collection of national tax and setting of rates for motor taxation and other national fees. Overall responsibility for European Monetary Policy Implementation in Ireland including levels of local borrowing.</i>
Foreign Affairs	None	<i>Yes-Negotiation on regulatory affairs at EU level.</i>
Health and Children	Through the Health Services Executive (HSE) County based consultative arena.	<i>Yes-Co-financing of local health and public health initiatives.</i>
Justice and Law Reform	An Garda Síochána, the national unified and unarmed police service, are organised on a County basis, consulting with County/City and Town Council Joint Policing Committees.	<i>Yes-Implementation of the Local Authority Joint Policing Initiatives.</i>
Social Protection	Organised on a nation wide basis the department also supports Family Resource Centres and Community Development Projects across the State.	<i>Yes- Co-financing of local community based initiatives.</i>
<i>Transport</i>	<i>Through the National Roads Authority.</i>	<i>Yes- Implementation of National Roads Policy, co-financing of national public transport initiatives as well as direct support for local transport infrastructure.</i>

Source: Departmental Statements of Strategy

The departments give effect to the policy of the government through the preparation of legislation for presentation to the Houses of the Oireachtas. The policy in broad terms is then implemented through a range of regulatory instruments and administrative processes. These are generally in the form of both binding and non-binding guidelines and circulars addressed to the effecting bodies. In addition to the departments, there are a large number of central, single purpose organizations. The services offered by these bodies can be allocated across five distinct categories as follows in Table 44.

**Table 44: State Agency Impact at local level**

<b>Service Category</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Local Institutional Role</b>	<b><i>Impact at local policy level</i></b>
Commercial actions such as energy generation, public transport, public broadcasting	Eirgrid, Irish Rail, RTE	None	<i>Limited largely to consultation on specific project proposals as for private sector project promoters.</i>
Development led actions covering the provision of supports to economic activity	IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Fás	Representation on the Development Boards and other ad hoc local initiatives led by the local authorities.	<i>Play a significant role in determination of development led policies in the local authorities and Development Boards most significantly, Development Plans.</i>
Health bodies addressing primary care, hospital provision and administration and other health related services	Health Services Executive	Representation on the Development Boards and other ad hoc local initiatives led by the local authorities	<i>Limited largely to consultation on specific project proposals as for private sector project promoters.</i>
Cultural bodies providing for the policy agenda and direct delivering of culture	Arts Council, Irish Sports Council, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna	Direct co-funding of local authority cultural services such as local arts officers, sports partnerships and related infrastructure. National Policy direction for libraries.	<i>Play a significant role in determination of sports/culture- led policies in the local authorities.</i>
<i>Other regulatory/advisory bodies which address specific needs such as environmental protection</i>	<i>Environment Protection Agency, National Roads Authority.</i>	<i>Role limited to statutory guidance and provision of financial/regulatory oversight.</i>	<i>Play significant role in finance provision and project evaluation alongside statutory review.</i>

These bodies are effectively independent of the political process and, in the case of commercial state bodies operate within a normal market environment. In addition, some 6 cross border bodies have been established under the North/South Ministerial Council, four of which have a cross-border spatial planning role.

**Table 45: Organisation of Local Governance in Ireland**

Organisation	Functions/ Responsibility	Local Institutional Role	Relationship to local democratic responsibility	Local Government Policy Impact
2 Regional Assemblies	The two Regional Assemblies were established in 1999 to coordinate the provision of public services and to monitor the implementation of the national Development Plan in their respective areas.	The two Assemblies have adopted regional strategies which provide the policy interface between the national Development Plan and the public service plans of the local authorities and various state agencies. They are directly responsible for the operational programme for their respective areas. Staff are a part of the local authority pool.	The Members of the Assemblies are nominated by the Regional Authority membership and therefore consist of local authority elected members. The assemblies are part-financed by local authorities.	<i>Limited policy relevance notwithstanding their coordination role in EU funded programmes. There is no statutory basis for policy direction from the Assemblies to the local authorities.</i>
8 Regional Authorities	The eight regional authorities were established in 1994 to promote the coordination of public services and initially to provide a forum for the local review of the National Development Plan. They also have responsibility for the preparation of a regional economic strategy and regional planning guidelines which set the strategic framework for the local planning authorities. The Authorities have also taken a leading role in the implementation of the national Broadband Strategy.	The Regional Planning Guidelines and Regional Strategy have to be considered by the Local Planning Authorities in the preparation of the relevant County/City Development Plans. Currently there is no statutory obligation to embed policy direction into local development planning. Each authority is supported by an Operational Committee comprising the Chief Officers of all public sector operations in the region, including the County Managers and the Chief Officer of FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Tourism Organisations, Health Service Executive, An Post, Iarnród Éireann, ESB, Teagasc and others. Staff are a part of the local authority pool.	The Members of the Regional Authorities are nominated following each local election, by the constituent local authorities. The authorities are part-financed by local authorities.	<i>Limited relevance notwithstanding their coordination role. The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2010 proposes to provide a statutory basis for spatial planning direction to address decisions of the Supreme Court concerning interpretation of existing regulatory framework.</i>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Functions/ Responsibility</b>	<b>Local Institutional Role</b>	<b>Relationship to local democratic responsibility</b>	<b>Local Government Policy Impact</b>
17 Harbour Authorities	The management of Ireland's port infrastructure.	The majority of harbours in Ireland are operated under the local authorities, albeit that they have an increasing commercial role. The biggest authorities, Cork, Dublin and Shannon/ Foynes have been established as corporate entities in their own right.	Members are nominated to the Boards of the Authorities and in a number of instances secretarial services are directly provided by the Authorities.	<i>Limited relevance.</i>
1 Regional Tourism Authority	Dublin Tourism is the only remaining Regional Tourism Body. It has the responsibility of promoting Dublin and its environs	The Authority is part financed by the four Dublin local authorities.	Members of the Board of Dublin Tourism are drawn from the tourism industry and the four local authorities in the Area.	<i>Limited relevance</i>
7 Regional Fisheries Boards	Responsibility for the monitoring of fisheries on a regional basis, licensing of fisheries and development of inland waterway based recreation services	None	None	<i>Statutory inputs to river basement management and county/city development policy and planning control/licensing.</i>
33 Vocational Education Committees	Established in the 1930s these committees are in effect subsidiary bodies to the relevant local authority. They are responsible for vocational training and education and increasingly most second level facilities. They are also becoming involved in the direct management of new primary schools in what are termed "developing areas" i.e. areas identified by the planning authority as areas for prioritisation for state infrastructure provision due to their development potential.	Membership of the Committees is determined by the local authorities and nominees of the Minister and the education sector in each area. Staff are a part of the local authority pool.	Part financed by local authorities.	<i>Critical development role in local education provision now recognised through Department of Education/Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Guidelines on Planning for School provision. Members of the County/City Development Board.</i>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Functions/ Responsibility</b>	<b>Local Institutional Role</b>	<b>Relationship to local democratic responsibility</b>	<b>Local Government Policy Impact</b>
35 City/ County Enterprise Boards	Responsible for supporting local enterprise development	Key local enterprise development role and interface with Enterprise Ireland in the translation of national enterprise policy. Staff are a part of the local authority pool.	Membership of Boards drawn from the relevant local authority, the State development agencies and local business. Part financed by the local authorities.	<i>Limited policy relevance due to the local authority-state agency policy interface. Members of the County/City Development Board.</i>
54 Integrated LEADER and Partnership Companies	Responsible for supporting local and area based development	Key to the implementation of national rural and community regeneration policy	Membership of Boards drawn from the relevant local authority, the State development agencies and local business/community interests. Part financed by the local authorities.	<i>Members of the County Development Board and limited statutory policy input.</i>
25 RAPID Areas	<i>Responsible for targeted investment of state resources for regeneration through the local authorities.</i>	<i>Key to the implementation of national regeneration policy. Staff are a part of the local authority pool.</i>	<i>Membership of Implementation Task Forces is drawn from local authority and local community interests. Part financed by the Local Authorities.</i>	<i>Limited policy relevance.</i>

These bodies report to what is a new shared institutional arena established, by the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the aftermath of the Good Friday and Saint Andrew's Agreements.

In the local institutional context there is a further range of agencies. This is in addition to the local government system. These agencies have been established to address a particular local implementation need on the part, generally, of a specific parent department. These are set out above in Table 45.

### **5.3 Moves towards reform of the Irish local-centre policy relationship**

Peadar Kirby, writing in O'Broin and Waters (2007), suggests that Irish academic perspective is missing on the role of local government. He puts forward that, in the absence of such analytical and independent review

*...the tendency has been not so much to reform local government in any thorough and innovative way but, rather, to establish new institutions to try to plug the gaps in what is a patently dysfunctional system so as to overcome the obstacles to effective governance that it presents."*

(2007, p13)

In other words, given the lack of understanding of the dynamics of local government in Ireland, it has been easier in the past to address local institutional gaps through government departments applying isolated institutional re-structuring at the local level, without regard for the existing system of local government. It is for this reason that there would seem (as evident from the above tables) to be a congested institutional environment at the local level. Very few independent perspectives, as is evident from the document review, are providing any real analysis to this context. This is particularly the case where seeking to understand the nature of the local-centre policy relationship.

Most local government reforms to date have been associated with the day-to-day functioning of the system and have arisen as various governments adopted new policies or legislation. The system has had to adapt to address significant, ad hoc reforms. These have included the appointment of professional full time managers, the changes to the planning environment and legislation, the loss of responsibility for most health services and changes to the financial regime, particularly in the 1970s (See Annex D). However, as a system, the extent of reform relative to other EU member states has not been radical. There is still in place the same basic organisational structure bequeathed to Ireland by the UK authorities in 1898. Nonetheless various attempts to reform structures were undertaken, particularly in the 1970s. The most significant efforts at reform, however, have arisen since 1985, culminating in the proposals set out in *Better Local Government, A Programme for Change (1996)*, the *Action Plan for a New Millennium (1998)* and the *Report of the Task Force on Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (2000)* (see below). The significance of these reforms is that each has sought to create a more dynamic environment in which local-centre policy dialogue could take place. As such, they provide the researcher with the opportunity to appraise efforts to reform within the characteristics of the models developed within the literature review.

### *5.3.1 The Barrington Report-Local Government Reform-Report of the Expert Advisory Committee 1991*

Present reforms find their origins in the establishment of an expert group in 1990 under the Chairmanship of Tom Barrington, the late Director General of the Institute of Public Administration. The key problems identified in the Report, with the system, after almost seventy years of independence, included among

others: a poor level of integration of public services at local / regional level; a narrow range of functions being delivered by local government; the lack of a structured regional level and a poorly developed municipal level; poor linkage between the local authorities and non-government organizations and a central government policy role which was poorly linked with meeting local expectations. The Report called for a series of actions to address these problems, many of which have taken on board to some extent by the reforms of the past 15 years. These include the following in Table 46.

**Table 46: Recommendations of the Barrington Report**

Reform Recommendation	Application to Model Characteristic	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Devolution of powers and responsibilities in education, community care, social welfare, transport, local development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service quality and citizen based service provision</li> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</li> <li>Resourcing and appraisal</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-Local Authorities as Planning Authorities may now develop schools and third level facilities, contribute to transport provision, community facilities, local and rural development initiatives under the Planning and Development Act, 2000. As Road Authorities they may supply and support transport initiatives. Under the Local Government Act, 2001 the Authorities have specific responsibilities for social inclusion, leisure and amenity provision, direct provision of training and other supports addressing social disadvantage.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of 8 regional authorities with direct elections to co-ordinate functions and public services generally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation of structure/institution</li> <li>Spatial/Territorial Perspective</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-8 Regional Authorities, of representatives drawn from the elected councils in each of eight regions are in place.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of 151 District Councils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation of structure/institution</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-Area Committees, under the Local Government Act, 2001 and which operate within the County Council structures are in place across the Country. These committees in some respects address the services which were to be delivered by the District Council structure in Barrington.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change to the existing County Council / County Borough status as the primary unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service quality and citizen based service provision</li> <li>Organisation of structure/institution</li> </ul>	<p><i>In place</i>-The Report on Public Sector Expenditure 2009 has however recommended the withdrawal of this principle.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform of the public authorities</li> </ul>		<p><i>Partially in place</i>-The reforms in this instance have largely been limited to their becoming members of the Development Boards. In law their local business plans must be consistent with the County Development Strategy in each City/County but this provision under Section 129 of the Local Government Act, 2001 remains untested in Administrative Law.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reforms to the municipal level of government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-Engineering services have been centralised at County level, while decentralisation of housing services to each urban council formerly a district/borough council is in place. Institutional reforms concerning boundaries and names of councils also now in place.</p>

Reform Recommendation	Application to Model Characteristic	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximum 10 year appointment for Managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-All managers are appointed on a seven year contract basis. This may be extended by three years subject to the approval of the Councillors. Alternatively a sitting manager may re-compete for a further seven year term subject to restrictions on age grounds.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 year terms of office for Chairmen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partially in place</i>-The Local Government Act, 2001 provided for directly elected full term mayors. This was subsequently amended so that Mayors may be appointed on a one year term basis within the elected council. The forthcoming White Paper on Local Government proposes the implementation of a full term directly elected Mayor for the Dublin Region and a subsequent roll out to appropriate City Regions. Legislation enabling the election of a Dublin Region Mayor has been published and is expected to be passed before both Houses in Autumn 2010.</p>

Barrington identifies with, and pre-dates (by some measure) the thinking developed by Healey (1997), Rhodes (1999), Lejano (2006), and Lyons (2007) in regard to the need to move the local-centre policy environment towards one which could be characterised by both internal and external collaborative engagement. In addition, his thought process clearly had a focus for spatial application of policy delivery which would be set at a national strategic level but with sufficient scope for local variation. Furthermore and most critically, the Report, perhaps for the first time since the reforms which established local government in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, sought to create a new structure which had both horizontal and vertical relevance to national policy implementation. It also, unlike Ahem (2005) and Lejano (2006), recognised the relevance of diagonal integration with a focus on the need to reform the policy relationship across the national level in a manner that would be complementary to the proposed local reforms.

In addition, however, the period concerned was marked by the development of the National Partnership Framework. National initiatives which created local agencies on a pilot basis at the time, received a significant boost with their incorporation into the Local/Urban and Rural Development Programme of the Community Support Framework for Ireland in 1993/94. This provided significant resources covering the period 1994-1999 and subsequently in the National Development Plans including the current 2007-2013 Plan. These institutional changes at local level thus contradicted, in part and from a structural perspective, the recommendations in the Barrington Report and commenced the process of disaggregation of the local institutional environment.

One of the unintended consequences of a failure to apply fully the integration recommendations in Barrington, is that many local elected members and officials continue to perceive the local development agencies to be a snub to the local government system. Section 76 of the 1963 Planning Act had initially allocated this role to local government. In their view, (i.e. local officials and councillors) given successive government policy, local government, did not have adequate resources to take on an active role in local development and with the establishment of the new development structures were, in their eyes, increasingly less likely to. Equally, however, it was generally held at the time that the local government system, given the process of change associated with the move towards facilitative governance, failed to adjust to socio-economic change sufficiently quickly. This resulted in the need, on the part of the relevant national departments, to establish these local agencies. This was an over riding concern at the time within central government circles.

Nonetheless the Barrington Report recommendations can be characterised within the framework of the models developed in the document review as seeking to move the policy relationship towards a co-governance environment (See Table 46 below). The overall objective was to restructure local government and to establish greater linkage, on a hierarchical basis between a local government system, a new regional system and a refocused central system. Policy generation would take effect through joint development rather than on a purely national basis as applied at the time. In addition, the Report recognised the significance of greater citizen engagement and the need for collaborative mechanisms in which active participation might be facilitated.

### *5.3.2 Devolution Commission*

The Barrington Report, in seeking to address the broader role which a local government system should undertake, recommended the establishment of a devolution commission. This recommendation was among the most significant of the Barrington Report in that it directly linked the policy-making environment at the national level with that at local government level. In doing so it underpinned the substantive role which local government should have within a dynamic policy environment. There was however an unwillingness of the national policy-making arena at the time to engage in direct policy development with the local government system. It is no surprise therefore that this particular recommendation was not acted upon, until July 1995, following external advice to the incoming Taoiseach. The then new government agreed, at the behest of the Taoiseach, to establish the Devolution Commission. The direction provided by the Taoiseach marked a further shift in approach by government in that it becomes the first example of a local government policy lead taken by a department other than the predecessor of the current Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Two Reports were issued by the Commission, the findings of which may be broadly summarised as follows:

**Table 47: Devolution Commission Recommendations and Model Application**

Devolution Commission Brief	Recommendations	Application to Model Characteristic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To consider a process of devolving significant functions to local government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A devolution programme to provide a wider role for local government in order that they become multi-purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service quality and Citizen based service provision</li> <li>Organisation of structure/institution</li> <li>Spatial/Territorial Perspective</li> <li>Resourcing and appraisal</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To create mechanisms to involve the authorities in policy and administration which was meaningful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New four level policy system based on, regional, county and sub-county</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</li> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To create a focus for the authorities in local development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each level should prepare an integrated multi-purpose development plan to coincide with national and EU development planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</li> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</li> <li>Spatial/Territorial Perspective</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have local government act as co-ordinators for local development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With effect from 1.1.2000 the creation of an integrated local government/local development system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spatial/Territorial Perspective</li> <li>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</li> </ul>

The Commission's recommendations were subsequently responded to with the publication, in December 1996, of the Department of the Environment's own reform proposals-*Better Local Government-A Programme for Change* (prepared within the Department without the prior knowledge of the members of the Commission). The recommendations in the Devolution Commission Report were significant in that they continued with the Barrington focus on services designed within a policy environment which would be integrated on a hierarchical and diagonal basis. Collaborative planning was to be a hallmark of the new role for local government while other, nationally led, policy actions were to be translated into local action through a proposed integrated multi-purpose development plan. Such plans would be grounded within a county/city spatial/territorial perspective, be citizen centred and inter- temporal. Local government services were to be consistent with a national service standard and the re-organisation of public services was to be grounded on a factual evaluation of the relevant policy environment. These efforts to develop a national set of standards, in turn, would be underpinned by both ex-ante and ex-post policy appraisal. Such thinking therefore reflected, in light of the Barrington influences, an iterative/co-governance model.

### *5.3.3 Better Local Government-A Programme for Change*

The Government, while accepting the Devolution Commission Reports, adopted the Department of the Environment led initiative to regain control of the reform process. The Department produced what was seen at the time as a far reaching policy document which covered not just local government and local development reform, but indeed general public service reform. The document was to become a central part of the general process of public management

reform i.e. the Strategic Management Initiative, commenced by the then outgoing government and continued by the in-coming government in 1997. This is important as for the first time local government reform in the form of *Better Local Government - A Programme for Change* is seen as a part of wider public management reforms which were intended to be wider and deeper and not just focused on local government. The thinking set out by the Department included concepts such as:

- National standards for the services that matter most to people i.e. front-line services, to ensure that citizens have the right to high quality services wherever they live, albeit that with the exception of environmental services no national standards would per se be determined at national level;
- Devolution and delegation of decision-making to the front line i.e. area offices, giving local staff responsibility and accountability and the opportunity to design services around the needs of local people;
- Flexibility for local public organisations and staff to meet the aspirations of users i.e. through expanded area committees which would include the community and rural development sector as well as elected members;
- More choice for service users through one stop shops. As such the reforms envisaged were to include a whole of government perspective as well as simply focusing on local government in its own right. The initiatives envisaged were set out under five strategic objectives as set out in Table 48 below:

**Table 48: Strategic Objectives of Better Local Government**

Strategic Objective	Application to Model Characteristic	Strategic Objective	Application to Model Characteristic
<p><b>Better Customer Service:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on delivery of quality services;</li> <li>• Development of performance indicators;</li> <li>• Creation of one-stop-shops;</li> <li>• Development of quality initiatives;</li> <li>• Public rights to information to be developed;</li> <li>• Public right to attend meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service quality and Citizen based service provision.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Developing local democracy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of constitutional recognition for local government;</li> <li>• Signing of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;</li> <li>• Creation of an enhanced policy role for Councillors;</li> <li>• Integration of local development with local government;</li> <li>• Creation of Strategic Policy Committees;</li> <li>• Creation of Corporate Policy Groups;</li> <li>• Establishment of Area Committees to oversee service delivery;</li> <li>• Co-ordination of local development and its agencies;</li> <li>• Creation of Community and Enterprise groups to facilitate the co-ordination process;</li> <li>• Attendance of State agency personnel at meetings of local authorities to advise on policy;</li> <li>• Liaison between the Garda and local authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders;</li> <li>• Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders;</li> <li>• Organisation of structure/Institution;</li> <li>• Spatial/Territorial Perspective.</li> </ul>

Strategic Objective	Application to Model Characteristic	Strategic Objective	Application to Model Characteristic
<p><b>Financing Local Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new system of funding to be introduced;</li> <li>• Motor tax to become the dedicated local authority tax;</li> <li>• Discontinuation of the rate support group;</li> <li>• Discontinuation of domestic water/sewerage charges;</li> <li>• Value of money auditing to be introduced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resourcing and appraisal</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personnel Development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolution of personnel management to the local authorities;</li> <li>• Creation of directors of service to co-ordinate the SPCs;</li> <li>• The creation of a Local Government Management Services Board;</li> <li>• Equal opportunities for women;</li> <li>• Abolition of officers/employee distinctions;</li> <li>• Reduction of clerical/administrative grades;</li> <li>• Unified staffing structures in urban/rural authorities;</li> <li>• Creation of code of practice on the employment of persons with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders;</li> <li>• Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders;</li> <li>• Organisation of structure/Institution;</li> <li>• Spatial/Territorial Perspective.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Restructuring the System</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Regional Authorities were to be given powers to oversee the implementation of Sustainable Development;</li> <li>• The development of land-use guidelines by the Regional Authorities;</li> <li>• The consolidation of local government law.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation of structure/Institution;</li> <li>• Spatial/Territorial Perspective.</li> </ul>		

The Government which was elected in 1997 broadly, and unusually, accepted the above principles and measures. It set out its views in "*An Action Programme for the Millennium*". A key feature of the Action Programme was the recognition of the validity of both the elective and participatory processes of local governance in the State. This was very significant. The Action Programme sought to recreate the role of the elected member, a role which it was generally agreed had been restricted in large measure by the national partnership process discussed earlier. In addition, the role of participation was of importance. There was recognition by national government that there was to be a continuing and developing role for those that might not have been seen as part of either the local or national policy-making processes.

In light of the recommendations in both Barrington and the Devolution Commission Reports, the need to have external representatives as well as elected representatives engaged in the local policy process became a central feature of the structural reforms. The guidelines for the establishment of the collaborative policy structures, drawn up by representatives of central government, local government and local development/community and the national social partners, provided that each elected council was to remain the primary unit of local democracy and to retain final local policy-making responsibility. It was to do so however within a national policy framework where there would be a need to concentrate on the development of a strategic focus for the functions of the authorities and, more importantly, the creation of a process of partnership which would facilitate the implementation of strategic planning at local level. This was seen as a big issue in that the systems of governance in Ireland did reflect a strong bias towards sectoral expertise which,

while remaining valid, nonetheless needed to be placed in the context of the inter-dependency and multi-dimensional nature of the Irish public management environment. The Action Plan further underpinned the thinking in the earlier reform proposals of *Barrington* and *Better Local Government*. This thinking reflecting, for the first time in the history of the State, a shared cross-party approach to local government reform subsequently became embedded into the Strategic Management Initiative at national level through the work of the *Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development*.

The Task Force Report recognised the dysfunctionality associated with multi-sectoral governance in a sectoral driven regime of public management. It took, as a starting point, the principles set out in the Devolution Commission reports and the Millennium Action Programme as well as the new National Partnership Framework which placed local government reform within a national institutional context for the first time (This had been one of the direct outcomes from the Action Programme).

In addressing the issue of integration between local government and local development the Task Force respected the traditional means of policy delivery, i.e. national direction to local implementation. Equally it recognised the need to reform the means through which policy at the national level was made. A policy process commenced which began, for the first time, with bringing local government management (but not the elected members) into the drafting of national policy. Given the shift in the balance of relations between the traditional public management process and the newer facilitative forms of governance at local level i.e. local partnerships/rural and community development as well as

the initial progress on local government reform, the Task Force established a further series of underlying principles for integrated policy development which include:

- Community development should be based upon a process of collaborative planning underpinned by the local government system;
- Social inclusion based on targeted local development needed to be embedded into the local government system;
- Partnership / participation based on the development of governance having real inclusion in decision making capability within the local policy process which would parallel similar arrangements then applying at the national level;
- Democratic legitimacy based upon an integrated framework of elective and participative forms of governance.

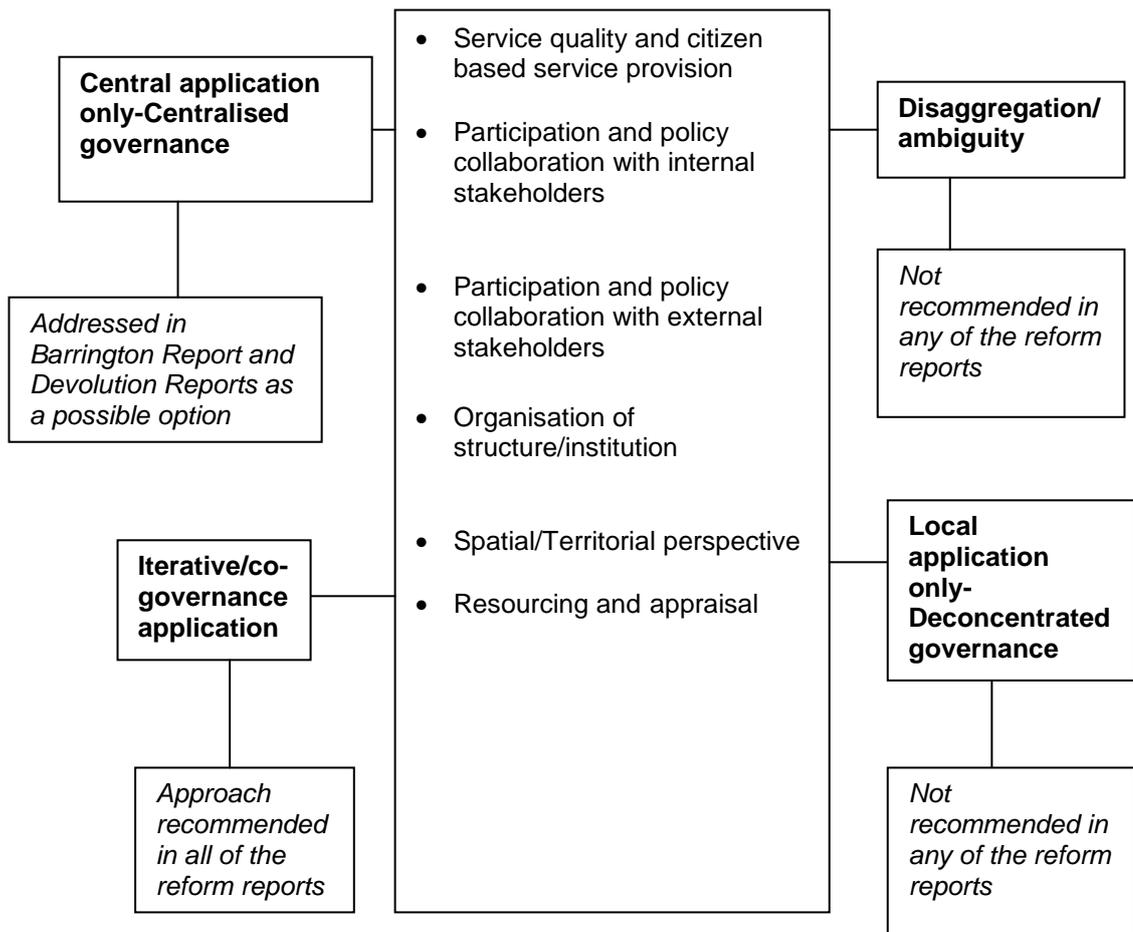
The outcome of such thinking resulted in a call for the adoption of an integrated socio-economic strategy at local level which would directly feed into the national policy process. The thinking in this instance respected a process in which all local actors in socio-economic development should be part of a process of integration at local level. This participation would be underpinned by greater levels of diagnosis of the local socio-economic environment by local government and the passing of this diagnosis thereafter up to the national level. The definition of a process of sustainable development was to rest at local level but was expected to integrate with regional and national perspectives on sustainable development and spatial perspective.

Such thinking ultimately informed, among others, the revised institutional arrangements which would integrate local spatial planning with that envisaged

in the National Spatial Strategy. Thus the county/city development board process was established with the express purpose of creating a collaborative planning model for integrated socio-economic development leading to sustainable development at local level but also feeding directly up into the national policy level.

The overall reform process therefore could be summed up as seeking to deliver a local-centre policy process that would be collaborative in nature, based on territorial perspective and integrated within the national policy arena. When considered within the four models developed within the document review, a clear understanding can be established that the process was one which would move towards a co-governance model but equally, could be placed within a centralised policy direction model. In that context the reform process commenced with Barrington and continued through to the Report of the Task Force on the integration of local government and local development could be summarised as follows within the modelling framework as set out in chapter three previously (and for ease of reference is reproduced below as Figure 13). A more detailed perspective on individual aspects of the models as they are addressed in the reform proposals is also set out in Table 49 below. The key point here is that the reform proposals clearly reflect a view that the post-modern policy environment for local-centre policy development was gradually shifting to one which is markedly different from that which prevailed in the modern policy era and that even with partial implementation of those reforms the local-centre policy interface was changing from an overly centralised model towards one where the nature of the relationships was far most subtle.

**Figure 13: Characterisations of centre local policy interaction**



This thinking manifests itself in the reform recommendations as set out in *Annex E*. Table 49 thus demonstrates the recognition of the importance of having greater policy integration between the local and centre systems of government and reflects a remarkable degree of foresight particularly on the part of those involved in drafting the Barrington Report.

**Table 49: Overview of Local Government Reform Process in Ireland**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Centralised policy direction</b>	<b>Deconcentrated/ autonomous</b>	<b>Iterative/ co-governance</b>	<b>Disaggregation/ Ambiguity</b>
<b>Service quality and citizen based service provision</b>	Development of national quality standards recommended in Barrington, Devolution Commission and Better Local Government.	None of the Reform Reports recommended creation of an autonomous system.	Creation of policy space for dialogue with appropriate service quality determinants set at national level but subject to local interpretation recommended in Barrington and Devolution Reports.	None of the Reform Reports recommended an approach which would create disaggregated service parameters.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</b>	A national direction on collaboration was a feature of both Better Local Government and the Task Force on Integration.		The Barrington Report, Devolution Commission and Better Local Government recommended the development of agreed corporate planning processes and the embedding of internal stakeholder management.	
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</b>	A national direction on collaboration was a feature of both Better Local Government and the Task Force on Integration.		The Barrington Report, Devolution Commission and Better Local Government recommended the development of agreed corporate planning processes and the embedding of external stakeholder management.	
<b>Organisation of structure/ organisation</b>			A four level structure was recommended in the Barrington Report and underpinned as an approach to re-structuring in the subsequent reports.	
<b>Spatial/Territorial perspective</b>	A partial focus on sectors and functions is a feature of the Devolution Commission and Better Local Government.		The Barrington Report, the Devolution Commission and the Task Force recommendations were focused on integration through shared spatial perspective.	
<b>Resourcing and appraisal</b>	All Reports acknowledged the need for national direction on resources with limited autonomy in the allocation of resources within nationally determined outlines.		Both the Barrington Report and the Devolution Commission recommended multi-annual budgeting based on protocols for local service delivery.	

#### **5.4 The current role of local government**

The cumulative impact of the reform process is that local government has now become the central focus for local socio-economic development. This has been largely agreed at the national level through the national partnership process. The adoption of the life cycle approach to public service delivery in the National Partnership Process under *Towards 2016* (see Annex F), seems to require the local government system to implement its various roles within a framework which places performance and delivery of improved public services at the centre of the national partnership process. It must do so at a time when it increasingly is being required to apply an increasingly robust regulatory framework and at the same time it is being encouraged to continue the process of internal corporate reform alongside newly developed external participative processes in order to sustain an accountable and effective public service. Given all these factors the model which might be most appropriate to the ideal Irish context could be that of iterative/co-governance.

However, in its role as direct service provider the local government system supplies, as acknowledged earlier, a wide range of services. Indirect service provision also arises in areas where the local authority has contracted out services such as waste collection. The actual provision of such services is addressed in policy terms by the elected members but responsibility for delivery rests within the professional/administrative/management system.

Furthermore, local government plays the role of a local legislator and regulator where it sets standards, issues licences, directs and controls development. It does so through local regulation in the form of bye-laws or through statutory

policy documents such as the County Development Plan. The adoption of these instruments rests largely with the elected members. Increasingly, however, where elected members fail to adopt a policy the Manager may do so<sup>22</sup>. In other areas the Minister may issue statutory guidance or actively intervene in a policy arena such as planning and development where the elected members have adopted a policy that is inconsistent with a national policy position. Such intervention to date has largely been limited to sporadic efforts to restrain councillors over provision for land zoning in a limited number of development plans processes. The policy actions associated with both direct and indirect provision, local regulation and legislation occur largely in the absence of specific policy expectations being delineated by the national level. Therefore the ideal model or at least what is being sought through the reform processes might not so easily be defined with an iterative/co-governance model. Increasingly, local government is providing the platform for public consultation on policy development required of other organisations. This relatively recent function is largely derived from the establishment of community and voluntary fora in each local authority area as a part of the CDB process. Furthermore the local authorities, increasingly through the CDBs, are playing the role of facilitating local inputs to national policy issues in areas such as spatial planning and most notably, social inclusion.

In addition, one of the key new roles of local government (announced by the Government in 2007) is that of facilitator for economic development in their respective areas. The widening and expansion of roles builds on the political

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<sup>22</sup> Most notably in regard to regional waste management strategies.

significance that comes with being the only democratically based structure outside of the Oireachtas and the Presidency. This includes playing a representational role on local and regional development bodies, the CDBs, various national bodies and others. More specific, however, is the role played, on a daily basis, that brings together various local actors to deliver under the umbrella of local government, local service needs and facilities outside the direct remit of local government. In their own right the authorities allocate a greater than average proportion of their financial resources, when compared to other local government systems, towards economic actions, as suggested in Table 50 below. They do so in the virtual absence of any form of national objective or guidance. Finally local government, alongside its facilitative role, is expected to play the key role of being a local advocate for economic, social and cultural cohesion.

**Table 50: Expenditure Allocations**

Country	Education	Social Protection	General Services	Health	Economic Affairs	Other
Austria	16.6	20.2	16.7	17.4	14.3	14.7
Belgium	19.8	16.3	23.5	2.5	9.9	27.9
Denmark	12.8	51.2	5.6	20.9	4.7	4.8
Finland	19.9	23.7	13.8	28.7	6.1	7.9
Germany	16.2	33.3	14.6	1.9	11.4	22.7
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>16.9<sup>23</sup></b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>33.4</b>
Netherlands	27.6	14.6	14.6	1.7	17.2	24.2
Sweden	21.6	26.8	11.3	26.9	5.6	7.8
United Kingdom	32.3	28.4	5.6	0.0	8.9	24.8

Source: % Sub-Country Expenditure Spread 2006-Dexia/CEMR January 2009

Given the above range of responsibilities, and given the cross departmental policy effect, local government now has a combination of roles to play for a considerable number of the life cycle actions (i.e. some 118 out of a total of 205) set out in *Towards 2016* (See Annexes E and F). Most notably in this regard is the role as the local planning authority. Also of importance is the role of the authorities (acknowledged in the 2008 OECD Review) as the supporting institutional arrangement for the CDB, Joint Policing Committee, the Social Inclusion Measures Group, the Childcare Committee and the Community and Voluntary Forum. Local authorities therefore have both internal and external challenges in their multi-dimensional roles. Nonetheless, as acknowledged earlier they are not alone in having policy responsibilities. Taking a specific look at those agencies charged with strategic planning as a result of the objectives of *Towards 2016*, the issue of who is responsible might be somewhat clearer at local, rather than at regional and national level. Even at local level there is considerable cross-over (See Table 51 overleaf for the extent to which *Towards 2016* actions can cross over) and thus the potential for confusion exists in the

<sup>23</sup> The spend of the VEC system, as a subsidiary committee of the Irish local authorities has been included in the above figures.

absence of a direction at national level. The current regulatory basis for strategic planning is set however, not within a national constitutional provision but rather, within a statutory and regulatory framework largely based on an administrative process embedded within local government legislation (i.e. the Local Government Act, 2001 and the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2008). It is the case therefore that the local authorities and other local agencies are determining local implementation of much national policy as delineated in the national partnership process. There is some limited overview and guidance provided by the regional authorities, and a relatively restricted national direction being given through a national spatial strategy and administrative/financial controls such as the Local Government Auditor. This suggests a model that is neither centralized nor iterative/co-governance.

This is an issue that will be considered in detail later in the case study as it counters the common view that it is the centre which determines what the local will do. The idea therefore that public management in Ireland and the planning/policy processes associated with it could be more indicative of a disaggregated model of public administration presents as an argument worth further consideration. If this were the case what then of the need to move towards an iterative/co-governance model as suggested in the reform process? This question will be examined in the following chapters.

**Table 51: Strategic Spatial Policy Responsibility**

Policy Sector	CDB	County/ City Council	Regional Authority	Regional Assembly	Regional Central Dept	National Dept	National Agency
Labour Force Management	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Household Formation	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Housing Demand	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Economic Development	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Labour Supply	*		*	*	*	*	*
Employment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Foreign Investment	*		*	*		*	*
Internationally traded Services	*			*		*	*
Tourism	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Natural Resources	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Urban Infrastructure	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Development restraint	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Rural Structures	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Enterprise	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Resource Potential	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Quality of Life Issues	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Social Infrastructure	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Retail Development	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Access to education	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Training	*		*	*	*	*	*
Transportation	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
ICT Infrastructure	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Energy Infrastructure needs	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Coastal management	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Intensification of rural land uses	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Environment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Natural Heritage	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Cultural Heritage	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

#### *5.4.1 Regulatory and institutional reform*

There has been, in a complementary process to the structural reform processes outlined above, a considerable focus on the issue of regulatory reform in Ireland and elsewhere as an on-going feature of public service reform. The focus was on the need to lessen the restricting nature of regulation by government to allow

for greater economic activity, in particular. The OECD for example suggested, in 2001, that in Ireland the public service had tended to be risk adverse and so had traditionally acted as a block to economic progression until relatively recent years. It had *“a tendency to follow rather than lead”* (OECD, 2001 p5). The OECD went on to suggest that the fragmented nature of local government could be seen as one which *“impedes the delivery of high quality public services.”* It put this into the context of the local-centre relationship and acknowledged that:

*...the effectiveness of existing institutions is tied to the relationships between the three executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of the state (‘horizontal coherence’) and the relationships between central and local levels of government (‘vertical coherence’).*  
(2001, p136)

Essentially what the OECD recognised was that there was and remains a need for clear policy perspectives to be applied through an administrative process. This process should be underpinned by a concrete political framework at each level of government in the State. This would be a feature of a system which could be fragmented in organisation. If adequately resourced, inter-linked and transparent, such a system could bring the necessary flexibility to addressing issues such as sustainable development, globalisation and the ever increasing expectations of a better educated population.

Coherent institutional reform, underpinned by a complementary reform of the regulatory framework and applied through an integrated system of public management remains a central challenge to public service reform generally in the OECD. This thinking is borne out in the 2008 OECD review of the Irish public service but is also a feature of internal consideration within the institutional framework in Ireland. Policy development will thus be further pressured by the need to put in place disaggregated service responses that arise when an ad hoc service demand is created by service users rather than by

citizens with a shared strategic view. This in turn has restricted the arguments about public service reform at the local level in Ireland and thus in some respects underpins the continued limited analysis applied to the local-centre relationship in the State.

Such an outlook is not simply the reflection of a learned process but is a recognition that Ireland is now an embedded part of a globalised economy. The capacity, therefore, of both local and central government to respond to international influences in the Irish socio-economic environment requires levels of coherence and coordination not previously associated with the local-centre relationship. Such influences demand a level of coordination which will allow for a flexible approach to international change. There is also a need to meet local and national expectations across horizontal and vertical public service interfaces. More critically the diagonal relationships that, as suggested in Figure 14 below, are a normal feature of modern governance must be factored into the organisation of the policy process. Clearly such thinking reflects a need to establish clarity in the policy process at both a local and national level. There is a link established between the external policy environment and the internal corporate process. This link, in turn, is associated with the organisation of the public service across its various layers. There is, as a result, a need to put in place processes across both the political and administrative machinery of government. This must be undertaken in a manner which is flexible enough to address the instability of the international environment.

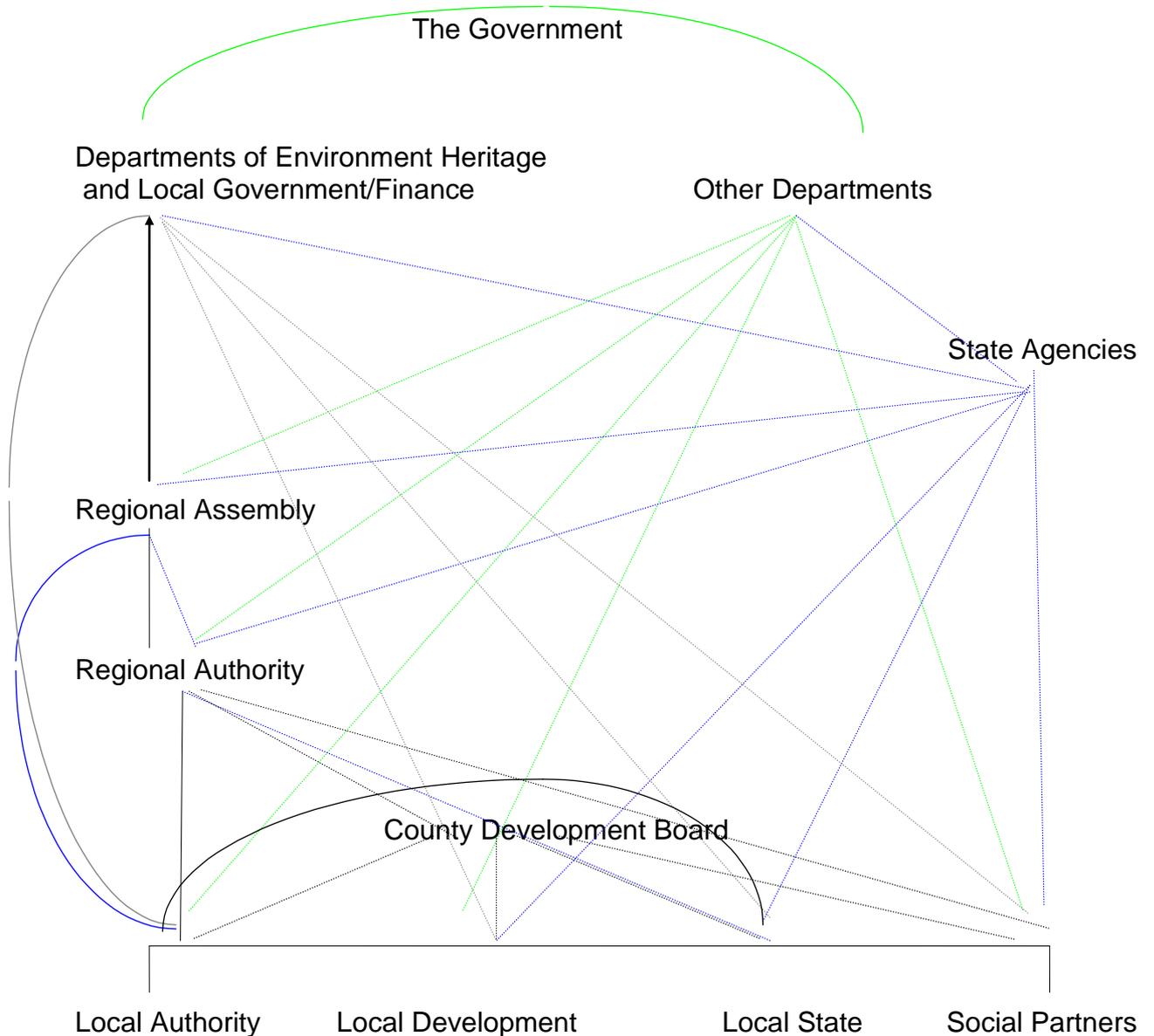
Thus there is a need for a strategic planning process which allows the governance of the local and the national to adjust to the competitiveness of the international market place. But the actual process of engagement seems dispersed. This set of conditions underpin the argument for greater central control given that ultimately, under the Constitution, local government is subject to the law as defined by the Houses of the Oireachtas. More fundamentally, however, is the interpretation of that law on a daily basis by the various government departments and the political process which oversees them. The local institutional context in Ireland reflects, at one level, a confusing degree of organisation while, at another, a relatively decentralised (if somewhat silo-like) approach to service delivery.

In part this is as a result of a hiving off of direct service responsibilities such as harbour provision, local enterprise development and vocational/post primary education from both local and national government into arms-length agencies. In other instances it reflects a growth in the voice of sectors in the national partnership process such as those addressing social inclusion and community, rural and local development. This enhanced role for such representatives has resulted in a nationally driven policy response to an identified local need and sets of expectations developed outside of a strategic context that is set by the local authority.

What is clearly an issue in terms of understanding the local-centre government policy process in Ireland, is the extent to which those charged with strategic and operational delivery within the above framework can interface with each other and with the political process. It also poses the challenge of understanding just

where a national policy perspective applies and how this is embedded into the local policy process across bodies such as local authorities. It is important to note that the current institutional setting is not wholly hierarchical as is commonly argued, but is, in light of the above discussions on reform, in fact a more confusing “spider's web” of overlapping jurisdictional settings as suggested in the above Table 51 and in Figure 14 below. Virtually every part of the public service has some role to play in local service provision and therefore some impact on the central-local relationship, the primary focus for the examination here. It is self evident, nonetheless, from the Figure 14 below, that the Irish public management process is one marked by considerable horizontal and diagonal interface as much as the traditional view of it being hierarchical and vertical in its on-going implementation of national policy. Clearly the need to work through the challenges of service planning and policy development is both difficult and fundamentally significant if a true understanding of the current relationship is to be understood.

Figure 14: Current Institutional Framework for local government



#### 5.4.2 The Green Paper on Local Government 2008

The Green Paper on Local Government sets out the next stage in the evolution of the local-centre policy relationship. It sees the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century being addressed through initiatives, the Paper argues, that in some ways reflect the thinking (if not directly admitted) of the UK Lyons Inquiry as well as the NESF and the OECD. These allow for characterisation of the Green Paper within the models set out in the document review as follows in Table 52 below.

The Green Paper reinforces the arguments for a co-governance model as demonstrated in Table 52 underpinning the thinking of earlier reform initiatives. A key aspect to the Green Paper, however, is that it recognises, on the part of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the need for the creation of an environment of trust between the local and the national governance processes, a hallmark of Scandinavian governance. This lack of trust (which existed between the local authority system and state departments due to historical circumstance set out in Annex C) is one of the reasons why central departments sought to establish their own agencies rather than devolving functions to the local government system. The departments concerned simply did not trust the local authorities to deliver on the objectives of the departments given the potential conflict between local political and managerial objectives and those of the relevant departments. The disconnection in local service planning arose due to the existence of the institutional boundaries created as a result of the local authority boundaries across the State. This reinforced the thinking at the national level that often it is easier to create a regional or national body to deliver a new range of services.

The disconnection at the local level has created a level of mistrust between those responsible for local service provision and the democratic framework which is ultimately responsible for it. This, the Paper suggests, might be having the effect of reducing the opportunity for participation in the local democratic process or indeed may be one of the reasons why an alternative participative model has been so successful in the past decade, again causing further levels of disaggregation.

**Table 52: The Green Paper on Local Government-Model Characterisation**

<b>Green Paper Strategic Reform Initiative</b>	<b>Centralised policy direction</b>	<b>Deconcentrated/ autonomous</b>	<b>Iterative/co-governance</b>	<b>Disaggregation/ Ambiguity</b>
<b>Maintaining a continued focus on Quality Customer Service</b>	No obligation to apply universality of standards so not applicable.	Ensuring greater connectivity between the local government system and the people at the local level reflecting the need for innovative policy development and implementation	Recognises need for a collaborative model of governance.	Service quality and Citizen based service provision but without specific standards applied.
<b>Creation of an appreciation among the local population but also within the central governance of the State, in regard to the role of local democracy and its institutions</b>			Participation and policy collaboration with internal/ external stakeholders.	
<b>Addressing and resolving social exclusion and creation of integrated communities-reflecting the increased diversity of the communities local government serves</b>			Participation and policy collaboration with internal/ external stakeholders.	
<b>Improving the nature and level of environmental management and addressing the challenge of climate change-reflecting both the national commitment to achieving sustainable levels of development and meeting the responsibility of doing so within the international environment now applying to the environment</b>			Recognises need for a collaborative model of governance to underpin sustainability and to agree applicable standards.	

Green Paper Strategic Reform Initiative	Centralised policy direction	Deconcentrated/ autonomous	Iterative/co-governance	Disaggregation/ Ambiguity
<p><b>Putting in place a proper balance between the delivery of a wider range of tasks and responsibilities within local government and the need to ensure as the OECD recommends, greater coherence, value for money and efficient and effective delivery of public services</b></p>	<p>Organisation of structure/ Organisation/ Process.</p>		<p>An application of the principle of subsidiarity or decision-making at the lowest and most appropriate level within the vertical and diagonal layers of governance at the local and national level.</p>	
<p><b>Continued population growth and balanced regional development-reflecting the going concern with place shaping and the maximisation of critical mass within the Irish urban framework</b></p>			<p>Spatial/Territorial perspective.</p>	
<p><b>Underpinning of democratic responsibility and accountability</b></p>			<p>Resourcing and appraisal should be central to the reform process.</p>	

One critical area which the Paper fails to address is that of agreeing on priorities between the centre and the local. While it does suggest the use of service agreements between the urban centres and the county it does not indicate whether this would be an option to explore in regard to the relationship between the local and the national. In this case, Ireland does seem to stand out from other systems in Europe, most notably in the case of the UK but also in the Scandinavian countries and Germany and France. In these countries the setting of national priorities within a local framework is the basis for national co-financing of local initiatives which are set against a national benchmarking of levels of service delivery. It also fails to reflect on the need, as the 2008 OECD Report recommends (while noting the progress in local government of having output indicators), for policy outcome evaluation and monitoring.

The vibrancy of a local government system might be in the extent to which a variety of perspectives are applied to the range and type of local services in meeting local need. However, the case should also be made that even in systems where there is real devolution and autonomy, this is against a set of minimum expectations on the part of the State or the region. Such is not the case in Ireland where even with a centralised, if disaggregated regime as acknowledged by the OECD, such minimum standards are not set and therefore very dependent on a willingness on the part of the local political or managerial process to give the level of priority required in meeting national policy expectations.

The Green Paper recognises the role of the development boards. It recommends a revised role for the boards which also suggests that the local

government system has the potential to free up central government to perform tasks of strategic and national importance. The development boards are expected to actively foster the greater understanding among all public bodies in the locality and the creation of the connections which did not exist in the past. The OECD Report (2008, p268) complements this thinking where it recommends:

*...the need to explore the use of networks...to provide a more coherent integrated approach to cross-cutting priorities.*

It instances the work of the boards and the Office of the Minister for Children in this regard.

Interestingly, in a recommendation that in some way would parallel that of the Prefect in Denmark, the Green Paper suggests the appointment of a legal advisor for each local authority. The role of this advisor would be, as in Denmark, to provide the necessary legal guidance on matters pertaining to the statutory role of the local authority, thus providing a counter to the current role of the manager. The Paper suggests that this would have the effect of removal of managerial default decision- making powers in the case of policy decisions. This is a feature of the increased devolving of powers to the management system in the absence of a willingness of the local democratic process to accept responsibility for decision making in particularly controversial policy arenas in recent years. However such an approach might simply cause a further deepening of current levels of disaggregation by embedding parallel disaggregation within the immediate policy processes of the local authorities.

## **5.5 Challenges confronting current local-centre processes as a result of the reform processes**

A range of challenges remain fundamental if a clearly integrated public policy process is to be established at the local level in Ireland. Among such challenges are three aspects of the institutional context which continue, as suggested in the 2008 Green Paper, to act as blockages to joined up governance in the State.

- Community, local and rural development, a critical feature of the local government facilitating role, does not necessarily follow the neatly mapped out boundaries of the local authorities; Yet this is seen from an iterative/co-governance perspective, as the Barrington and later reform efforts recommended, where the future for local government will rest;
- Current institutional structures for local/regional government are mainly based upon such boundaries and are seen as critical to underpinning the identity associated with such structures;
- Integration of public policy has to try to address socially derived issues regardless of institutional or organisational boundaries but this is unlikely where policies increasingly are influenced by non-strategic concerns.

Considering the above aspects the system remains overly tied to pre-independence derivatives in institutional terms. These, in turn, remain based upon boundaries (spatial and sectoral) that in the absence of clearer direction from central government have become barriers to meeting the service needs of some aspects of public expectation. Furthermore, there is a perception among local government management and elected members of a steady but substantive erosion of the role of local government. This is even against the backdrop of apparent reform and expansion of mandate, towards ad hoc,

regionally determined, policy fields in matters pertaining to the environment, transportation and other "traditional" areas of Irish local government. (i.e. Ad hoc as in the absence of a clear central perspective on the most ideal policy process.) As such, efforts for structural reform based on New Public Management are, it seems from the Green Paper, limited. Thus the need to examine a specific policy arena within the models developed in the document review in chapters two and three. Social Inclusion as indicated in Chapter Four provides the basis for such consideration.

## **5.6 Conclusions**

The multi-dimensional role of local government in Ireland is set out above along with the on-going reforms of the past decade. These reforms are set within the model fields of influence developed in the literature review. It is clear that each effort has sought to move the system towards a co-governance model where the state would coordinate the delivery of local services through a revitalised local government system. This effort particularly in regard to the issue of social inclusion has been a key motivation behind the re-structuring of local government, most notably with the establishment of the county/city development board structure. Nonetheless, as evident from the publication of the Green Paper the impact of such reforms remains open to question. There is the continuing perception that Ireland is a centralised state, even if this can now be challenged within the framework of the models developed thus far. In the next chapter the implementation of the reforms arising from the social inclusion process will be specifically examined as a critical case study which will underpin the thinking established in chapters two and three. In addition, it will provide the researcher with the capacity to address the validity of the models in the Irish

context. It is to this area that the consideration of the centre-local policy arena in this thesis will now turn.

## **Chapter Six: Social inclusion: From a national intent to local implementation**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In line with the on-going reform of public management in the State, considerable effort has been invested by government and the social partners to establish a comprehensive institutional framework for integrating poverty and social inclusion into the broad policy arena. This applies at both the national level and the local level, specifically including local government. While this thesis does not seek to examine the impact of the National Partnership Framework, it is of relevance that this particular framework has provided both the political and administrative impetus to address poverty and social inclusion generally within the strategic management initiatives of public sector reform at the national level. This is so as the national partnership process recognises the horizontal policy effects of social disadvantage i.e. social disadvantage covers a range of policy areas and is not simply limited to the need to provide income support.

### **6.2 Social inclusion-Application at local government level**

As indicated in Chapter 5, the ongoing reforms placed the local authority at the centre of the local policy arena. Particular effort was made to highlight the leadership role of the local authority in the socio-economic development of the local level. In this sphere, national policy placed the local government system at the heart of a local response to meeting the challenges of social inclusion. (See *Annexes D,E and F* for further detail) Successive programmes agreed at the national partnership level clearly demonstrate this process and seem to complement the institutional reform processes undertaken since Barrington.

The *National Action Plan on Social inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion)* and the revised *Programme for Government 2007-2012* mark a substantive endorsement of this new role.

*NAPinclusion* provides for a focused addressing of local issues through local government, having particular responsibility for housing and planning. This continued the original policy objectives of the original national policy on social inclusion first developed in the early 1990s. In that regard the Planning and Development Act, 2000 introduced the concept of “*proper planning and sustainable development*” into the policy-making process in local government in Ireland for the first time. The Act makes no effort to define what is meant by sustainable development. Such definition, in common with most local government legislation in Ireland, has been left to the local authorities, in their role as planning authorities in this instance, to determine alone. Nonetheless, the embedding of sustainability and through it, the concept of social inclusion, into the planning policy arena and the need for active community participation in the planning process has become a feature of the Irish planning system..

Furthermore, the implementation of the Local Government Act, 2001, which gives local authorities in Ireland their modern legislative basis, provides specifically for the role of local government in social inclusion. This is complemented by institutional arrangements which parallel, in many respects, the national partnership process , most notably the establishment of County/City Development Boards (CDB).

Section 2(5) of the 2001 Act states

*In this Act, except where the context otherwise requires, a reference to social inclusion or its promotion shall be read as including a reference to any policy, objective, measure or activity designed to counteract poverty or other social deprivation or to facilitate greater participation by marginalised groups in social cultural or economic life of the local community.*

More directly the Act introduces a focus on social inclusion through Section 66

(3) (a) which enables such authorities to

*take such measures, engage in such activities or do such things in accordance with law (including the incurring of expenditure) as it considers necessary or desirable to promote the interests of the local community.*

Furthermore, Section 66 (3) (b) provides that

*For the purposes of this section a measure, activity or thing is deemed to promote the interests of the local community if it promotes, directly or indirectly, social inclusion or the social, economic, environmental, recreational, cultural, community or general development of the administrative area (or any part of it) of the local authority concerned or of the local community (or any group consisting of members of it).*

The above sections in the 2001 Act have provided local government with the scope to move towards taking a central role in social inclusion at the local level, but as will be demonstrated in the Case Study, with the active engagement of central government departments and agencies. The provision is further underpinned with the establishment of the CDB structure under Section 129, while the establishment of strategic policy committees is provided for under Section 48.

Section 69 of the Act requires local authorities to have regard for social inclusion, when performing any of their functions. What this suggests is that even where there might not be an immediate or obvious social inclusion consideration, when planning for a service or in making a policy, a local

authority needs to consider social inclusion<sup>24</sup>. Under such conditions, the need for active incorporation of social inclusion in the central business planning of the local authority is critical to embedding into its service delivery and operational management, an ethos of inclusion and an understanding on the part of elected members and staff of the importance of social inclusion. These institutional reforms associated with social inclusion demonstrate that there is in fact a move towards an iterative/co-governance framework which could conceivably be rolled out into the wider local-centre policy arena.

### **6.3 Social inclusion-National policy direction for local government**

The national partnership structure, underpinned by on-going policy development at European level, therefore provides a focus, through the social partners, for ensuring that anti-poverty measures and social inclusion are presented within a clear policy framework at the national level. Therefore the researcher has an available policy arena which provides a basis for understanding the dynamics of other policy arena in local government. This is so in that there *seems* (see below) to be a well established level of dialogue, underpinned by an established institutional framework, which has been specifically put in place to allow for such dialogue within an overall national policy structure. The researcher can consider the policy interface in the knowledge that the policy engagement that does occur is set within the frameworks envisaged in the reform processes as suggested below in Table 53. The other policy area, from a local government perspective, that is most associated with the reform processes, i.e. the spatial

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<sup>24</sup>In law i.e. the Local Government Act, 2001, it is one of a limited number of obligations placed upon a Local Authority. Other statutory obligations arise in the context of legislation which is not a part of the basic law of local government such as the Planning and Development Act, 2000. Under the 2000 Act County and City Councils and a limited number of Town Councils are designated as Planning Authorities. The Supreme Court has previously determined that a Planning Authority in law is a separate legal entity from a Local Authority (Keane 1982).

planning framework, would present similar opportunities but to a more limited extent. This is so as reforms envisaged under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2008 do not directly address a local to national policy framework. This policy gap is due to be addressed under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2010 which was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas in July 2010. It is however much too early to determine local-centre effects of this new legislation. What is apparent however, even at this early stage, is that a significant institutional setting underpinned by specific national guidelines will be required if the new legislation is to have an impact. This, as will be demonstrated below, is one of the lessons of the approach taken in regard to social inclusion.

In effect, the following case study will examine the policy interface in social inclusion, having regard for the model in Table 53, and from this the researcher will consider the relevance of the findings to the wider policy process between local government and the national arena.

*NAPinclusion*, the national policy recognises that poverty and social inclusion are central to general policy formulation and implementation at both the national and local level. As a result, structures have been put in place to enable a high-level strategic understanding of the issues surrounding poverty and social inclusion. It also provides for the co-ordination of public services that is central to meeting the needs of communities exposed to social disadvantage.

The previous chapters would suggest that the local-centre policy process could be characterised within the models developed in chapters two and three (and set out in detail in *Annex G*). Chapter four acknowledges social inclusion as a

policy sphere appropriate for detailed analysis using the framework. This chapter, develops this thinking by beginning to apply the characteristics developed in chapters two and three, in regard to possible policy frameworks for social inclusion. The ideal type within each model could be determined as follows in Table 53.

**Table 53: Application of Models to Ideal Social Inclusion Policy Development**

	<b>Centralised policy direction</b>	<b>Deconcentrated/ autonomous</b>	<b>Iterative/co-governance</b>	<b>Disaggregation/ ambiguity</b>
<b>Service quality and citizen based service provision</b>	In a centralised system it would be expected that clear direction be provided in regard to national policy expectations. These would in turn be underpinned by a clear statement of minimum service standards, both quantitative and qualitative. There would be limited capacity at local level to vary such conditions.	In a deconcentrated/ autonomous system all determination of the need for and application of, standards would be determined at local government level.	A local-centre policy arena would be in place to provide the negotiation space for agreement on shared priorities and implementation plans to an agreed standard.	In a disaggregated system there would be limited clarity on who determines levels of quality and standard of delivery.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</b>	Clear direction on whom and how internal collaboration processes might apply would be put in place at the national level.	All collaboration processes would be determined within the relevant local authority.	A shared policy development space would be created to allow for iterative consideration of policy development and implementation based on national objectives and local priorities.	Limited to no provision for structured collaboration would be in place allowing for considerable variation in approaches based on individual direction rather than strategic perspective.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</b>	Clear direction on whom and how internal collaboration processes might apply would be put in place at the national level.	All collaboration processes would be determined within the relevant local authority.	A shared policy development space would be created to allow for iterative consideration of policy development and implementation based on national objectives and local priorities.	Limited to no provision for structured collaboration would be in place allowing for considerable variation in approaches based on individual direction rather than strategic perspective.
<b>Organisation of structure/ institution</b>	Structure would be set by the central policy process.	Structure would be set by the local policy process.	Negotiated structure would be in place.	Ad hoc approach to structures would apply.
<b>Spatial/Territorial perspective</b>	Spatial perspective would be set at national level.	Spatial perspective would be set at local level.	Negotiated perspective would apply.	Ad hoc approach to spatial planning would apply.
<b>Resourcing and appraisal</b>	Resource allocation would be set at national level and subject to national evaluation.	Resource allocation would be set at local level and subject to local evaluation.	Multi-annual financial perspectives would be agreed and subject to shared evaluation process.	Ad hoc approach to resource allocation and evaluation would apply.

In essence what the above table indicates is that in a centralised system, there would be clarity regarding the specific role local government would play in applying national policy. This clarity would be underpinned by a series of centrally determined service standards, an appraisal system based upon universality of service provision informed by national conditions and common implementation structures across the state. In a decentralised system one could expect to find considerable variation in approach to the management of social inclusion at local level. In a co-governance process, one which the various local government reform reports in Ireland suggest as a way forward, there would be the expectation of agreed protocols between the local and the centre, delineating the range and level of service provision. Finally in a disaggregated system it might be expected that policy implementation would not be underpinned by substantive resourcing or regulatory direction by the centre. It would also be the case that decisions at local level to address social inclusion would largely be ad hoc, and generally subject to local political or administrative priorities.

The next challenge, given this broad overview, is to consider the Irish system and to place the research within the reality of the local-centre policy environment so as to determine the validity of the ultimate findings.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (*NAPinclusion*) sets out the policy framework for social inclusion in Ireland. Local government is identified within the policy objectives of both *NAPinclusion* and *Towards 2016*<sup>25</sup>, as the level of government responsible for implementation of both at local level.

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<sup>25</sup> See Annex F

In broad policy terms therefore, local government in Ireland plays, from the national policy perspective, a critical implementation role at the local level. An examination of the institutional settings for social inclusion can, as a result, provide the researcher with an opportunity to characterise the local-centre relationship within a context which has both a statutory basis and a highly developed national policy framework. This allows the researcher to consider, using a social constructivist lens, the models developed within the literature review as they would apply to a substantive local-centre policy process. The approach also enables the researcher to interact with the most critical stakeholders as outlined in the earlier chapter on methodology.

Given the development of social inclusion policy through the national partnership, it might reasonably be expected that the objectives of the policy in *NAPInclusion* would be underpinned by executive functions being put in place to ensure ongoing implementation. The document review suggests that the statements of strategy adopted by each of the Government Departments have been informed by the *NAPInclusion* in regard to their mandates. It is not clear however, within their business plans as to whether action to underpin social inclusion has been incorporated into their service considerations and indeed into the individual performance criteria which are central to the delivery of those services. In fact it is only in a limited number of cases that this is actually the case. Of equal relevance is the absence, within the strategies, of quality standards that would underpin local delivery and in doing so set the direction for local government and others in those departmental areas having a policy interface with local government. This suggests that a key initiative to embedding poverty and social inclusion into actual service delivery at central level would be

the incorporation of *NAPinclusion* objectives and performance criteria into Departmental Business plans. There is however an absence of any such initiative.

The review also suggests that, in the case of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the lack of an integrated perspective on social inclusion could potentially impact on local authorities. This is so given that the divisionalised structures of the Department essentially replicate the programme group structures of local government, with the notable exception of the Local Government and Housing Divisions. In other words, the divisionalised nature of the Department could result in a silo perspective on issues of a multi-functional concern such as social inclusion. In the absence of a clear intent to address specific applications of inclusion within the business planning of the various divisions of the Department, the Department itself is running the risk of enhancing a silo effect rather than a multi-dimensional policy response. In the absence of substantive embedding of the national policy, in this case *NAPinclusion*, there might be, as a result, a reduced potential for the embedding of social inclusion into the activities of the local authorities, a point which the case study which follows will consider.

### *6.3.1 Development of social inclusion policy at local level*

In parallel with the reform of public management at the national level considerable effort has been put into the reform of local government and most notably, the integration of local government and local, rural and community development through the establishment of the county/ city development boards (CDBs). Central to the role of the boards was the preparation and

implementation of ten-year strategies for the social, cultural and economic development of their counties/cities and the co-ordinated delivery of poverty and social inclusion activities and of public development services at local level. These strategies have been subject to several inter-departmental reviews at national level. Most recently, as acknowledged earlier in this research, the Government has adopted the recommendations of those reviews with a view to refocusing the boards into prioritised local strategic actions, particularly those aimed at a more joined-up approach to local service delivery involving relevant agencies. This joined-up focus has primarily been on social inclusion.

The boards are supported through the local government system and are serviced by a director of service and supporting staff. Some 10% of local government staff are employed in supporting the work of the boards and it is the only area in the Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group where staff savings are not envisaged.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the County and City Managers Association has established a working committee of directors and managers to address social inclusion issues between the local government system, the national inter-departmental committee which oversees the work of the boards, and the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government supports the directors through networking arrangements and on-going liaison. It, in turn, is supported by the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

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<sup>26</sup> It is also worth noting that of the county manager level some eight of the twenty nine managers were at the time of writing, directors of community and enterprise prior to their appointment as manager, the highest level of representation of directorships in the system and that the only senior local government official to enter senior management in the civil service was also a director of community and enterprise.

The CDBs are led by the local authorities and include the social partners, state agencies, local, rural and community development organisations and community and voluntary representatives. These representatives, in turn, contribute to the sub committee structures of the boards, most notably the Social Inclusion Measures Co-ordinating Groups (SIMS), which were, in line with national policy, established to facilitate greater inter-organisational co-ordination between the local and national bodies responsible for local service delivery.

In addition to the boards, local government generally is being encouraged to engage in a more pro-active approach to addressing local poverty and social inclusion. This is particularly relevant given their planning and housing functions (among others) where there is a clear need for consideration of poverty and social inclusion requirements. For example, planning policy is key to the sustainable development of local communities as is housing policy in relation to individuals and family units affected by social disadvantage. Indicative of this is that of 205 life cycle actions in *Towards 2016* some 118 either directly are the responsibility of local government or are dependent on local government creating the environment in which delivery of a particular action can be facilitated. In its spatial planning role local government either provides, facilitates, or regulates some 89 of these actions (see *Annex F*). Given the extensive nature of this involvement, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has supported the development of a local government work programme and a Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network to underpin the response of local government. In doing so the Department has been responsible for establishing a formal policy network which

is bringing the local policy perspective into the national policy arena on a permanent basis. This includes a series of local networks of councillors, officials and representatives of social disadvantaged groups. These networks, in turn feed into a national network which has been managed by the Institute of Public Administration from 2006, under the guidance of a Steering Group, the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group, comprising the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG), the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, and the Local Government Management Agency, the Local Authority Members Association, the Association of County and City Councils and the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland. The institutional arrangements therefore provide for both a vertical and horizontal policy process and, as significantly, a diagonal framework which allows for local government interface with departments other than the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

In addition, Social Inclusion Units have been established within 16 local authorities with funding from the DEHLG to foster a strategic and cross-cutting approach to social inclusion within local authorities and which would underpin the *NAPinclusion* and *Towards 2016*. About half of the local authorities have also prepared local anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies (LAPSIS) that complement their county/city strategies for social, cultural and economic development. In a number of instances such strategies have been co-financed by the national level.

Finally, a key feature of the local policy process, as envisaged in the *NAPinclusion* and *Towards 2016*, is the implementation of Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) in policy processes at local authority level. Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) is a policy evaluation framework which allows a policy maker to consider the issues of poverty within a policy-making process, regardless of the nature of the policy area being considered, with a view to achieving a reduction in poverty.

Poverty appraisal techniques are being introduced into policy-making across the European Union and elsewhere. In Ireland, there have been various efforts to apply poverty proofing at national and local level for several years. The process itself has been a feature of the work of the predecessors of the Social Inclusion Division in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), for over a decade. At the national level, OSI published, in 1999, guidelines on poverty proofing for use by government departments. This was in response to a commitment to do so in the original *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* and subsequently re-stated in *Towards 2016*. At local authority level, county and city development boards, in 2001-2002, completed poverty proofing of their integrated strategies for economic, social and cultural development. The boards received some limited guidance, based on the national guidelines in this regard, from the Task Force for the Integration of Local Government and Local Development.<sup>27</sup>

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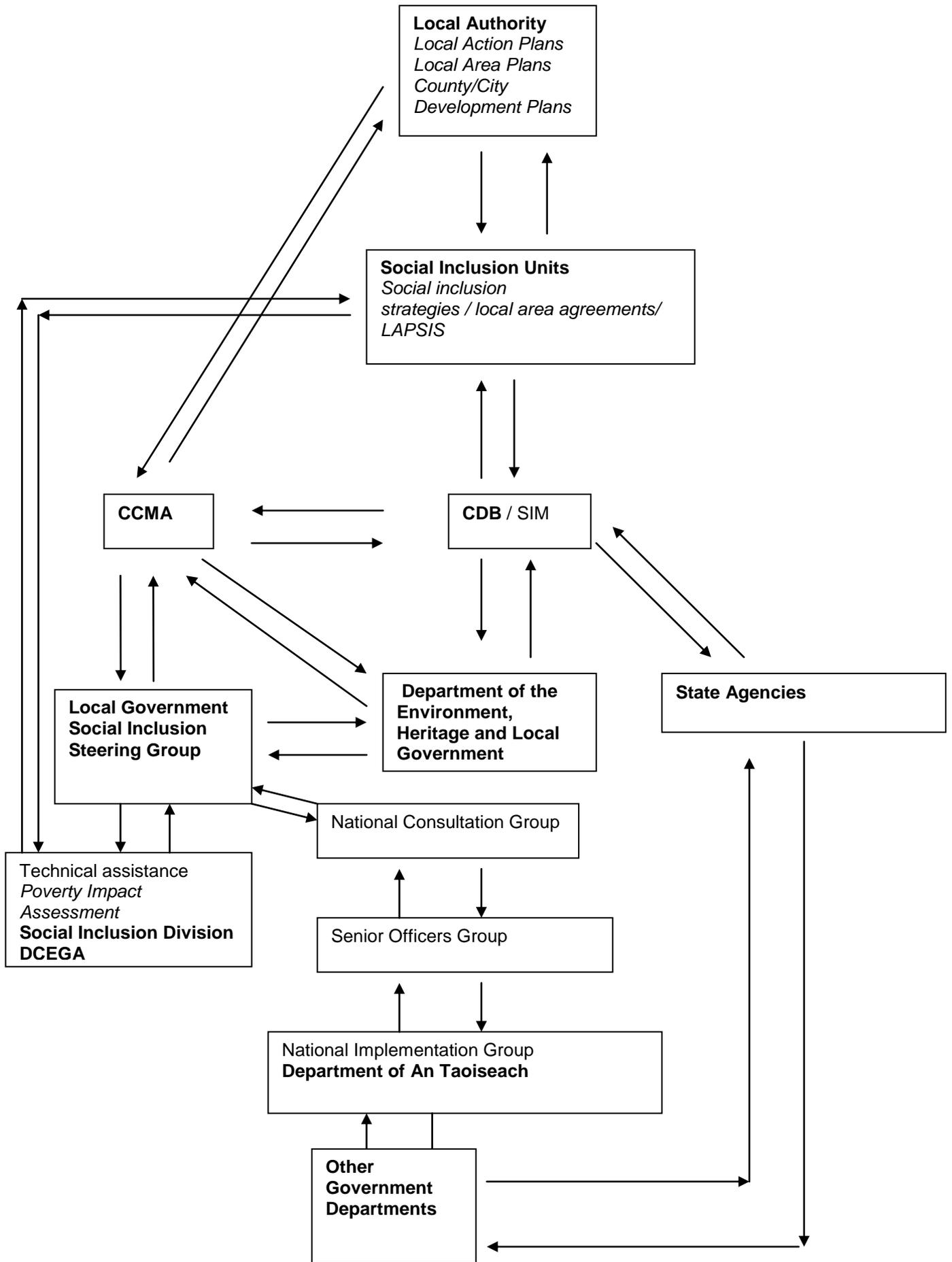
<sup>27</sup> A shared vision for County/City Development Boards: Guidelines on the CDB Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, May 2000.

A review of poverty proofing in Ireland was undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council in 2001. Arising from this review and other initiatives through the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* the need for proofing was underpinned in the work of both OSI and the Combat Poverty Agency. OSI prepared a new set of guidelines to facilitate the application of poverty impact assessment at national level. The commitment to having general application of the guidelines at national level was re-stated in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (*NAP Inclusion*) and also in *Towards 2016*. The objective behind the implementation of PIA is that it is seeking to facilitate the embedding into all local government policy processes, of a national policy framework i.e. *NAP Inclusion*.

Other associated institutional changes, developed as a part of the above policy process, were in regard to the cohesion of local, rural and community development. Under the direction of the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, LEADER Groups and Area-based Partnerships and Groups that were responsible for the delivery of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme have moved towards having a single over arching institutional setting within most cities and counties known as the Cohesion Process.

In effect, the policy processes associated with the above efforts to integrate social inclusion into local government would seem to be positioned, as set out in Figure 15 below, within a sophisticated co-governance framework at both national and local levels. At face value it might therefore be argued that the local-national policy interface, in this specific policy arena, is moving towards an iterative co-governance model as set out in the document review.

Figure 15 : Centre-Local Policy System for Social Inclusion



The fact that there is in place such a sophisticated local-centre policy framework should not however be taken at face value as indicating a move towards the policy interface envisaged within the Barrington and Devolution Commission Reports. These do after all seek to move towards a co-governance model for policy generally. In order to establish whether this in fact is the case, it is necessary to establish the framework by understanding both the national and local perspective and to underpin this understanding by creating a comprehensive picture of the reality of the policy process. This will allow the researcher to determine the "*what is*" and thus to position the researcher to begin to focus on what would be required to move towards models of "*what ought to be*".

#### **6.4 National perspective on the local-centre policy interface**

Dr. Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General at the Department of An Taoiseach and head of the Irish Civil Service, has played a central role in the national policy process over the past decade. Speaking at an IPA Breakfast Briefing in June 2008 Dr. McCarthy provided an insight to the challenges confronting the local-national policy interface when he noted that:

*Our system remains segmented in service delivery, policy orientation and cemented in old ways of doing things....*

He continued, having regard for the then recently published OECD Report on the Irish Public Service, by acknowledging that:

*a more explicit focus on goals and on how we organise ourselves...means we need to take a more system wide approach rather than a structural approach...this involves dialogue across various elements of the public service and needs to be about performance....*

The current local-national system was, in his view:

*...an incredibly fragmented way of organising a small public administration...*

and that a:

*.....shared understanding of the policy goals and the ability of organisations to do this...*

would be necessary if government and the public services were to confront the increasingly complex challenges of a modern society. He perhaps summed up the frustration of being at the centre of the national policy process when he declared:

*All too often there is a wonder of amazement where policy is agreed at national level and then is not reflected in the direct engagement of a service with the citizens at a local level...*

Dr. McCarthy, through the national partnership process, has had the critical responsibility of addressing the embedding of social inclusion into the public management systems in the state. He was central to the establishment of the institutional arrangements set out above in Figure 15. His concerns therefore carry considerable weight in attempting to understand the nature of the local national policy interface. It is legitimate therefore, to consider, within the framework of this case study, whether his “*wonder of amazement*” is in some part a result of a disaggregated ambiguity policy arena which might be a fundamental feature of the existing local-national policy process. His comments would certainly be at variance with what is understood to be a centralised model.

Dr. McCarthy made a critical concluding point in regard to the central-local relationship when he reflected on the need for:

*...clarity of shared understanding animating shared delivery of a policy...*

Ultimately is what is being sought by Dr. McCarthy, is a system which falls into the *iterative co-governance model* developed in the literature review, rather than the *disaggregation/ambiguity*, *autonomous* or *centralised models* identified earlier. In part his thinking seems to identify with what was recommended by both the *Barrington* and *Devolution Commission* Reports.

His colleagues at national level would seem to share this opinion. Five officials were interviewed across three government departments as part of the initial research for this thesis. In one such case the view (Senior Central Government Official 1, an official with policy responsibilities) was expressed that:

*We are a successful but vulnerable society – as a result of inappropriate policy and policy implementation. We must manage our affairs more smartly; we must implement our goals more consistently.*<sup>28</sup>

The same official went on to note:

*We are at an advantage in Ireland. It is easier to have face to face encounters in a smaller country, the feedback route is shorter. A shared agenda comes from successful interconnectivity... Strengths of planning at a local level are that it is easier to see interconnections between sectors at a local level.*

Given this perspective the Official went on to note that:

*Development requires extending visions beyond the boundary of individual agencies... how can the activities of other agencies influence what I am trying to achieve?*

When questioned in regard to the role the central authorities have in regard to ensuring an inter-departmental perspective on issues such as transport, education and housing, among others, the Official responded by saying:

*These issues only come together at a National level in Ireland. Do we need an Executive Regional presence? But some issues (e.g. transport) are of a scale that can only be taken at a national level.*

He did go on to acknowledge that:

*There are no examples of good practice at the moment in relation to a co-ordinated approach, e.g. co-ordinated development of housing and educational facilities... Particular issues should be raised with the government/relevant department. The evaluation of problems should be a two way dialogue between the local and the government systems.*

This opinion is borne out with similar frustrations being expressed by a colleague in another Department, in this case holding sectoral responsibilities<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Senior Central Government Official 1, 16 February 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Senior Central Government Official 2, 2 December 2007.

He suggests that his current role in dealing directly with local government and the local governance environment generally is to be “*reactive*” rather than setting specific direction. He sees his Department as:

*...dependent on the local authorities to present their respective cases for funding rather than taking the lead in planning for delivery.*

Such a view would seem to underpin the view that the current policy interface could not be described correctly as a *Centralised Governance* model. Such a view would be contrary to traditional views on the relationship where the centre is seen as the driver.

As such both officials provide a counter view to the prevailing local and academic perspective in their areas of responsibility that the local authorities are dependent policy bodies and the decision-making centralised. The second official likened his role to one:

*more like a funding institution rather than a leader in delivery even with what is a well developed national policy framework...*

and basically he has:

*found that where an authority (local) takes a particular view to delivery it is hard for the Department to influence the authority to change its policy perspective. This is now embedded into the statutory framework notwithstanding several efforts to apply a national approach to the implementation of what is a national policy.*

A further opinion from a policy advisory unit of a central Department complements the above perspectives. In this instance the Official<sup>30</sup> is responsible for directly advising local authorities in regard to what would be regarded as a core political value for one of the government parties. This particular value is set out in the agreed programme for government between the various parties. Having sought to implement a specific ministerial initiative

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<sup>30</sup> *Senior Central Government Official 3*, 29 November 2007

without success due to the local authorities working to impede the policy objective, this Official held the view that:

*Cultural perspectives are so influential-why is it that some policy options will work in some counties and not in others.*

Much of his work will now be about “*shifting the mind set*” if he is to succeed in implementation of the political priority.

Such views are not restricted to the central departments but are also reflected among senior personnel in the wider State sponsored sector. In one such case the Agency plays a key economic development role across the State. A senior official<sup>31</sup> of the Agency who also plays an active role at local level through a development board and is therefore well placed to observe and understand both national and local concerns suggested that while on the one hand:

*Little can be progressed in the absence of money even if there is a local willingness to achieve something...*

on the other:

*Instructions from the centre are too vague...challenge to retain flexibility in local decision-making against a background of a lack of national direction...*

He is critical of the lack of guidance for national agencies in how they should approach local authority policy-making. He suggests that there is:

*No agreement at national departmental levels that the State Agencies can apply in regard to local arrangements...*

and in doing so suggests a similar perspective on the local-national policy process as being one which is more notable for its ambiguity and lack of clear policy direction. There is thus, from his perspective, considerable inconsistency in state agency inputs to both local and national policy development. Other Officials operating with a regional brief (three of whom were interviewed) for their parent departments also seem to be confronted with the lack of clarity on

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<sup>31</sup> Senior State Agency Official 1, 3 July 2008.

their role in the policy interface between the local and the national. One<sup>32</sup> suggests that (also) in regard to economic development: “the local authorities are just too small to compete...” and poses the rhetorical question:

*We have a traditional county boundary which is unlikely to disappear so the question is how do you integrate this into a new regional perspective where a possible regional manager has the power to effect change rather than local government managers or elected mayors at county level?*

particularly if, as he added:

*Co-ordination in Ireland at regional level operates only on the basis of goodwill at personal level...*

He also acknowledged that there is:

*Limited inter-action with locals on the part of state agencies...*

and that this is unlikely to change given that:

*Co-ordination in Ireland at regional level operates only on the basis of goodwill at personal level...*

while:

*There will be no change to local government unless the City and County Managers Association agrees and unless they see significant benefit to it...*

and in that context:

*There is a genuine question about whether we need a regional level between central and local government...if we have one we must use it to bring added value to justify such a layer...*

A key aspect arising from the various interviews is the need to understand the capacity of the local-centre policy interface in establishing service quality standards and minimum delivery standards. The absence of minimum service standards reduces the opportunity to implement universal services. Furthermore it limits the capacity of the centre to understand the value of services being delivered and whether they are effective. The same Official suggested that:

*Performance has increased with implementation of Performance Management and Delivery System (PMDS) but there is still a question over its effectiveness...there needs*

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<sup>32</sup> Senior Official with regional brief 1, 23 June 2008

*to be a fully transparent transfer of information across government, local authorities and the state agencies...information is all too often withheld from colleagues across the public service...*

He does go on to suggest that:

*The carrot will not work...the only way to get real implementation is through regulatory control...*

A counter view from a colleague<sup>33</sup> of the above official is offered in that he suggests:

*The difficulty is subservience to national government...Nationally because even the most local of issues are sent back to the centre....the system is thus overwhelmed...*

and somewhat pessimistically suggests that he and his colleagues:

*Do not have the political will or understanding of the population to even think of approaching a Nordic model-we will simply stumble along...*

Others however do see opportunity to change towards an iterative/co-governance model but question the appropriateness of the State or a particular department to lead a reform process which might provide greater clarity within the local-national policy interface. This experience has been informed directly as a result of the Officials concerned working within the local-centre system for social inclusion. One such Official<sup>34</sup> did suggest that given the diversity of the local system, in terms of scale (e. g. Dublin City and Leitrim County Council), demographic profile, stage of economic development etc., any attempt to establish minimum public service standards and doing so on a co-governance basis could not possibly work. It is understood from this Official that this diversity was one of the principal reasons for moving towards limited interpretations of local authority outputs<sup>35</sup> which are based on volume

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<sup>33</sup> Senior Official with regional brief 2, 27 November 2008

<sup>34</sup> Senior Central Government Official 4

<sup>35</sup> Noteworthy in that these were based on a centre-local process that included all the key stakeholders, are national in origin and reported as such and are acknowledged in the OECD Report as such.

measurement rather than policy outcome appraisal processes. This view has been confirmed in discussions with an independent contributor<sup>36</sup> to this particular process<sup>37</sup>.

The Official suggests that the formalisation of the policy dialogue between the centre and the local is best set against a framework where both local and national would retain the maximum flexibility to address issues on a case by case basis. Thus national policy should not seek to direct in detail but rather set strategic parameters for local consideration and implementation as appropriate. The local policy process would translate the national into the local implementation without the burden of over-inquisitiveness on the part of the State and its officials. Disaggregated ambiguity therefore, from his perspective, has many attractions.

The above comments reflect quite differing perspectives that apply across both sectoral service responsibilities as well as policy applications of national administration. This suggests that there is a validity in taking the view that the local-centre policy system generally is not one which could be defined as *Central Application Only-Centralised Governance* or *Local Application only-Deconcentrated Governance*. This would seem to underpin the initial appraisal set out in *Annex G*. In addition, there is little to suggest, as is the case in the initial appraisal having regard to Figure 14, that the local-centre interface could be appropriately described as *Iterative/co-governance Application*.

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<sup>36</sup> Dr. Mark Callanan, Institute of Public Administration

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.lgmsb.ie/Upload/documents/Service%20Indicators%202007.pdf>

It is now worthwhile to reflect on this perspective from the local government standpoint.

## 6.5 A local perspective

At the local level the wider local-centre policy relationship is viewed through a variety of perspectives which reflect the nature of the relationships which have been established, largely by individual actions on an ad hoc basis. (Three managers and an assistant city manager were interviewed)

One senior official<sup>38</sup> with a history of contributing to the local-national policy interface, indicated that there would always be an:

*On-going budgetary concern which suggests that the Councils will always have to be wary about what commitments they enter into notwithstanding national expectations.*

When looking at the budgetary cycle as manager he has to be aware, notwithstanding the working relationship he and the Council have with various government departments, that:

*Local priorities always have to be realistic about levels of resourcing and the capacity to meet resource needs.*

He therefore, is under pressure from both the local political process and the on-going national policy process which engages with him on an ad hoc basis. He is thus:

*concerned with, and about, more and more, national guidelines about what needs to be done...*

and meanwhile :

*Integration of services will release resources...services to underpin economic development will have to be prioritised...*

in the absence of any specific direction from the centre.

The issue here is that the manager sees a major challenge in trying to manage expectations from both the local and national policy processes, particularly in

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<sup>38</sup> County Manager 1, 3 July 2008.

the absence of what a minimum standard in service delivery should be. This becomes complicated if his corporate team are not party to the policy process or are not provided with the capacity to deliver policy expectations which are partly derived at national level. It is further complicated by the reality that such expectations are rarely well established, either in the form of specified service standards or appraisal, and thus he and his team are left with the responsibility of interpreting national expectations within a policy vacuum, regardless of what may have come through from the national level.

Similar perspectives were also derived from meeting with a number of senior local authority planners<sup>39</sup>. From their viewpoint they are confronted with local political and other expectations and so:” *...there is resentment by local politicians*” when it comes to embedding national policies such as the *NAPinclusion* or the *National Spatial Strategy*. Particular distain on the part of planning professionals not to mention elected members, they suggest, is reserved for policies that are unclear and undermine the need to protect the local landscape and rural community development, with planners often having to interpret general national guidelines such as those relating to rural housing.

The relatively *ad hoc* approach that is applied across the multiple interpretations of national policy at the local level points to the need, they suggested, to enhance the dialogue between the local and the national. Currently local authority planners have no means to communicate collectively into the national planning policy framework and this undermines their capacity to deliver on national expectations, for example, the National Spatial Strategy. The then

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39 Meeting with Planning Officers Galway 28/02/07-(Three County Planning Officers)

president of the Irish Planning Institute, a participant at the meeting, suggested in his acknowledgement of the gap between the national and local policy-maker, that there is a:

*...lack of a forum for senior planners to exchange information and no mechanism for communication from the planners to the national arena*

So while those responsible for physical planning policy within local government have a nominal guidance in the form of the National Spatial Strategy and other broad policy statements, the:

*...need for integrated approach to public design...*

also requires application at the national level and, in its absence, the local policy maker is always:

*...playing catch up all the time...*

and

*...reacts to development proposals rather than being pro-active.*

A parallel perspective can be drawn from another senior official<sup>40</sup> when he considered that there is:

*Limited tie in between the concept of place and the provision of services...*

and the local authority should not be seen at national level as:

*...the automatic funding regime of last resource...*

as can be the case with the dedicated use of national funds for social investment purposes. Initiatives supported by such funds often result in the local authorities having to pick up current expenditures arising from such investments, a feature of the policy interface which has not attracted any substantive debate at the national level. There is a need, in his view for:

*... on-going dialogue between the various local levels and at county/city and national levels...*

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<sup>40</sup> County Manager 2, 8 January 2008

and to underpin this dialogue:

*...local government has to be allowed to speak for itself...*

This engagement could lead to the:

*creation of a sense of taking considered decisions*

and thus:

*meet expectations by having an active dialogue...*

There are however differences of opinion within the system itself as is evident from one of his colleagues<sup>41</sup> in an urban environment. This Official suggests that:

*Limited direction from the centre is given added impact due to the scale of the City so the City does stand out from the rest of the local government system*

This Official argues that there is a:

*Need to place services ...into a regional context and then identify what might most appropriately be delivered through regional and local government*

but given the importance applied to county and other local identities this is unlikely to occur. In addition, he suggests in regard to the local –national policy environment that the:

*...Silo effect is very real... a necessary feature of the scale but there is a need for an over riding perspective and this is missing...*

This is causing further difficulty to the local authority in its coordination role at local level as there are:

*Clear instances of partnership disaggregation which grew through the national authorities inability to refuse resourcing resulting in a multitude of local bodies many of whom will not engage with each other and now look to the Community and Enterprise function in local authorities to resolve issues but the Community and Enterprise Office does not have sufficient support from either the national or local management framework.*

Finally it is his view that:

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<sup>41</sup> Assistant City Manager 1, 6 August 2009

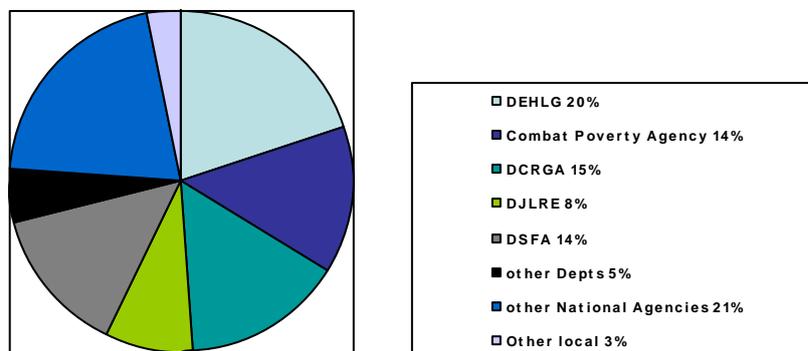
*Inputs into the national policy arena are limited and largely restricted to getting heard at CCMA level, and even this is not always the case.*

In overall terms there are mixed views coming forward from the local government side in regard to the level of direction from the centre, the extent of local-national policy dialogue and the level at which national intervention takes place. This points towards the disaggregation model rather than the centralisation model normally identified with the local-centre policy relationship in Ireland.

### **6.6 Focusing on social inclusion: Policy linkages from local to national**

The above perspectives are drawn from direct discussion with both local and national actors. A comprehensive picture to provide a system wide perspective was further derived from the issuing of a questionnaire to all the County and City Managers. A detailed analysis of the questionnaire is attached in Annex H. Twenty two of the thirty four authorities responded to the survey, a 65% response rate. The findings of the questionnaire follow:

#### *6.4.1 Summary of findings-Communication between levels*

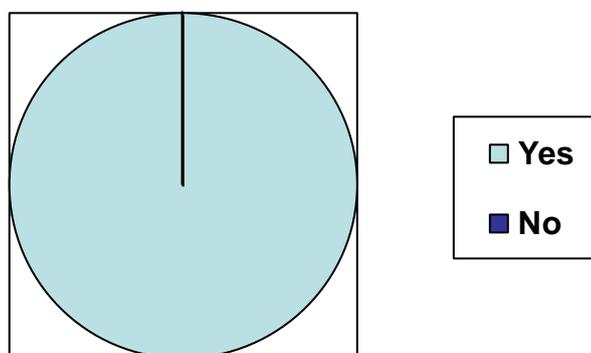


The main contact point, unsurprisingly for the local authorities is the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. However all the respondents

acknowledged others, including the Combat Poverty Agency (now merged with the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs), and to a lesser extent the Department of Justice and Law Reform, the Department of Social Protection, as on-going contacts. This suggests a reduced leadership role for the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government notwithstanding its importance in other policy arenas for the local authorities. In the absence of such leadership the opportunity for greater policy ambiguity could arise given that the policy objectives of the government departments may not necessarily be integrated as discussed earlier. Examination of the corporate strategies (as outlined in Table 2 of *Annex C*) suggests that the corporate planning of the departments includes the embedding of social inclusion policy into their operations including those relating to local government, where applicable. However, there is limited evidence from the business plans of the relevant sectors including the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to suggest that such corporate perspective is actually being embedded into the business of the Departments. This is underpinned by the questionnaire respondents. All of the responses highlight that there is no *structured* engagement of local authorities/ CDBs with relevant government departments e.g. Taoiseach, Finance, Health and Children, and others in regard to social inclusion. It is argued in all of the responses that, were the opportunity to interface with such departments established, there would be an improvement in local implementation of policy and the development and review of policy on social inclusion. Furthermore the responses highlight a lack of Information flow from the *Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development* (and its replacement, *the Inter-departmental Committee for the County/City*

*Development Boards*, which recommended the establishment of the SIMS Group and supervised the national review of Boards). There is thus a lack of coordinated clear direction from the national level to the local level on addressing social inclusion. More significantly, there is an acknowledgement by the respondents that there are no specific minimum standards applied by the national authorities.

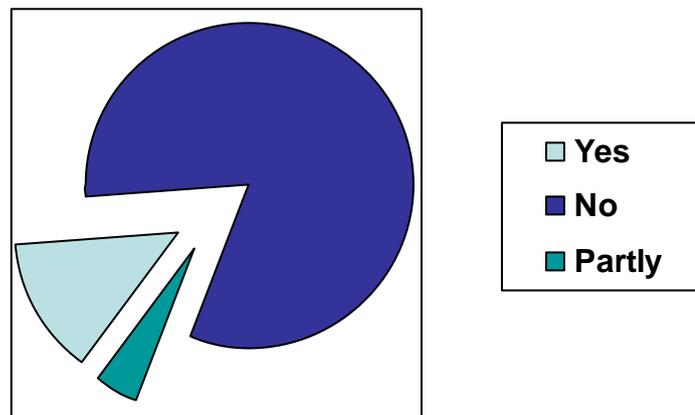
#### 6.4.2 Summary of findings-Improvement of communication between levels



While in broad terms communication with Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is seen as good, communication across policy areas generally, and not just in regard to social inclusion, is seen as not very effective. Linking some policy areas with the social inclusion themes set out in *NAP Inclusion* (e.g., planning and housing) is regarded as problematic. Communication with the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs is intermittent. Communication with other Government Departments such as Department of Education and Skills, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and the Department of Justice and Law Reform and agencies such as Pobal remains difficult and in need of promotion. There is, as a result, limited prior engagement or contribution from the local level into national policy,

therefore ineffective policy implementation and lack of integration is being experienced. This is resulting in a disconnection in policy between and within agencies, at national, regional and local level. A more successful delivery of *NAPinclusion* and related policies depends, it is asserted, on a more effective link with the work of local authorities.

*6.4.3 Summary of findings- Satisfaction with the manner in which local responses in policy terms to social inclusion are factored into national policy*

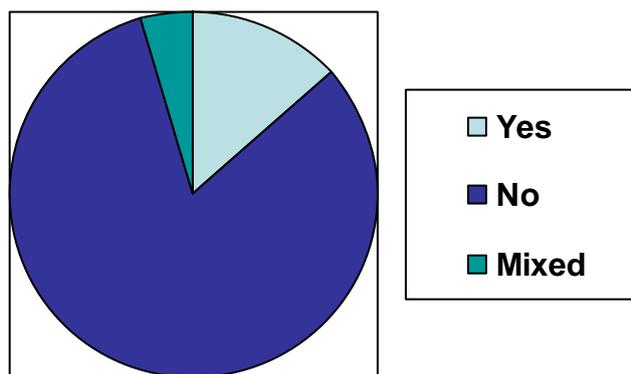


There is limited confidence in the extent to which the local input is heeded at national level. Communication at National level of the local level priorities that are set out in the CDB strategies & other review documents is regarded as poor. The role of the CDB for example, in the endorsement process, a function specifically devolved to the CDB, suffers from lack of clear policy at national level.

In regard to general policy applications the seeking of meaningful input, rather than input at short notice, or in circumstances where the policy position is

already substantially developed, is regarded as the exception rather than the norm. There is a need for clear follow through on policy submissions and indications as to how the submissions are reflected in national outcomes.

#### 6.4.4 Summary of findings- State agency contribution to policy development



The comments on this issue suggest that there should be a more 'horizontal' communication between agencies at national level alongside greater consultation with local level partners in national planning for social inclusion. Local authorities should be able to trace whether local issues have impacted on national policy. Thus the need for a formal framework to address social inclusion is well established.

If the Department of Social Protection fulfilled this function, an annual reporting structure could be established to focus on the social inclusion aspects of each matter considered by the Councils. This could be further underpinned through a national re-iteration of the responsibilities that CDBs have so that all government departments are aware of their role..

In addition there is no mechanism, for CDBs or local authorities in their own right, to flag up issues of concern. To redress this, quarterly reports could be submitted at senior level and then issues could be collated and presented to the Ministerial group for action and follow up. All responses stated that not enough is being done at present. This appears to be due to the lack of mechanism for communicating effectively from local to national or vice-versa. Participation and awareness also needs to be increased across all government departments and not just those that deal directly with Social Inclusion issues.

#### *6.4.5 Summary of findings- Integration of national policy into local authority corporate planning*

In general, the questionnaire returns indicate that the social inclusion aspects of all existing national policies are considered and included in the Corporate Planning process and in operational plans of the Councils. Once a national policy initiative is received by a local authority, it is discussed by the Management Team, party leader meetings, corporate policy group or the relevant Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). It will, if appropriate, then be placed before the full council. This approach may however vary with policy area and departments. The Corporate Planning Process reflects the National Policy process where possible. National policy initiatives are fed through by circulars generally, and in some limited cases through organised regional meetings.

All policies received are communicated to section head level in the local authority and then referred to the relevant section. SPCs discuss /approve policy initiatives at their meetings.

The overall response is, however, mixed indicating that some local authorities have a designated process for considering national policy within their organisations, others feel that it comes to them by media, or that there need to be specific staff to research and communicate policies and their potential organisational consequences. Corporate plans reflect national policy, but communication can vary in different policy areas and departments.

#### *6.4.6 Summary of findings- Communication of policy with the local elected members*

Information briefings prior to policy implementation are seen as a central feature of engagement with elected members of the local authorities. Significant initiatives might be more comprehensively understood if disseminated at policy workshops or seminars which would provide the opportunity for improved regional networking.

The use of regional information sessions, rather than seeking individual submissions from each local authority is something that should be given more active consideration by the centre when addressing policy development. There are common issues for all local authorities notwithstanding boundary concerns. There is also a role for the County and City Managers' Association and the Association of County Councils. Prior consultation with the local authorities is seen as necessary not only to provide for informed national policy but also to ensure smoother implementation of national policy at local level.

The responses suggest that by utilising the mechanisms that are in place, e.g. the County and City Managers' Association., various networks of the local authority system etc, strengthening of the effectiveness of the joint functional committees at national level could be achieved. The government departments and national agencies could more effectively channel policy initiatives and information to local government, both to its executive structures and to elected members, at SPC level. Overall, the responses suggest that effective communication of national policy would require better briefing to local authority officials and members which should be done at regional level.

#### *6.4.7 Summary of findings- Understanding of social inclusion issues and national policy expectations at management team level*

The responses indicate that in larger Councils little is known, even though various booklets, for example, on social inclusion have been distributed. In smaller councils it is easier for information to be circulated. Discussions in some cases take place at management team meetings on fortnightly basis, which keeps it on the agenda and monitors progress. Social Inclusion Units are seen as offering the opportunity to embed the issue throughout the organisation.

Specific social inclusion issues relating directly to local government (housing, RAPID, access, affordability of services, etc.) and also about initiatives taken by the CDB can be a feature of the work of the authorities but the level of awareness is uneven and often limited to what the authorities are required to do under a given act as opposed to an integrated cross departmental approach.

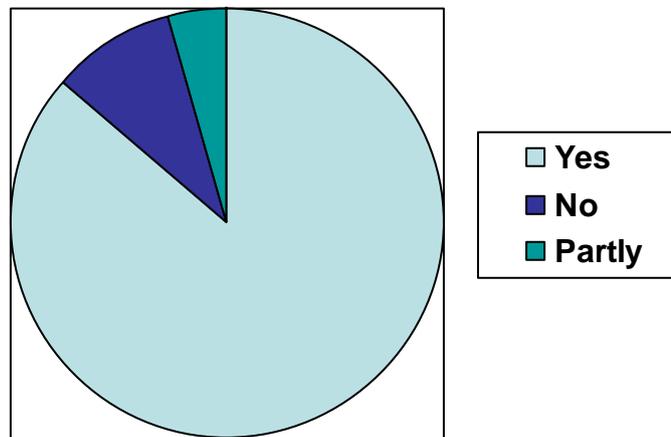
In some cases people think social inclusion does not apply to all departments and some do not have an understanding of social inclusion, More direction is needed across all sections from line management and the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government.

The need to acknowledge and reinforce the central role that local authorities play as a forum of democratic representation and civic leadership for their respective communities continues to require consideration at both local and national level.

There is incomplete appreciation of the implications of the *NAPinclusion* and related national policies within local authorities. In many respects, this is driven by the established programmes and funding priorities across a range of national agencies and Departments. These are not being sufficiently integrated, or responsive to the difficulties and implementation challenges that arise at local level.

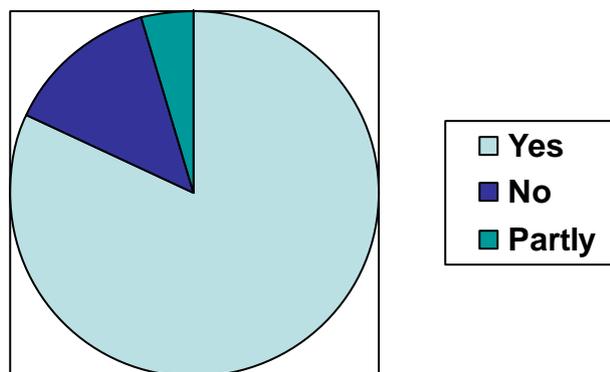
Generally knowledge within local authority departments depends on the level of involvement the other groups have with social inclusion issues. Apart from the focus in the corporate plans, limited training and awareness is provided in some CDBs and local authorities, but knowledge seems to be very thin on the ground. The majority of responses asserted that other sections/ their colleagues should be aware of the general policies and issues but no responses stated specifically that other people would be aware of specific roles/ responsibilities. In some CDBs knowledge can be limited to those that work with social inclusion measures only.

6.4.8 Summary of findings- Impact of the NAP Inclusion on local corporate plans



The responses to the questionnaire suggest an apparent lack of engagement between the centre and the local levels, nonetheless there is an overwhelming identification with the national policy in the corporate planning processes associated with local government. The organisational plans are applied at individual level through the performance management delivery system. Responses in the questionnaire suggest that the PMDS could become the focus for greater integration between national expectations and the local capacity to deliver public services .

#### 6.4.9 Summary of findings- Impact of the NAP Inclusion on local budgetary plans



Of the respondents, 80% did acknowledge that the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion played a key influence in determining budget priorities. Given the extent of staffing in both the Community and Enterprise and Housing functions there would be a legitimate expectation that social inclusion would be a key influence. What is surprising is the extent to which the NAP Inclusion is acknowledged by the respondents when it comes to preparing the budget.

#### 6.4.10 Summary of findings- Local social inclusion priorities for the immediate future

The responses indicate that inter-county communication on social inclusion particularly through the neighbouring CDBs should be strengthened. The operational framework of regional bodies such as the Regional Authorities, the regional offices of the national development agencies etc. need to be flexible in response to local needs, but the responses acknowledge that this can be difficult as the remit and focus of regional bodies will differ on local needs. Agreement on emerging issues for a particular region which will strengthen the

bargaining/lobbying position of departments/organisations with a regional structure could be considered at the local authority level.

A more focused response by regional agencies regarding the delivery of services is required. This could include:

- Co-ordination of the planning and development of childcare facilities and services.
- Co-ordination and integration in education and on disability issues especially structural planning and implementation.
- Introduction of a social inclusion brief to the regional authorities to parallel the progress at local authority level.
- Acceptance that regional agencies need to respond and listen to the local needs and to also feed the information up to the parent body/department.
- Recognition that regional bodies need to continue to work at County level with regard to local priorities.

Achieving full support and prioritisation for the implementation of social inclusion policies at a local level remains a concern and needs to be resolved. More national support in the form of a resourced national social inclusion support unit is required.

The responses indicate that consultation with relevant local structures like the CDB on priority issues should be considered at the national level. Realignment of the national policy interface needs to be addressed so as to allow effective circular feedback from local, regional and national levels.

The questionnaire responses also suggest that national policies and programmes need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of rural counties

where poverty is more scattered and hidden. A demand was also indicated for a commitment to contribute appropriately to addressing these priorities, along with providing a supportive response to applications for resources or to feedback which suggests that national policy needs to be changed or improved,. There were also calls for a commitment to provide local offices of national agencies with the freedom and resources to contribute to addressing the priorities.

More integrated policy and planning at departmental level, with strong leadership by lead departments, is called for, in order to address complex issues facing groups such as pro-active planning in relation to the addressing new poverty.

The development of national templates for poverty, gender, equality, proofing etc of all actions, for application across government levels and by all member agencies could be considered it was suggested. This along with the development of direct links via *NAPinclusion* could facilitate the addressing of deficiencies at the national level.

Creation of a space for local authority members and officials to feed into policy issues on an ongoing basis was also suggested along with the establishment of a process whereby an information flow is created between the national, regional and local levels.

At all levels, the responses suggest that there needs to be a mechanism in place to integrate local, regional and national issues in some form or another.

This is despite the fact that such a mechanism is in place. Sean – this seems contradictory

#### *6.4.11 Summary of findings- Strengthening the articulation of local authority policy issues into the national policy arena*

A forum for bringing the views of the County Development Boards to the national arena was called for among the responses. Consultation by government departments on local priorities in the allocation of funding is also suggested, again indicating the lack of engagement through existing structures. It was however noted that local authorities who have social inclusion units are better placed to combine good models of research and action that reflects the experience of the target groups and communities affected by poverty and the agencies serving them. Good policy work comes out of informed debate and openness to engaging /listening and recording the experiences of those most affected by inequality and poverty. This has facilitated those within the structure and who are aware of the processes associated with social inclusion policy development to influence and contribute.

Mechanisms for local authority members and officials to voice their opinions and submit policy documents at a national level continue therefore to be relatively *ad hoc*.

#### *6.4.12 Overall summary of findings-Integrating the local input into national policy on social inclusion*

The views expressed (80%) suggest that there is limited confidence in facilitating local inputs into the national policy framework on social inclusion.

There is no mechanism, for example, to allow CDBs or local authorities in their own right, to flag up issues of concern e.g. quarterly reports which could be submitted to the senior officers' level (i.e. *Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion*) within the social inclusion framework which has been established (as set out in Figure 15 above) notwithstanding that there is in place a highly developed structure which could do so. The initiative tends to rest with the centre and is ad hoc. Issues could, with the institutional settings now in place, and if more robust and *used to determine both local priorities and the appropriate application of national expectations*, be identified and presented in turn, to the centre policy processes for action and follow up. This is an issue which reflects concerns across the layers of policy-making at local level, i.e. within the local authorities in their own right, as well as within the wider framework provided by the development boards. The view was expressed (also 80% of respondents) that awareness of the horizontal nature of social inclusion policy needs to be increased across all government departments and not just in those that deal directly with social Inclusion issues.

In regard to the individual local authorities, the response about their capacity to contribute to an active policy dialogue is mixed. All of the respondents indicated that they have systems in place to respond and contribute to national policy initiatives. However while some have a designated process for identifying and considering national policy, specifically social inclusion, within their organisation, others indicated that national policy comes to them via the media<sup>42</sup> or other sources. These suggest that there needs to be specific staff to

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<sup>42</sup> It is also worth acknowledging that the media where the first source of information with the Summer 2010 announcement of a planning investigation into the decisions of six local authorities.

investigate and analyse national applicable policies and the consequences that it will have on them. The resources to enable the authorities to do so are not available to them and so it is necessary to have access to some form of external technical assistance available to them.

Notwithstanding the absence of resources the national policy process does nonetheless play a significant role in the development of the local policy process. Corporate plans at local level do reflect national policy, but communication can vary from policy area and department. It is also suggested that by utilising the mechanisms that are in place i.e. the City and County Managers Association, various networks of the local authority directors of service etc., there could be a considerable strengthening of the effectiveness of the joint functional sub-committees within the social inclusion framework set out in Figure 15 and their links with the various government departments.

The results from the questionnaire also suggest that the government departments and national agencies could more effectively channel policy initiatives and provide for greater disclosure to local government including elected members. Consideration of the wider policy arena could be then addressed more effectively through the dual aspects of this mechanism, under the overarching structure of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

#### *6.4.13 Summary of findings-the articulation of local policy issues into the national arena*

Good policy work comes out of informed debate and openness to engaging /listening and recording the experiences of those most affected by the policy environment, in this instance, those addressing or confronting inequality and poverty. The local authority strategic policy committee and other similar local fora are seen as having the potential to be good fora for shared discussion and informed debate at local level. It is through these types of institutional arrangements that it becomes possible to feed into the policy processes of local authorities and boards and thereafter into the national policy process through the social inclusion framework set out in Figure 15. Consultation and engagement with the local authorities and CDBs at an early stage in the policy formulation process is seen as critical by those interviewed and within the questionnaire responses. At the moment the managers can find it difficult to input effectively into policy formulation at the national level if the national level fails to use the mechanisms established to give effect to local-centre dialogue. There may be a failure, on the part of central departments, to recognise that the use of public advertisements or government circular to seek the views of the local policy-makers, along with those of other stakeholders, does not provide an opportunity for consultation and effective policy input. A strong commitment, it is suggested, at central level is required for this to work and that commitment should apply within the existing institutional framework for policy development.

The framework, the responses in the questionnaires suggest, needs to be adequately resourced and supported as the policy-making structure with the capacity to collectively improve the level of debate and awareness of all

participants, in particular elected members in their legislative capacity, at local level. The system to facilitate information flow from SPC/Local Authority-SIM/CDB to the national level is seen as in need of strengthening. In part, this could be derived through a transparent discussion on local issues at national level with appropriate feedback to the local institutional settings. The existing institutional arrangements, notwithstanding their development over the past decade, are seen as not meeting the needs of the policy interface.

## **6.6 Overall key findings from interviews and questionnaire**

The principles underpinning the *NAP Inclusion* and the *National Sustainable Development Strategy* have been embedded into the corporate plans of the local authorities and development strategies of boards among the respondents to the questionnaire. It is also important to note that, of all areas of focus for CDBs and local authorities, the natural environment (and not planning or social inclusion as might ordinarily be expected) is the area that already has the greatest amount of statutory responsibility imposed on them. The regulatory framework on environmental matters provides for specific obligations due to European Union regulation which may well account for such responsibility and accountability being so clearly enumerated.

There is no specific obligation placed on local government to specify corporate responses to social inclusion notwithstanding the provisions of Section 69 of the Local Government Act, 2001 or the provisions of *Towards 2016* or *NAP Inclusion*. Nonetheless, most authorities do actually have provision for social inclusion ranging from detailed Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies (LAPSIS), underpinned by corporate plans and business action

plans, to specific budgetary allocations and individual accountability through the performance management and delivery system (PMDS).

There are mixed views in regard to local input into national policy development. In regard to particular projects the views suggest that there is scope to enter into dialogue with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on an ad hoc basis. Opinions have been expressed however, that more work needs to be undertaken to highlight the importance and necessity of encouraging and facilitating inclusion at local and national level through the provision of substantive guidelines for the local level. This would reduce the scope for liberal interpretation of national expectations.

The re-establishment of the inter-departmental committee for the development boards is seen as an opportunity to improve dialogue on broader policy issues such as sustainable development. Nonetheless, there remains the view that there is limited communication between the Department and the boards and local authorities on national policy matters.

Given the above findings the application of the four models to the case study analysis of social inclusion policy development is summarised in Table 54.

**Table 54: Summary of Case Study Application of Models to Social Inclusion Policy Development**

Possible Current Position	Centralised policy direction	Deconcentrated/ autonomous	Iterative/co-governance	Disaggregation/ ambiguity
<b>Service quality and citizen based service provision</b>	Implementation of the policy originates at the national level through the National Partnership Process. There is limited local government engagement in the policy framework. There is however no effort to determine service quality parameters and there is an absence of direction on the extent to which service provision could be targeted towards particular communities.	Limited evidence is available in regard to local authorities taking social inclusion into core corporate planning processes until the receipt of national guidelines and specifically the establishment of development boards and SIM Groups.	A formal co-governance structure has been established. This framework includes direct representation of both central and local government, including elected members. All policy development and related initiatives on social inclusion are developed within the framework. The national representation includes cross department inputs and feeds directly into the national policy-making process.	The Guidelines issued make no provision for national standards, range and extent of service provision. Such considerations are entirely at the discretion of each individual local authority.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders</b>	Specific guidance was provided for the internal membership of the SPCs, CDBs and SIM Groups. Limited guidance was provided in regard to expanded area committees and community and voluntary fora.	There is no evidence of local government seeking active engagement without the initial guidance of the centre.	Limited evidence of interaction between the local internal policy process with the national process.	Evidence suggests relatively ad hoc engagement which is issue driven rather than being set within either a local or a national policy context.
<b>Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders</b>	Limited guidance in the form of the transposition of national inter-departmental guidelines on the use of Poverty Impact Assessment techniques, including consultation processes, to the local policy context.	There is no evidence of local government seeking active engagement without the initial guidance of the centre.	Limited evidence of interaction between the external local policy process with the national process.	Evidence suggests relatively ad hoc engagement which is issue driven rather than being set within either a local or a national policy context
<b>Organisation of structure/ institution</b>	Broad national guidelines provide for the structuring of the local policy process.	Some limited evidence of a social inclusion perspective being applied through the establishment of area structures prior to implementation of the local government reforms in a limited number of local government areas.	Limited interaction between the centre and the local in determining appropriate structural perspective application to social inclusion.	Targeting of disadvantage in spatial terms wholly within the framework of local government. There is evidence of locally driven but ad hoc policy development concerning the spatial direction of relevant areas within over all spatial strategy and within social inclusion perspective. (e.g. 60% adoption of Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies across all local authorities).

Possible Current Position	Centralised policy direction	Deconcentrated/ autonomous	Iterative/co-governance	Disaggregation/ ambiguity
<b>Spatial/Territorial perspective</b>	Limited spatial/territorial perspective is applied through the RAPID/Clár Programmes but the actual identification for approval at the centre rests with local government.	Some limited evidence of a spatial perspective being applied through the establishment of area structures prior to implementation of the local government reforms in a limited number of local government areas.	Limited interaction between the centre and the local in determining appropriate spatial perspective social inclusion.	Almost wholly determined at local level on an ad hoc basis.
<b>Resourcing and appraisal</b>	Limited resource provision to individual social inclusion initiatives.	Limited resource provision to individual social inclusion initiatives.	No evidence of a co-ordinated centre-local policy dialogue on social inclusion resource provision.	Determined primarily within budgetary characteristics set annually by the relevant County/City Manager.

The above findings suggest that there is a veneer of co-governance applied to the local-centre relationship and that the current interface might be more accurately considered within the disaggregated ambiguity model. Substantive underpinning of this finding now follows.

## **6.7 Applying the findings of the primary research within the case study to the models**

### *6.7.1 Service quality and citizen based service provision*

#### 6.7.1.1 National standards for service delivery

The research demonstrates a lack of quality service standards being determined at the national level, notwithstanding the expanded policy framework for social inclusion. This point was highlighted in the interviews. It is also borne out in the lack of such standards in *NAPinclusion* and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Strategy Statement. While the centre has set out, in broad terms, the policy expectations of the national level there is no evidence of any attempt to define specific service delivery through the local authority system. Furthermore the face to face research would suggest an active resistance to such a development. As a result local strategies and corporate plans present an ad hoc/informal evaluation and appraisal process which varies across the local authorities. The argument that there is a lack of application of public service standards and therefore a centralised model is inappropriate is further underpinned within the national partnership framework. So while there is a clear effort to integrate local service delivery into a national policy framework there is no discernible *ex ante* or *ex post* evaluation. This has been entirely left to the individual local authorities to determine. As a result, services provided at the local level suggest an ad hoc

service output determination, entirely determined at local government level. The research therefore suggests that the Irish case broadly reflects the characteristics of the disaggregated/ambiguity model. i.e. all of the respondents to the questionnaire highlighted that:

1. A lack of national direction being applied
2. Ad hoc/informal evaluation and appraisal taking place
3. Lack of application of public service standards applies generally
4. Ad hoc service output determination is in place and generally based on local criteria.

These are also highlighted in the OECD 2008 Report as applying generally to the implementation of national policy across the public service.

#### 6.7.1.2 Delegation to front line services

Broad national guidance has been provided by national agencies, particularly the Combat Poverty Agency (now subsumed into the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs), with decisions to deliver social inclusion services, or otherwise, being centred on individual local authorities. This is acknowledged in the responses received. In addition, individual authorities that do have local policy in place e.g. Local Anti-poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies, retain responsibility for designing and delivering services internally or through external partners such as local development partnerships. There is no evidence, from either the interviews or the questionnaires for national government to influence decisions directly. Furthermore, there is no indication of any attempt on the part of the centre to

determine the nature or extent of delegation, even within existing local government structures.

This suggests that the characteristics of the disaggregated/ambiguity model apply i.e. Broad national guidance is provided with local decisions to provide, or otherwise, services underpinning social inclusion applying.

#### 6.7.1.3 Universality of service provision

There is no national framework in place to define the nature and level at which services can be delineated. The research suggests that the absence of such determination frees the local policy environment to take relatively flexible approaches to addressing local policy responsibilities on a recurring basis. This suggests that the disaggregated/ambiguity model applies i.e. Broad national guidance is provided by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Decisions to provide or otherwise universal local services is, however, determined by each individual local authority.

#### 6.7.1.4 Rights based service planning

There is no evidence of rights based public service planning in the Irish policy process. This is reflected in the review of the corporate plans of both national departments and local authorities. In the absence of a developed administrative law code and supporting framework, the interpretation of rights rest within a judicial framework set within constitutional provisions and resultant rights alone. To date there is no evidence of administrative law being applied to the social inclusion policy framework. In the event of the development of a body of administrative law, based on judicial caseload alone as is the case for planning

rights the disaggregated/ambiguity model would be applicable. i.e. state intervention would be limited and ad hoc.

#### 6.7.1.5 Citizen based service design

The prioritisation of local public services remains primarily within the corporate responsibilities of the local authority system. The research suggests that this is determined to a limited extent through a local political perspective, but is primarily based on influence from the administrative/professional management layers in local government at corporate planning and financial planning stages. Broad guidance is available from the centre but is entirely subject to local interpretation. This suggests that the disaggregated/ambiguity model applies i.e. State intervention is limited and ad hoc.

### *6.7.2 Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders*

#### 6.7.2.1 Enhancement of local elective governance

The research suggests a lack of clarity in the elected-participatory institutional setting at local/national level. Responses (some 80%) from the questionnaires suggest that current arrangements at CDB level provide for a limited (project specific) policy interface between the executive function in local government and local agents of central government. There is limited engagement, the interviews confirm, with the elected process at local level and no engagement with national processes. Participative policy development is well established within the national partnership framework. The effective result, however, has been the exclusion of the local elected members from the national policy arena. Dual professional/elective hierarchical arrangements remain a feature of the local government system in Ireland across all policy arena. The elected

members hold specific policy related responsibilities called reserved functions while the management staff hold responsibilities for what are called executive functions. The research suggests that the engagement of corporate policy groups within the local institutional arrangements for social inclusion policy development is limited. This, in turn, is reflected in a poor corporate perspective being applied, even in areas where direct provision for elected members has been established i.e. the boards of the integrated local development agencies. This suggests that the disaggregated/ambiguity model applies i.e. A lack of clarity in the elected-participatory institutional setting at local/national level is a feature of the policy relationship. This is notwithstanding the existence of the local-national institutional setting set out in Figure 14 above. In addition, dual professional/elective hierarchical arrangements are in place and both do not necessarily co-ordinate.

#### 6.7.2.2 Cross- local electoral cycle service planning

The national policy framework is determined without regard for the local electoral cycle. This point is clear from both the national face to face interviews and is also suggested in the responses to the questionnaire. At local level the corporate planning of each local authority is wholly determined within a local electoral cycle. i.e. the specific statutory requirements of the Local Government Act, 2001 (Section 134). Other policy-making processes however operate outside of the local electoral cycle. This includes social inclusion. Therefore the disaggregated/ambiguity model applies.

### 6.7.2.3 Setting of political priorities

This takes place to a limited extent at both local and national level. The national inputs are limited to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion per the *NAPinclusion*. There is no direct interface between it and the local government system. As acknowledged earlier there is limited local setting of political priority. The agenda addressing social inclusion is primarily set within the management structure (in common with other areas of local government policy and notwithstanding the reservation of policy functions to elected members). This finding is clearly established through the responses to the questionnaire and the face-to-face interviews. All of those local officials interviewed confirmed a view that priority setting tends to take place within the management team in each local authority. This is underpinned by the questionnaire responses where only limited input of political priority setting was acknowledged. This suggests that the disaggregated/ambiguity model applies.

### 6.7.2.4 Political embedding

The role of the local elected representative is limited to participation within the normal council policy process. There is limited evidence of elected representatives taking a leading role in setting direction, albeit that the national representative bodies are participants in the national institutional arrangements as set out in the case study. At the national level, there is equally limited political direction on the part of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The limited role both levels play is thus indicative of the disaggregated/ambiguity model.

### *6.7.3 Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders*

#### 6.7.3.1 Consultation with external stakeholders

The national policy process has set out the need for local consultation with external stakeholders. The social partners as well as local offices of the state and state agencies are formally represented on the social inclusion structures of the local authorities including the CDBs and the SIM Groups. Other ad hoc forms of consultation are in place. These are determined at local level. The research confirms that the extent to which consultation moves outside of these arrangements into the diagonalised policy processes of state agency/national agency is severely constrained by corporate perspectives of these bodies. There is limited policy engagement between the state bodies, other government departments and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This also applies to the local authorities notwithstanding the social inclusion structural framework set out in Figure 15. The limited role both levels play is thus indicative of the disaggregated/ambiguity model.

#### 6.7.3.2 Access to policy process

Elite group access is a hallmark of the local policy process with direct engagement applying through the structures established at the local level, most notably the county/city development boards and the social inclusion measures groups. The research suggests that this is a replication of the national arrangements. Consultation with non-elite groups tends to be ad hoc and informal and subject to individual initiative rather than corporate intent. This indicated a disaggregated/ambiguous approach.

#### 6.7.3.3 Inter-agency service delivery

National guidelines in regard to inter-agency service delivery on social inclusion issues have been issued. These, according to the case study, are general and retain limited perspective on expectations or outcomes arising through inter-agency activities. The momentum to having such delivery tends to be ad hoc. This allows for considerable variation in the interpretation of the national guidelines at the local level and thus the disaggregated/ambiguous model applies. The research supports this perspective in that half of the authorities still have to complete a local anti-poverty strategy notwithstanding the national policy arena. In addition, implementation of poverty impact assessment and evaluation remains sporadic for the former and ad hoc for the latter.

#### 6.7.3.4 Internal policy innovation

The case study suggests that internal policy is driven by local government management and therefore is subject to individual managers taking the initiative to drive a social inclusion policy forward. There is limited policy direction provided at the national level outside of the broad policy parameters set in the national partnership process. This allows for considerable variation in the interpretation of the national guidelines at the local level and thus the disaggregated/ambiguous model applies.

#### 6.7.3.5 Inter-temporal application

The application of policy tends to be relatively open to local timeframes. At the national level there is an expectation that each authority will adopt a corporate plan that is complementary to the electoral cycle at local level. There is no attempt to set such objectives within a national electoral cycle. In regard to

individual authorities undertaking specific strategic initiatives in the area of social inclusion, the decision to do so and the timing associated with such moves rest entirely within the local decision-making environment. This suggests that the applicable model is Local application only-Deconcentrated governance.

#### *6.7.4 Organisation of structure/institution*

##### 6.7.4.1 Flexibility in policy interpretation

The research clearly demonstrates an ad hoc approach to the interpretation of the national policy agenda with high flexibility being applied to local interpretation of the objectives of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion. This has the effect of spilling over into other policy responsibilities including those set out under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2008. This allows for considerable variation in the interpretation of the national guidelines at the local level and thus the disaggregated/ambiguous model applies.

##### 6.7.4.2 Level of application of policy endorsement

Broad national applications have been set for a limited endorsement of social inclusion actions at county/city development board level. The boards have applied, as a result, an ad hoc approach to endorsement. The research suggests that the endorsement process is limited to the SIM Groups and is subject to considerable variation across all the authorities. There is no evidence of any endorsement process applying to sectors other than the local development sector. The disaggregated/ambiguous model thus applies.

#### 6.7.4.3 Alignment of service responsibilities

There is limited alignment of service responsibilities in the Irish public sector generally, a factor identified in the OECD Review of the Irish public service. Such alignment that is in place is driven by European regulation in areas such as the environment and competition law, albeit that there is scope, even in these areas, at both national and local level to interpret such regulation with a degree of latitude. In regard to social inclusion there is no such provision and this is reflected in a lack of service objectives in the national policy. Local government is free therefore to determine appropriate targets in regard to inclusion. Those undertaking local anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies (approximately 50% of all local authorities) have sought to seek service level alignment internally within the relevant local authorities and across local agencies. No specific national guidance has been prepared to give direction to such alignment. The Social Inclusion Division in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs provides broad guidance and technical advice through its local government support programme, a factor acknowledged in the research underpinning the case study. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.4.4 Subordination of local policy

The research suggests that there is a significant capacity to interpret the general objectives of national policy at the local level. Subordination, it is acknowledged, arises from time to time following specific requests for guidance on individual initiatives being undertaken within the national policy context. National reviews that are undertaken in line with the *NAPinclusion* generally provide overview analysis rather than appraisal based upon specific national

characteristics. This arises due to the limited sub-ordination of local service delivery determination which takes place within the local policy environment rather than at the national level. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.4.5 Subordination of national policy

The case study suggests that there is considerable scope for local driving of policy implementation, particularly within the professional structures of the local authority. This can result in local responses which range from complete unwillingness to engage with the national policy environment to one which is fully driven by the national policy. The determination of where a local authority rests within this policy range is largely within the management structure of each authority. There is therefore a wide variation in the sub-ordination of the national policy. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.4.6 Shared policy perspective

There is a limited and ad hoc approach to determining a shared policy perspective. To date, while there are in place institutional arrangements for policy engagement, these tend to be more influenced by individual choice rather than there being a wide corporate application throughout the system. Local inputs to the national policy arena are recognised as improving. Nonetheless there remains considerable scope at the local level to take a different interpretation to a policy shift that arises at the national level. Furthermore, such shifts, given that they tend to take place within the national partnership process in which the local authorities do not directly participate, seem to take place without the necessary appreciation of the local policy environment. As a result

there may be limited appreciation of the rationale for such policy shifts and therefore limited willingness to adjust the local service provision. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.4.7 Clear lines of policy accountability

The case study acknowledges the establishment of an integrated structure to enable policy dialogue across the layers of local and national government. Nonetheless, policy accountability would still be considered to be unclear in the area of social inclusion. This is borne out in the responses to the questionnaire. 80% of the respondents confirmed a lack of clarity, while generally those interviewed shared similar perspective. There is limited effort to identify where actual responsibility for policy determination and implementation rests. This applies to the corporate level within the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and the local authorities. It also applies to individual management designations at political and executive level. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### *6.7.5 Spatial/Territorial perspective*

##### 6.7.5.1 Agreed delineation of boundaries

National determination alone has been a feature of the policy arena in that the decision to apply, for example, a life cycle approach to local public service delivery was taken as a part of the negotiation process in *Towards 2016*. The research suggests that the appropriateness of local government boundaries across nineteenth century structures may no longer be valid. The extent to which structural reform of boundaries through national processes is largely

limited to agreed variations taking place between local authorities. This suggests a centralised model.

#### 6.7.5.2 Cross boundary policy implementation

As a result of the above effects, cross boundary policy implementation tends to be ad hoc and has limited national perspective. The case study suggests that where such implementation takes place it does so within a national policy vacuum and is limited to individual initiative rather than corporate direction at the local authority. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.5.3 Developing spatial direction

Notwithstanding the provisions of the above legislation, the research demonstrates that spatial perspective has tended to be informed, from a social inclusion perspective, by ad hoc and reactive concerns to the effects of the concentration of social disadvantage. The introduction of area-based planning and urban regeneration initiatives is taking place without specific regard for social inclusion policy as enumerated at the national level. The degree of interface is further limited by a lack of integration between the spatial planning policies at national level with those addressing social inclusion. This is having the effect of creating limited direction for spatial planners and those charged with housing responsibilities at the local level. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

### *6.7.6 Resourcing and appraisal*

#### 6.7.6.1 Provision of resourcing

The provision of resources in the area of social inclusion, is according to the case study, heavily influenced by central resourcing. The availability of such resources however does not necessarily mean that a particular authority will engage with the policy arena as this decision still remains within the sphere of the individual executive within the authority. Furthermore the availability or otherwise of national resources has not ruled out initiatives in the arena if particular actions were considered appropriate at a particular point in time. There is a question about the capacity of local authorities to sustain individual initiatives within current funding structures and related arrangements. The study suggests however that there is a capacity within the relevant authorities to identify resources to maintain particular actions that are recognised as a priority notwithstanding decisions in regard to financial supports originating at the national level. There is no evidence of any take up of the provisions of Section 109 of the Local Government Act, 2001 which allows local authorities to establish a community fund for the purposes of raising, through a local tax, funds for social inclusion or the provision of community services. The research suggests that only one example exists (County Galway) where the executive sought to introduce such a fund but this was rejected by the elected members on the basis that such funds should be national in origin. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.6.2 Formality of policy appraisal

Sectoral professionalised planning (i.e. policy which is developed within the professional designation associated with a particular sector, e.g. planners in

spatial planning, civil engineers in transportation, architects in housing etc.) is identified in the case study as the norm in regard to undertaking policy evaluation in the local-centre policy framework. Appraisal, in so far as it is undertaken, is also primarily the responsibility of the professional staff implementing the policy process. There is limited impact assessment with no observance of national policy on poverty impact assessment. Regulatory impact assessment, in contrast to the national policy objectives, is not undertaken in any policy instance at the local level. Strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment are applied in accordance with the European regulatory framework reflecting the professionalised appraisal process that is limited to policy development governed by the European policy arena. There is limited application of Poverty Impact Assessment. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

#### 6.7.6.3 Frameworks for outcome appraisal

Ad hoc output appraisal applies to the centre-local policy interface for social inclusion. This is due to, according to the research, an unwillingness at the national level to set outcome standards due to the variation in social inclusion challenges at the county/city level. Sectoral professionalised planning is applied suggesting a disaggregated/ambiguous model.

#### 6.7.6.4 Outcomes based policy appraisal

There is no evidence of policy outcome appraisal being determined at national level within existing national institutional arrangements. The case study does suggest that local strategy making is moving towards a local outcomes based approach but this is ad hoc and generally limited to economic performance

rather than social inclusion. This suggests that the applicable model is disaggregated/ambiguous.

In overall terms this allows the researcher to delineate the applicability of the four models to the current arrangements in local-centre social inclusion policy in Ireland.

**Table 55: Model applicable to current local government system in Ireland**

<b>Features of a local-centre public policy interface</b>	<b>Suggested current applicable model</b>	<b>Rationale for suggestion</b>
<b>National Standard for service delivery</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	None in place other than for European Regulated obligations
<b>Delegation to front line services</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Established in accordance with local corporate plans.
<b>Universality of Service Provision</b>	<i>Disaggregation/Ambiguity Policy framework</i>	None in place.
<b>Rights based service planning</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	None in place.
<b>Citizen based service design</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Established in accordance with local corporate plans.
<b>Enhancement of local elective governance</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited engagement determined at local level by the management process.
<b>Cross- local electoral cycle service planning</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited if increasing determination within a formal local-centre policy dialogue process.
<b>Setting of political priorities</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited to broad policy guidelines issued following consultation
<b>Political embedding</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited to broad policy guidelines issued following consultation
<b>Consultation with external stakeholders</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Established in accordance with local corporate plans.

<b>Access to policy process</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad national guidelines in place but determined at local authority level.
<b>Inter-agency service delivery</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Ad hoc on a case by case basis within strategic framework of the Development Boards
<b>Internal policy innovation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Almost wholly determined within the local authority.
<b>Inter-temporal application</b>	<i>Local application only-Deconcentrated governance</i>	Almost wholly determined within the local authority.
<b>Flexibility in policy interpretation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad guidance at national level only.
<b>Level of application of policy endorsement</b>	<i>Central determination only-Centralised policy direction</i>	Limited to local development sector on a national basis. No policy endorsement applied to local authority policy field.
<b>Alignment of service responsibilities</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad guidance at national level only.
<b>Subordination of local policy</b>	<i>Disaggregation/Ambiguity Policy framework</i>	Limited to interventions on financial audits, limited spatial planning objectives and judicial review.
<b>Subordination of national policy</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	No national guidelines so subject wholly to corporate plans within local authorities.
<b>Shared policy perspective</b>	<i>Disaggregation/Ambiguity policy framework</i>	No national guidelines so subject wholly to corporate plans within local authorities.
<b>Clear lines of policy accountability</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited to interventions on financial audits, limited spatial planning objectives and judicial review.
<b>Agreed delineation of boundaries</b>	<i>Central determination only-Centralised policy direction</i>	Determined in accordance with the Local Government Act, 2001.

<b>Cross boundary policy implementation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad guidance at national level only.
<b>Developing spatial direction</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad guidance at national level only.
<b>Provision of resourcing</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Broad guidance at national level only.
<b>Formality of policy appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Almost wholly determined within the local authority.
<b>Frameworks for outcome appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited broad national guidelines with no specific outcome indicators in place.
<b>Outcomes based policy appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	Limited if increasing determination within a formal local-centre policy dialogue process.

## 6.8 Elite interview results

Having determined the current status of the policy relationship the researcher then engaged with completion of a series of elite interviews based on a format of questioning developed in the document review. The purpose of this research application was to put the findings of the research outlined above to eight senior officials (50% female) at local and national level to determine the validity of the findings. The questions put to the officials are set out in Table 56 below.

**Table 56: Elite Interview Questions**

<b>Fields of influence of local-centre policy interaction</b>	<b>Area of Inquiry</b>
<b>At what level are service quality and citizen based service provision determined? Who are the decision-makers?</b>	<i>Delegation to front line services National standards for service delivery Universality of service provision Rights based service planning Citizen based service design</i>
<b>At which level is participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders determined?</b>	<i>Regeneration of elective governance Cross- local electoral cycle service planning Setting of political priorities Political embedding</i>
<b>At which level is participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders determined?</b>	<i>Consultation with external stakeholders Access to policy process Inter-agency service delivery Internal policy innovation Inter-temporal application</i>
<b>Who drives the process of internal policy development?</b>	<i>Flexibility in policy interpretation Level of application of policy endorsement Alignment of service responsibilities Sub-ordination of local policy Sub-ordination of national policy Shared policy perspective Clear lines of policy accountability</i>
<b>At which level is a Spatial/Territorial perspective applied and given effect?</b>	<i>Agreed delineation of boundaries Cross boundary policy implementation Developing spatial direction</i>
<b>Where is the need for resourcing and appraisal initiated? How are resources allocated? What appraisal strategies are used?</b>	<i>Provision of resourcing Formality of policy appraisal Frameworks for outcome appraisal Outcomes based policy appraisal</i>
<b>How would you describe the overall determination of the nature of local-centre policy development in light of recent reforms? Have the reforms led to more effective centre-local interaction?</b>	<i>Through social inclusion initiatives Through other local authority policy arena Through non-local authority arena Through other local integration processes.</i>

## 6.8.1. Service quality and citizen based service provision

### 6.8.1.1 National standards for service delivery

The interviews suggest that the determination of the range and level of services to be provided will generally take place within the local authority policy process. There will therefore be variations across local authorities e.g. leisure services in the urban areas will tend to be a big issue but are not so significant in rural areas. How service provision is determined however, is based on local capacity to deliver within the resources that are available to the authority. The local government fund is not subject to specific regulatory or national policy direction. As such it is very difficult to say where it is actually spent so it is difficult to apply national standards that can generally apply to the full range of local services. The general approach is to use, where available, international standards such as those pertaining to water services. These are subject to EU regulatory obligations. Other ad hoc standards are derived mainly at local authority level so there is considerable scope to determine the range and level of standard applied. One of the senior local government officials suggested (in regard to the roads programme) that there is:

*Absolutely no national recognition of what I do with the money I have...the Department might indicate what a standard will be but this is only applied in a very small portion of the network.<sup>43</sup>*

while a senior central official<sup>44</sup> suggested that:

*Trying to get a handle around the nature of the relationship suggests that there is not an absolute thought out framework that describes the Irish system. The government moves to change is haphazard and as to how the process is driven is ad hoc. Standards are subject to different interpretations at an individual level within the local authorities”.*

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<sup>43</sup> Elite Interviewee No.2, 13 July 2010

<sup>44</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5, 21 July 2010

Another senior local government official <sup>45</sup> noted that notwithstanding the highly developed institutional arrangements for social inclusion:

*...from the central government perspective social inclusion is not important-water, planning etc. are seen as important...but ambiguity does nonetheless aptly describe most of the local-centre policy areas with some limited exceptions. Housing is absolutely centralised while Water is trying to move towards a co-governance model because of the international demands on the Department.*

This official went on to declare that in his/her authority there are:

*...no national standards but the Council do apply ISO standards, British Standards. There have been pathetic attempts to measure standards at national level... even in an area like building regulations you are left with making your own.*

The general perspective suggests that the limited extent of national standard setting, generally in the form of broad guidelines, has limited effect. The application of national policy requirements at local authority level therefore creates considerable ambiguity, lack of strategic thinking and limited cohesion.

The senior local government officials are, as a result, more concerned with judicial perspectives on standards, one suggesting that by default, where standards are applied they have arisen as a result of administrative jurisprudence rather than national policy direction. One <sup>46</sup> went so far as to suggest:

*They don't mind that the local authorities are exposed to third party actions so long that the Departments are not exposed.*

#### 6.8.1.2 Delegation to front line services

The need to have sufficient local flexibility in determining the delivery of a local service was recognised by both local and national officials. However, there is a

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<sup>45</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3, 2 July 2010

<sup>46</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 19 July 2010

clear identification of local interests setting the parameters within which services will be delivered. One senior local government official<sup>47</sup> acknowledged that:

*Delegation through to local staffs is heavily influenced by an active customer services policy and a central policy process underpinned by training. Even with these in place, and they may not be in some authorities, part of the difficulty is that some are good and some are not so good so no matter the level of prescription, individual choice has an influence.*

This is further underpinned by another senior local government official<sup>48</sup> who declared in regard to housing policy that:

*The provision of the service is non-discretionary but the locals can determine the detail of the decision...*

This suggests that even in an area where there is a clear effort on the part of the centre to delimit local autonomy, local staff can and regularly do make decisions which "*reflect the necessity of the needs of individuals.*" There is as a result an on-going difficulty for local authority personnel where generally some-one takes an initiative at local level:

*...and ultimately the state gets involved with national policy changes coming about following local organisations taking an action or through local authority initiative to generate a move towards a national policy.*

This thinking seems to be accepted at national level with one central official<sup>49</sup> noting that:

*The framework may be set centrally but then there is nothing behind that framework to back it up...individuals have driven the process not the system. The government should take a much stronger role but this implies the resources come as well.*

### 6.8.1.3 Universality of service provision

The general view, expressed by all those interviewed, suggests that the local authority should be free to develop/determine what it feels local service levels should be. The capacity of the local community should be the key influence as

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<sup>47</sup> Elite Interviewee no.1 5 May 2010

<sup>48</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

<sup>49</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

the more the State gets involved the less empowered the community will become. Universality of service provision in some areas is considered inappropriate and the State should, the opinions indicate, stay out of it. (e.g. in the provision of social housing the view was expressed that the State would never be positioned to determine the appropriateness of a particular policy given prevailing local social conditions can be so different from one authority to another). This may be due *"to geographic issues plus local political concerns"*<sup>50</sup> Also variations apply due to the centre seeking to comply with external obligations such as those arising at EU level. In many instances it was suggested that the centre in the past had entered into obligations without full appreciation of the local impact. One of the rural based senior officials<sup>51</sup> noted that:

*The state is complying with EU regulation but it sat back from the actual engagement. There is no real cost benefit analysis of moving towards universality. Are we willing to pay for what we agree to?*

In addition, in policy areas that seem to be relatively centralised the application of universality is subject to:

*...local circumstances. How people might be allocated is due to local decision-making. There is an attempt to deliver universality of services across the country but the flavour locally can be different.*<sup>52</sup>

Finally there seems to be an on-going resistance to applying universal standards at the national level. As one of the senior local government officials<sup>53</sup> asked:

*Why does it take so long to get standards through-it takes too long so they (the managers) are left to swim according to their interests and the interests of their staff and councillors. So you get 25 playgrounds in one rural county, and 2 in a nearby county*

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<sup>50</sup> Elite Interviewee no.1 5 May 2010

<sup>51</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>52</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

<sup>53</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

*with a similar population. How can the standard in the first county be mainstreamed into the other and elsewhere?*

The argument was put by several of the interviewees, both local and national, that the centre, in the absence of iterative policy development, was unable to recognise good practice at local level. As one<sup>54</sup> noted: It is:

*... odd for central government to take models of good practice which could be applied generally. Departments are not even remotely effective in this networking.*

Therefore the opportunity to mainstream innovation across the system was missing or dependent on the local officials to network with their colleagues informally. Only in the area of social inclusion did the local authorities operate within a national framework which would allow for the cross-fertilisation of innovation.

#### 6.8.1.4 Rights based service planning

The interviewees did not think that rights based service planning could work given the common law and constitutional framework currently in place. It was acknowledged that most rights are determined within the judicial process. One of the interviewees<sup>55</sup> noted that:

*If citizens seek a rights based service it has a habit of coming back on the citizen himself. It can stop the delivery of a service. This is an issue centred on the common good versus the right of the individual citizen.*

Another underpinned<sup>56</sup> this view by suggesting that:

*Our rights as an individual citizen tend to be based on judicial decisions and given the need to have resources available to meet such decisions this tends to skew the allocation of rights. This even applies to Ministers.*

In other words third party claims against local authorities in regard to the claiming of a right can enforce a shift in spending priority resulting in a shift from a service that is generally sought by the local population to one which may not

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<sup>54</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>55</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

<sup>56</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 6 21 July 2010

be a local priority but a legal obligation e.g. health and safety and access to public property.

#### 6.8.1.5 Citizen based service design

Notwithstanding the strategic national policy of creating citizen based services the view was expressed that the more the State is involved the more depressed will be the community engagement. Citizen based services are more driven by the institutions such as the Ombudsman rather than central policy. One<sup>57</sup> suggested that:

*If we look at planning it is not about whether you process an application in x days but about what national priorities and politicians really want i.e. ambiguity. i.e. the new planning bill is moving towards prescription being determined at the centre but without the understanding of what it means. The planning system does not recognise the positive contribution of rural society.*

Therefore the concept of having a capacity to deliver citizen based services through, in this example, the planning system, is left to the local manager and the councillors. They will respond to local expectations which suggest considerable variance from the objectives of national policy. The State has, in the opinion of both local and national interviewees, distanced itself because it might be obliged to put in place national standards and thus national resources to enable the local authorities implement their responsibilities. One national official<sup>58</sup> acknowledged that:

*Local authorities have shown an ability to change/adapt but this is not backed up at the national level. If you go to a CCMA meeting now viz 5 yrs ago there is no comparison. They embraced that change in direction/roles.*

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<sup>57</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

<sup>58</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

## 6.8.2 Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders

### 6.8.2.1 Enhancement of local elective governance

The regeneration of the elected representative is a central feature of post modern public management. However in the Irish case<sup>59</sup>:

*Councillors can be their own worst enemy.*" while another<sup>60</sup> suggested that:

*The elected members are even less influential... The national parliamentarians do not engage..*

One senior official<sup>61</sup>, acknowledged generally for innovation in service delivery at national and international level commented that as a result:

*A high level of trust on the part of the councillors... but he still found it hard to get councillors to have a direct interest in a policy arena.*

More depressingly another<sup>62</sup> argued:

*The nature of local government policy input at moment is down to the manager and the nature of the relationship between officials in the local authorities and their counterparts at national level... The consequence is a totally unbalanced local or regional development. The other disadvantage is that ministerial politics are high in determining resources from a national perspective. I would hate to be a councillor in local government. Their ability to do things is limited. Managers have learnt that keeping the councillors at bay, with little or no say, means no power. This message has come from the senior central officials.*

This view is further underpinned by a senior official<sup>63</sup> at regional level where it was suggested that:

*From the regional perspective there is no relationship between the managers and the politicians at the regional level. The director of the regional authority acts as a medium between the manager/regional politicians. The director has to negotiate with the managers who really do not see what it is in it for them. There is no love lost between the managers and the regional authority. The regional designated manager engages on an ad hoc basis. Directors will go to the managers before going to the members but has to hide this from the members. The other directors around the country would see themselves as a little bit more autonomous but still need to have them on board (managers).*

Overall the view is common across the interviewees that the councillors essentially see themselves as local ombudsmen, representing their

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<sup>59</sup> Elite Interviewee no.1 5 May 2010

<sup>60</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>61</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>62</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

<sup>63</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 21 July 2010

constituents. While there are many common positions between the priorities of the relevant senior officials and their councillors there is no doubt as to where the balance of power rests. Retaining an open ambiguity in this regard works for both the local officials and the elected members. In areas where there is local electoral difficulty there is an advantage for councillors in having some-one "to blame" for hard decisions. In addition, the largely part-time role of councillor restricts their capacity to be fully involved in local policy processes that may be complex. As a result<sup>64</sup>

*At the local elected levels there is intermittent engagement with the SPCs-no regeneration of elected governance and no cross-sectoral inputs from the SPCs really...but... There is evidence at local level that the councillors love to have the whipping boy when needed... they know that the managers provide the lever for difficult issues like incineration...*

#### 6.8.2.2 Cross- local electoral cycle service planning

Cross electoral cycle policy planning is seen as an issue particularly in urban areas where there can be a completely new set of councillors after an election. This has caused some difficulties as there is an assumption that new members do not see themselves having any ownership of policy adopted by previous councils even where legal obligations may be in place. The process is hugely challenging for the councillors particularly the drafting and implementation of the city/county development plan. As one senior local government official<sup>65</sup> put it:

*There is no recognition of the electoral process via the planning process.*

This may be due to the electoral reality of the multi-seat constituency in local government in Ireland. As was put succinctly<sup>66</sup>:

*The multi-tasking of councillors causes a survival mode.*

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<sup>64</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 21 July 2010

<sup>65</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

<sup>66</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 3 2 July 2010

There is no perception that there is electoral benefit from playing an active policy role unless the electorate can see the benefit. As described by one interviewee<sup>67</sup>:

*No body is looking 20 years down the road so we get shifts in policy without any regard for the life cycle.*

This is the case in regard to the annual budget so the elected members, particularly the corporate policy groups, tend to focus on this rather than on long term policy. As the above manager put it:

*The influence of the CPG is very varied and it is hard to find an example where CPGs are having a real effect. Their impact depends on the nature of the chairmen and their role at SPC level.*

Fundamentally the political process including both national and local has an influence, but this is under used or played out within the narrow confines of meeting individual needs rather than community expectations due to low sophistication in policy-making by the local political representatives.

### 6.8.2.3 Setting of political priorities

The managers are under pressure to engage with national priorities but there is scope to raise local expectations and concerns. The view is that there has been some improvement in the unified voice of the managers as a sector in planning, water services in particular, and major engagement in the environmental policy arena due to the need for the centre to engage due to international commitments. This however is not the case for the representative bodies of the elected members. As one senior<sup>68</sup> official suggests:

*Conflict can be a feature of the Local authority itself let alone the relationship with the Department. Even the nature of the relationship with the Department varies across authorities e.g. Wicklow and Monaghan.*

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<sup>67</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 8 2 September 2010

<sup>68</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 6 21 July 2010

In such instances, there may be unity of purpose between the centre and the local officials but a disputed policy arena with the local elected representatives. The capacity of the centre to push ahead with its perspective may well be dependent on the capacity to use resources to influence a decision, i.e. release of capital funds to supply waste water treatment for zoned lands in Wicklow and Monaghan. However, even the limiting of capital resources can be, and is, overlooked by local elected members where they determine that national expectations clash with local priorities. This places the manager in the position of having to meet the local expectation that he/she will help the councillors.<sup>69</sup>

*...to sort out their problems... they do not see this as a problem for the manager... they look to the manager to help them achieve their priorities and points with those with the mandate to sort them out....*

This view<sup>70</sup> was backed up generally with another manager stating explicitly:

*Our local/national politicians are ombudsmen, if you give the councillors their small things they will give on the big things. If you do not they will be lost to you. Council, democracy, management are totally tied up around the nature of their relationship so then the guy with the great personality will win out even in the absence of any real political vision.*

Collaboration is certainly not, however, systematic but dependent on individual cases.

#### 6.8.2.4 Political embedding

There is a level of pessimism that there is an increased propensity on the part of councillors to side with the individual need rather than the common good:

*.. councillors always go with the person who shouts loudest and in this they are failing the people generally...<sup>71</sup>*

The focus is unsurprisingly on issues on the ground:

*Ireland still very clientalist and even the best councillor will apply a view of 'how will this affect my constituents'<sup>72</sup>*

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<sup>69</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 4 7 July 2010

<sup>70</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 8 2 September 2010

<sup>71</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 1 5 May 2010

The local-centre relationship with the Department is at manager/director level. There is very limited interaction between the elected members as policy-makers and the Department and it is almost impossible for the Department to engage with various sections of local political perspective. This is left to the manager. This becomes more prevalent in regard to embedding local political direction. As the regional director noted:

*The local politicians will do it if given the opportunity but in reality they are driven by what they perceive as the critical voice.*

### 6.8.3 Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders

#### 6.8.3.1 Consultation with external stakeholders

There is a general perspective that the county/city development boards have not succeeded in achieving their primary objective of co-ordination of public service delivery at local level. As one manager<sup>73</sup> (and interestingly one of the original directors of community and enterprise) put it:

*The CDB Structure is failing because it is not on the radar of government and in most cases managers have disengaged from the process. Two key players effectively are left out of the CDB process -the managers who self-disengaged and the councillors who were never engaged.*

This is notwithstanding the fact that the boards are seen as a critical interface in nearly all recent policy declarations by the centre! It is evident that this thinking is not isolated as several expressed the view that questioned the willingness of the centre to be supportive of the initiative. One interviewee<sup>74</sup> noted:

*There has been an effort to involve the external stakeholders but it is around policy not cash. There has never been a buy in from on top-the silo effect. In reality the CDB needed to be replicated at national level. There was no commitment at national level. No commitment of the national level to get their local people working with their colleagues in other local agencies.*

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<sup>72</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 8 2 September 2010

<sup>73</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

<sup>74</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 8 2 September 2010

Nonetheless the view<sup>75</sup> was expressed that:

*Politicians like dealing with the stakeholders and the managers particularly like it-will use it to engage on projects they want to deliver.*

This is the one thing that has changed, it seems, clearly for the better. The local authorities would work closely with their partner agencies on a project basis since the advent of the last round of local government reforms. Thus the Department of Transport is now a key stakeholder given its policy role, however:<sup>76</sup>

*You could cite areas of other government departments that are an issue for local authorities but the question is who do we engage with.*

One critical gap in external consultation arises with the limited inter-action with the Department of Finance. As one manager<sup>77</sup> put it:

*There is limited direct engagement with Department of Finance, this tends to occur through the Department of the Environment and this a concern as there is little appreciation in the Department of Finance as to what local authorities do.*

Nonetheless, the interviewees did suggest that the state agencies as stakeholders have clearly changed their opinion of the managers as they see the benefits (outside of formal structures) of engaging with them on a project basis.

#### 6.8.3.2 Access to policy process

Diagonal coordination remains a key issue for the public service generally. As noted above the interviewees consider that the original objective of the CDB was to integrate local public services but 12 years on and there has been limited progress. One of the successes of the boards has been the development

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<sup>75</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 6 21 July 2010

<sup>76</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 1 5 May 2010

<sup>77</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 1 5 May 2010

of a leadership role for local government in social inclusion and getting diagonal integration at local level in this regard. However, as noted by one manager<sup>78</sup>:

*The CDB might be pretty good at it but this not replicated at national level...*

Notwithstanding the national framework on social inclusion there is limited evidence that outside of general consideration, local government has had anything other than a restricted input into the national policy arena. The same however can be said of the centre and the local where as one<sup>79</sup> put it:

*There is rarely a conscious decision to ignore a national policy application but there is an understanding that when there is a circular that it is subject to the local management teams interpretation.*

Depending on this interpretation a national policy may input directly into the framing of a local policy or it may not.

#### 6.8.3.3 Inter-agency service delivery

As discussed above, the interviewees recognise that the number of agencies at local level requires coordination but this is lacking. One was blunt in saying that:

*There is no coordination going on e.g. the Department of Education and Skills disengaged from the CDB process but the Minister for the Environment has not got involved to stop it. This is a barometer which tells us that the secretary-general of the Department of Education and Skills decided to pull out and there is no impact. What is the effect-nothing. The Departmental structure is status quo. The Green Paper is another example. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has written the document and therefore the other departments see it as a DOE document and nothing to do with them.*

However there is an acknowledgement that local defined needs can allow good inter-agency engagement if there is a common view on the significance of a particular project for the respective mandates of the agencies. In this regard the view is that the local manager plays, on behalf of the Council, the critical role in delivering inter-agency actions. This is especially the case as a number argued

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<sup>78</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 1 5 May 2010

<sup>79</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 1 5 May 2010

in regard to local development. The local authority has a new leadership role for the enterprise boards and local development partnerships which are critical to both the resourcing of these and their on the ground capabilities.

#### 6.8.3.4 Internal policy innovation

A common view expressed by both local and national interviewees was that government needs agencies to deliver local services and to be able to blame them when:

*...the bad things that happen as a feature of the government occur. If you got rid of the local authorities who would deliver and who would you have to blame? This particularly as most actions at the centre are not thought out<sup>80</sup>.*

A criticism, acknowledged by a number of the interviewees, is that local government has not been strong on internal policy innovation.<sup>81</sup>

*We tend to look at existing structures and redefine them in a haphazard way but a far more radical approach is required.*

It was recognised nonetheless by the national interviewees<sup>82</sup> that:

*Innovation in social inclusion far greater in Irish local authorities than in other EU States. There is evidence from the European Year on Social Inclusion that the EU local authorities are in awe of what is being undertaken in Ireland, but the level of clientalism can be a barrier.*

This innovation tends however to be determined by personal interest rather than there being a system wide intent to innovate due to as one<sup>83</sup> put it:

*...a dearth of strategic leadership in local government.*

This can result in poor resource returns. If a particular manager is focused on a particular policy arena such as social inclusion and he/she retires or leaves for another authority, the likelihood is that all innovation will stop or move to the new authority with the manager. In other words innovation is dependent on the individual rather than integrated within the corporate system. The use of

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<sup>80</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

<sup>81</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>82</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

<sup>83</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

resources can therefore be short term due to the contractual arrangements for managers, and the benefits over the long-term i.e. past the term of office of a particularly innovative manager, can be limited.

#### 6.8.3.5 Inter-temporal application

Given the life cycle of the elected council, the application of inter-temporal perspective can be limited. This is further enhanced with the seven year contract applicable to the manager in an authority. As a result the interpretation of issues such as sustainable development and integrated spatial planning can be limited and in need of national direction. There is however, in the views expressed, that this perspective is equally difficult at the national level for broadly similar reasons. The now defunct Regional Gateway Fund was cited by one interviewee<sup>84</sup> as a case in point where local managers outside of the specific gateway took the view that it should be used to deliver local project priorities rather than using it to focus on the building of an urban area with the necessary critical mass to compete at international level. This was then underpinned by a similar view being taken at the national level due to the presence of a strong minister in one of the counties affected.

#### *6.8.4 Organisation of structure/institution*

##### 6.8.4.1 Flexibility in policy interpretation

As acknowledged earlier, the interviewees suggest that, in the absence of a clear set of directions from the centre, the individual manager can play a critical role in the interpretation of a national policy initiative and can as a result,

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<sup>84</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

influence its implementation at the local level. However managers have to contend with the reality of national partnership and thus the fact that:<sup>85</sup>

*It is for elite groups relatively easy to access government departments in Ireland and this can create its own difficulties with departments jumping to needs more ideally addressed locally. Sometimes the influences are external and this can counteract the local expectations of actions being delivered.*

This results in policy marginalisation in instances where managers take a conservative view of their role in influencing national decisions. In instances where managers can play an innovative role or can build the necessary coalitions, considerable influence can fall to certain managers. This was acknowledged to be the case for the greater Dublin area where the view was expressed that the four Dublin authorities retain a level of influence in national policy-making which reflects a prioritisation of Dublin based initiatives relative to the rest of the country. The failure of other managers to apply similar, regional-based, thinking works against their capacity to influence the national policy arena and thus the resourcing of local initiatives.

#### 6.8.4.2 Level of application of policy endorsement

There is very limited financial assessment of the local authority in response to national policy initiatives. Interviewees suggest that compliance costs arising from legal obligations though the judicial process can drive a decision to go ahead with a service. In addition, the fact is that:

*Elected members have no interest in corporate planning and no appreciation of it.*<sup>86</sup>

Policy endorsement tends to focus on immediate constituency needs of either the national politician (if there is a minister) or the manager's own priorities in interpreting how a national policy gets translated into local delivery. The local

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<sup>85</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

<sup>86</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

elected representatives will look to the manager to help them meet their own immediate needs as ombudsmen, fixing the local roads, getting a house for an individual constituent and seeming to influence the planning consent process albeit that this has tempered in recent years due to councillor concerns that they will be seen as corrupt. As one of those interviewed<sup>87</sup> declared:

*Councillors know that they went too far in recent years and are now afraid to be seen to object to initiatives like the new planning bill for fear of being labelled as corrupt.*

#### 6.8.4.3 Alignment of service responsibilities

A perspective which was shared by all of the local government and the regional authority personnel is that.<sup>88</sup>

*Departmental culture in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is not a strong influence on other departments and local government suffers as a result.*

There is a need, it was suggested, for greater direction on inter-departmental matters that impact upon the local policy agenda. The irony was not lost on one of the interviewees that as a manager<sup>89</sup> there is the expectation that:

*...staff will be released to engage and inform the Department's policy process but that there is no evidence of this having any effect.*

Given, in the opinion of the manager concerned, that the Department's priority is to protect the Department by being able to say they collaborated with the local authorities on a particular initiative and that

*...it does not want to hear about realities...*

the alignment of service responsibilities seems dependent on the attitude of other government departments rather than the lead Department. Alignment at local level is therefore dependent on personnel taking a view that it is beneficial rather than the public management system agreeing that this would indeed be

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<sup>87</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 2 13 July 2010

<sup>88</sup> Elite Interviewee no. 3 2 July 2010

<sup>89</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

the case. As a result there has been limited alignment through the development board process. In fact, it was suggested that notwithstanding the existence of an inter-departmental committee at national level, most senior civil servants and national politicians confuse the boards with the enterprise boards.

#### 6.8.4.4 Subordination of local policy

Subordination of national policy on planning is a norm according to the local officials interviewed. This may well change with the implementation of the Planning and Development Act, 2010. Nonetheless, even with this new legislation local priorities will continue to drive the agenda:

*... even if we know who is in charge we do not want that to be common knowledge so no one can get the blame...*<sup>90</sup>

In the view of this particular manager inter-agency service delivery is based on very poor consultation and only where it is required by law and not in realisation that it is a better way of making policy. Access to the local policy process is a paper exercise in most cases. Access to the national policy process has only worked where there was a specific need. There is no real case of input into the national level outside of particular circumstances where the Department was unable to fulfil its international obligations. One of the national interviewees<sup>91</sup> seems to underpin this view by declaring that:

*...central government in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance cannot handle giving over power at the highest level. The civil servants concerned have a difficulty with local government having power. The reform process at national level suggests a strong anti-local bias which is consistent. There is as a result a constant need to convince people what local government is about.*

This view is further underpinned by a senior civil servant<sup>92</sup> in another Department because it is acknowledged that:

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<sup>90</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>91</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

<sup>92</sup> Elite Interviewee no.7 21 July 2010

*Local authorities are different because they raise 57% of their own income and they have a democratic mandate.*

#### 6.8.4.5 Subordination of national policy

It was suggested by one of the interviewees<sup>93</sup> that:

*You cannot separate the role of the national politicians and its capacity to influence decisions. If you are a Minister you can set up initiatives to hand out the sweets. The inter-department task force for the development boards has totally failed in this regard. Minister O'Cuiv, for example, could hand out the nice cheques.*

This approach results in the centre working to ministerial priorities which might not be strategic but rather focused on detail at a micro level. This it was suggested is an inversion of how the local-centre policy process should work. The focus of the centre should be on the strategic concerns of the nation but while:

*...we are a small enough nation to have a central system this not the case.*

There are many examples, it was suggested by a number of the interviewees, of where a local policy concern subverts the national policy need. This is as likely to be driven by a particular ministerial need to cultivate his/her constituency as much as a concern for the local political process to intervene in the application of national policy. The irony of the current Minister for the Environment, in his role as a constituency representative, seeking to subjugate his own Department's waste management policy to local concerns was one which was acknowledged.

#### 6.8.4.6 Shared policy perspective

The manager is seen as the pivotal point for putting in place a shared policy perspective between the local and the national. Generally local initiative is

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<sup>93</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

driven by the management team especially in regard to social inclusion. However it was acknowledged that the<sup>94</sup>:

*... internal networks set up to deliver aligned service responsibilities are not fully used.*

For some managers there is a benefit in using their own policy contacts at central level to gain competitive advantage over the system generally. This in turn influences the allocation of resources, particularly where the priorities of a manager and a local minister coalesce. As one of the managers<sup>95</sup> acknowledged (ruefully it should be noted):

*For some managers a departmental guideline is the law...for others particularly those with a community and enterprise background there is a willingness to push the boundaries out. The rewards can be the determining factor, playing the part can be ultimately the key influence in getting resources.*

#### 6.8.4.7 Clear lines of policy accountability

As acknowledged above many managers seek to operate within the broad parameters of what the centre will be happy with but there are "mavericks". This becomes more relevant where there is<sup>96</sup>:

*Limited clarity on where responsibility lies, for example social inclusion. The senior officials group is supposed to be leading the local policy process but there is little evidence of them engaging with the local authorities. In terms of the NAPInclusion the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs is in charge and this is clear but what actually happens? Every 3/5 years there is a consultation process across the country and this is not reflected in the plan. A report is done every year and that's it. Nothing happens if nothing is done. There is nothing behind it.*

Given that the social inclusion process is the only local-centre policy process with an established policy framework, the lack of senior official inter-action will not come as a surprise therefore in other policy arena. This is borne out in regard to housing which is seen as very centralised, planning which is seen as very decentralised and other policy arenas such as the environment which is

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<sup>94</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>95</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>96</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

subject to external influences such as the European Commission. There is therefore, it is suggested by several of the interviewees, a considerable gap in having identifiable institutional arrangements which clearly hold responsibility for policy implementation. It was suggested<sup>97</sup> for example in regard to the management of flooding that:

*On flooding 25% of the responsibility is with the local authority. 25 % with the Office of Public Works and no-one knows who is responsible for the remainder. This is deliberate on the part of the national authorities.*

Such thinking has been borne out in the *Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in regard to the Management of Severe Weather Events in Ireland & Related Matters*, issued on 20th July 2010.

#### *6.8.5 Spatial/Territorial perspective*

##### *6.8.5.1 Agreed delineation of boundaries*

The view was clearly expressed that boundaries in policy terms are not acceptable if too much definition from the centre is applied. Efforts to apply national boundaries to local implementation would not and do not work in Ireland as one size does not fit all. The sense of community still very strong in Ireland and this can be a key driver at local level it was suggested. Furthermore it was argued that: <sup>98</sup>

*Anybody who thinks that the issues in Limerick will be sorted out because of boundary changes are deluded. Equally a manager's job is to look after their particular area so by definition there will be points for conflict.*

Notwithstanding this view it was acknowledged that the central policy process does often seek to apply a one size fits all approach to implementation at local level. The effective result however is that given the absence of specific direction

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<sup>97</sup> Elite Interviewee no 2 13 July 2010

<sup>98</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

from the centre the local management team can and do interpret the national policy initiative to fit with local priorities. Given the view that:

*There is no regional structure where the manager can resort to. There is an unrealistic expectation that a group of managers will come together. Human beings will do what they feel they can do or not do. Dealing with the structures is avoiding the real issues.*

There can be little expectation of a unified approach, even at a regional level, to an agreed policy perspective which is shared across local boundaries.

#### 6.8.5.2 Cross boundary policy implementation

Cross boundary application of policy is seen as haphazard. As one manager<sup>99</sup> put it:

*No individual local authority will want to initiate a local approach to regional policy implementation.*

There is a need to create an institutional framework to enable this at local level but:

*...the question of local identity will become a major issue so creation of such a framework would need to be top down as there would be local opposition and the manager has to be mindful of such opposition.<sup>100</sup>*

The competition between managers is not to be underestimated. For example, it was acknowledged that in the area of economic development each manager is trying to be seen to deliver by his/her councillors and staff so there is often clear distance between the managers in a region. The regional director<sup>101</sup> interviewed noted that:

*It is very difficult to implement the regional economic strategy. Nobody says anything when the managers come together on economic development. When they (i.e. the regional team) try to implement a regional or national policy it does not apply. When clearly dealing with lower executives there are different messages from the one given by their manager.*

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<sup>99</sup> Elite Interviewee no.1 5 May 2010

<sup>100</sup> Elite Interviewee no 3 2 July 2010

<sup>101</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 21 July 2010

### 6.8.5.3 Developing spatial direction

One of the managers<sup>102</sup> pointedly noted that:

*...the government itself ignored the national spatial strategy time and again and this is now a total disaster. Why would we expect local policies to follow the NSS if the government could not do so?*

The perception is that the local has ruled on spatial matters as there was little for the Department to give. This is changing in light of current economic conditions and the inability to raise local levies to fund water and waste water services into zoned lands. It nonetheless remains in regard to rural housing where the perception is that the State does not enable service provision and therefore elected members have the freedom to direct managers to approve planning consents on a one off basis. The view that:

*We want to be able to build houses on our own land...*

drives much of the thinking in local planning policy in rural Ireland according to one of the managers<sup>103</sup> even if the manager thinks that this is inappropriate.

### 6.8.6 Resourcing and appraisal

#### 6.8.6.1 Provision of resourcing

The capacity to give effect to the reform of local government finance is seen at local level as seriously inhibited while there is limited appetite to do so at national level. Critically more requirements are falling on local government. These are taking effect without sufficient financial appraisal of the resourcing demands required over the long term. They are a feature, various interviewees suggested, of the local government environment as a result of international

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<sup>102</sup> Elite Interviewee no.1 5 May 2010

<sup>103</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

obligations. One of the interviewees saw considerable scope for a negotiated approach to a multi-annual funding envelope between the State and the local government system. There was an acknowledgement in this view<sup>104</sup> by noting:

*The agenda is in many ways set at national level but how this is translated into local is dependent on the resources available.*

Others<sup>105</sup> similarly acknowledged this perspective by noting:

*Much as our system is broken it does seem to fit who we are. The local authorities do have the capacity to deliver but the resource issue is a central challenge..*

If a negotiated settlement to finance could be derived it would enhance local capacity<sup>106</sup>:

*There is a need for the space for this in the centre-local environment... The quality of the imagination is critical to getting things done with resources available and this a key strength of the system.*

#### 6.8.6.2 Formality of policy appraisal

Initially the view from the local government and regional authority interviewees suggests that service indicators would be helpful in establishing a formal appraisal system. They have come to the view however that they are not useful. Most current indicators are statements of fact but do not tell management anything that could usefully inform policy development and implementation.

*Qualitative judgement is not built into the process. How do you measure a sustainable community for example particularly when the policy framework is largely set at national level and with the budgetary process a large feature but within national expectations that are very stratified?<sup>107</sup>*

This thinking in some respects was underpinned by the national perspectives albeit from an opposite standpoint. This particular official<sup>108</sup> noted that in the

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<sup>104</sup> Elite Interviewee no.2 13 July 2010

<sup>105</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 21 July 2010

<sup>106</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>107</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>108</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

initial efforts to establish an output based appraisal system for local government:

*...a local government group looked at making indicators so the Department fed into this and it was totally ignored. Then they reviewed the indicators so second time around the particular Department sent in 6 possible indicators and not one got in even though it included considerable engagement with the local authority staffs.*

Generally the view was acknowledged that attempts to measure output based performance arising through new public management inspired reform efforts were simply matters of ticking appropriate boxes.

*Much is a veneer to show we are wonderful at national level but nothing behind it.<sup>109</sup>*

while a local view suggested:<sup>110</sup>

*Measurements and targets are not in corporate plans-there should be service targets which can indicate whether people can or cannot deal with an issue/problem.*

Many local authorities themselves have created indicators relevant to the local environment. This, it was suggested by several of the interviewees, was personality driven because of self-held perceptions about accountability for local resource demands.

#### 6.8.6.3 Frameworks for outcome appraisal

One of the managers<sup>111</sup> asked the question:

*What is it we are trying to appraise? Qualitative judgement is never within the control of the local authority... this leads to ambiguity.*

Another manager suggested that outcome based evaluation has a future but the steps to it need to be based on output based assessment as the science of outcome appraisal is weak. The manager<sup>112</sup> further suggested that:

*A lot of work is being done by local government on outcome assessment in areas like social inclusion and this is acknowledged by the OECD but you will not go to the Department of Finance on outcome based methods.*

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<sup>109</sup> Elite Interviewee no.5 21 July 2010

<sup>110</sup> Elite Interviewee no.6 21 July 2010

<sup>111</sup> Elite Interviewee no 2 13 July 2010

<sup>112</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

Equally local politicians want things for their local constituencies so the view was expressed that it is better to focus from their perspective on output but doing so in a manner that would meet Department of Finance and other department's policy demands. This leaves the challenge at local management level to create business planning models that can allow information flows which are relevant to meeting local expectations and thus are outcome based while satisfying the limited national output criteria to satisfy PMDS reporting obligations.

#### 6.8.6.4 Outcomes based policy appraisal

The emphasis is on the tangible even if the intangible is more important. Nonetheless existing outcomes-based appraisal is recognised by several managers as a way forward. A number have incorporated it into their corporate planning even if nationally:

*Appraisal techniques are largely output driven.*<sup>113</sup>

One of the key challenges to outcome-based appraisal is that much of what a local authority does is about influencing others with specific functional mandates to deliver a particular public service. So for example, crime is a critical aspect of quality of life. The local authority can provide great housing, public realm and other related services but if, as suggested, the Joint Policing Committee cannot influence local policing priorities this good work can be negated. The suggestion from one senior official<sup>114</sup> was that:

*... the CDB should have this role so again back to the need for the direction on these other agencies working alongside the local authorities.*

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<sup>113</sup> Elite Interviewee no.3 2 July 2010

<sup>114</sup> Elite Interviewee no.4 7 July 2010

## **6.9 Overall determination of the nature of local-centre policy development in light of recent reforms? Have the reforms led to more effective centre-local interaction?**

Elite Interviewee No. 1 suggested that the current local-centre policy interface is one based on ambiguity. This is, from a central perspective set up to avoid responsibility falling on the centre even as there are continuing efforts by the Department of Finance to centralise through financial controls:

*We are being caught up with government and what it is doing...the level of autonomy at local level is restricted with barriers placed to prevent local decisions...but these restrictions are accompanied by the lack of clarity on what core public services are or mean.*

This manager is thus left to explore where the restrictions may be and whether he can use these opportunities to create competitive advantages in relation to neighbouring authorities.

Elite Interviewee No. 2 suggested that there are no national standards of policy coverage but if something goes wrong the manager is left vulnerable. If such standards were put in place resources would be required. Overall in this managers view there has been:

*...no improvement substantially arising from the BLG reforms. The structures created by the managers in the form of the Local Government Management Agency have the potential to improve local-centre policy engagement but no evidence of initiative in this regard from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.*

This view is not fully supported by Elite Interviewee No. 3. This manager acknowledged that:

*In certain areas of policy there has been a closer development of the relationship but whether it is at where it should be is debatable. There are barriers, some personal. The Department do this the Department do that but how closely do neighbouring authorities cooperate, why do we have to await a national direction to do it. There is no appetite for shared services for example so why do we need the Department to tell us to do it?*

The Interviewee opined that national policy makers often work on their own within government departments and that those people are often over loaded by competing demands. This often leads to a very disaggregated policy perspective and:

*Looking to the future the entire process is very uncertain. The centre does not have the political will to take away powers and do things at centre because they are just not capable of doing it.*

Elite Interviewee No. 4 expressed the frustration of having to work with a bureaucracy that can be used to control and delay, but he does acknowledge that local government does have some discretion. Critically he sums up his perspective by suggesting that:

*...every effort to integrate goes back to own silos. It is not that government is centralised but that government departments are centralised in their own right. They can break balls every step of the way if they wish...*

Real local policy reform he argued, is completely different from what has been attempted. It is always the reform of local government but there is little or no effort for central government reform.

*There is no point reforming local government if the general system of public service is not reformed. There can be excessive accountability at local level and none at national level.*

It suits the central civil servants to keep things ambiguous.

*Central government (he suggested) is hardly going to say it is going to put itself under review. The system has evolved organically to achieve things despite ourselves.*

Elite Interviewee no. 5 suggests that there is:

*No sign of an improvement but there is much more awareness of the gaps and what needs to be done. Social inclusion is the only area where something is happening. The managers are the fall guys who can be criminally responsible and the CCMA is baulking at challenging this.*

Elite Interviewee no. 6:

*...would also wonder about the continued relevance of the 1940s management system which came out of the scientific schools of management of the time. The Minister sees managers as having too much power.*

Nonetheless the voluntary interaction that takes place is now a hallmark of the local authority/centre interaction but it still is personally influenced, in the interviewee's view, rather than a system based engagement which would occur regardless of personality.

Elite Interviewee no. 7 acknowledges that it took a while to realise that there is a legacy of strong centralism on the part of the department he is involved in managing. Given his experience in the Department of Finance, central direction was seen as normal in the past. In more recent years however the norm is to have a joined up divisional approach, with networks of principal officers and higher making policy. In the establishment of the development boards the model for engagement with the local authorities became one based on both formal and informal engagement. The OECD in his view suggest that there is more to do but the process is recognised as transformed. There is now a recognition at national level of the need for joined up government-both formal and informal. This has to be recognised as a seismic change as it institutionalised the network relationships which were usually based on personal initiatives:

*If we had had the institutional arrangements we now have with local government in the 1980s we might have had amelioration of the worst effects of the 80s cutbacks....*

This he sees as a critical lesson in the current economic environment:

*While the local will never trump central policy it will be underpinned by the new institutional settings now in place.*

Elite Interviewee no. 8 summed up his perspective by acknowledging that:

*We feel comfortable with the looseness of how we do things...it goes back to a certain irreverence and lack of central authority. This can be a good thing as it allows for considerable innovation so we can save €3.5m and still keep services going-local services are still very driven by local needs but we do not measure the level of service provision as it does not suit government.*

## 6.10 Summary considerations

It is evident from the interviews, the completed questionnaires and the more recent elite interviews that notwithstanding the well developed institutional framework for social inclusion (see *Figure 15 above*) that is in place at the national level, there can be a lack of co-ordination in the social inclusion policy interface, and implementation, therefore, can take place without regard for actual results. There is a view, in regard to poverty and social inclusion, that there is a lack of clarity in what results are required at the local level and of what the policy, set out so clearly in the *NAPinclusion*, is trying to achieve in regard to local application. Thus even for social inclusion the current policy framework fits more appropriately in a disaggregated ambiguity model. If this is the case in a policy arena with such a well developed framework and a highly developed policy arena, what does this mean for the general policy interfaces between the local and the national policy process and which lack such structures? The elite interview findings suggest that disaggregated ambiguity is a norm. As has been demonstrated earlier, considerable effort has been put into establishing a policy framework, through the CDB process which seeks to provide the mechanisms for dialogue across the policy layers that make up the local institutional environment. In principle, the framework for dialogue should be in place, albeit limited to these areas within the immediate functional responsibilities of local government. This understanding is borne out in the elite interviews.

As is evident from three of the suggested models in the literature review, there is considerable emphasis on meeting actual expectations and the resultant policy outcomes, notwithstanding the fact that that they may be derived within a policy environment which is autonomous, centralised or co-governed. This

means that both the local and national policy maker will share a common perspective on what must be delivered, how and to what extent. This shared view applies regardless of the direction in which the policy flow arises; top-down, bottom-up or jointly. In the absence of such an understanding, as has been demonstrated in the case study, the elite interviews and the role local government now plays generally, the only model that can currently adequately define the nature of the policy relationship in the Irish case is that of the *disaggregated ambiguity model* notwithstanding the efforts through the reform processes to move towards a co-governance model.

Does this mean that this model is better or worse than the other models as a form of local public policy-making? The answer to that question depends on the perception of the elite interviewees. As is clear from the elite interviews, and to a degree the responses to the earlier round of interviews and the questionnaires, the current model does provide a degree of flexibility to those that wish to innovate. Alternatively however, it does mean that the establishment of minimum standards in public service delivery is almost impossible against the backdrop of an unwillingness to set such standards and agree them across the local-national policy interface.

This can and does clearly create levels of ambiguity of where responsibilities rest in the policy process. The State may set strategic policy intent but the local can interpret it to meet local circumstances or specific managerial objectives.. This, in turn, can allow either the State or the local authority abstain from taking direct responsibility for any policy disfunctionalism at the local level where and when it arises.

Disaggregated ambiguity also limits the capacity to apply universality of service provision across a spatial context that is multi-layered as well as multi-institutional. A failure to recognise that this might be the case would tend to undermine efforts to integrate across boundaries, institutional and geographical. It also allows better placed or resourced entities, in this case, mainly the larger urban authorities, as suggested in a number of the elite interviews above, to position themselves to deliver higher levels of service to their communities. In doing so, this further undermines the national policy of seeking balanced spatial development, and the reduction of social disadvantage, for example.

The case study and associated research suggests that none of the models set out in the document review sufficiently "fits" the Irish local-centre policy interface. The current relationship carries many aspects of a disaggregated/ambiguous system but there are also aspects that suggest both features of centralisation or central determination as described in the models and to a lesser degree local determination. There is also some very limited evidence of co-governance, the model which the Council of Europe, the Barrington Report and others, including the Head of the Irish Civil Service would seek to endorse as the more ideal model for the policy interface. However, to do so would fail to appreciate the unique characteristics of the policy interface, developed as it has against the backdrop of New Public Management, National Partnership and the re-structuring of the executive-councillor relationship. The recognition of the need for the centre to seek greater engagement with the local if both local and national political expectations are to be met has to be

addressed if an ideal model for Ireland is to be developed. It is to this ideal Irish model that the next chapter now turns.

## **Chapter 7: Towards a model for Ireland**

### **7.1 Introduction**

A fundamental consideration for this research was whether it was possible to apply one or more of the models developed earlier to the Irish local-centre government policy-making environment. In doing so the researcher would be positioned to establish whether the issues developed in Chapters 3 and 4 could be underpinned by the arguments enumerated in the case study, interviews and related research. In taking this approach the researcher would be positioned to determine whether the models developed would have applicability and, as a result, could establish the impact that such a perspective would have on understanding the Irish local-national policy arena. It would allow for consideration of the Irish local-central government interface from the point of view that traditional understandings of the policy interface might be applicable. Alternatively it might acknowledge that there is a need to look at some variant that encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type.

In the first instance consideration of each feature of the local-national policy interface, as set out in the models, was required. This consideration had to draw upon both the literature and document reviews but more significantly, the case study research and interviews, to determine the appropriateness of the models in the Irish case. The findings now need to be appraised having regard for the current policy interface as enumerated. This allows the researcher to argue for an appropriate model or alternatively, to develop a model that could be particular to Ireland. Developing such would then allow the researcher to benchmark this model, if applicable, against the models suggested and the issues posed in chapter 3.

## **7.2 The reality for the local government policy environment - the lessons**

Much has been written about the hierarchical nature of government, not just in Ireland, but also internationally. As is evident from the literature review considerable academic perspective has been applied to the institutional models underpinning hierarchical approaches to policy-making. Such perspective is appropriate to the management of services and the policy-making associated with such services in the Irish case. Policy-making between the centre and the local in Ireland should mean, given successive efforts at reform, having a co-governance environment with, as Lejano (2006) suggests, “*structures of care*” delivering the public services in the absence of genuinely dominant, hierarchical based, central bodies and agencies.

The case study acknowledges that the most recent iteration of the national partnership process<sup>115</sup> along with the various reforms implemented has placed local government, however intended, at the centre of the move towards the creation of such a framework in regard to social inclusion. This, the study further acknowledges, has presented a new challenge for a local government system that traditionally would have been seen as primarily engineering and infrastructure focused. In addition, its financial management processes continue to reflect the structures created prior to the reforms and national partnership. Thus, much of the progress in underpinning reform implementation has tended to be embedded within the institutional arrangements applying in the pre-reform era. These arrangements, aligned with the informality associated with the administrative/professional interface in Ireland, and the electoral processes at

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<sup>115</sup> See Annex E for details

both local and national levels, suggests a dynamic environment more associated with disaggregated processes rather than the centralization processes which local-national relations in England, as Lyons (2007) suggests, reflect. Such conditions place, it is suggested, the local and national policy processes of Ireland into a unique policy arena. Local and national authorities are obliged to push forward with policy reform which is outside of the norms associated with local and national democratic processes across other OECD members.

Such a perspective would seem to be underpinned, in part at least, by the findings of the research. In other words, given the ambiguity of mandate and the disaggregation of the institutional arrangements in Ireland, the national level cannot direct but rather is forced into levering policy implementation, through resource direction, into preferred policy priorities. However, even in applying such leverage it cannot guarantee that national expectations will be met. This is due to the lack of agreed service parameters with the local authorities, along with a limited policy co-development and delivery with other national agencies and national stakeholders due to the restriction of policy dialogue. Even in the case study example i.e. social inclusion, the policy environment has only recently provided a formal local-centre policy arena for the local-centre interface.

The limitation of local government access to the national policy process does, the research suggests, undermine the capacity of the State to deliver on many of the actions agreed within the national partnership process. If what government wants is not complemented by, for example, local expectations and

need as suggested in the research, national government policy will not be implemented and delivered as expected by the national policy-maker. The outcomes will not reflect the initial political objectives, even if there is agreement among other stakeholders. Equally, if the local processes do not match with the national, gaps in local service delivery will arise, and resources that may be available will not be sufficiently targeted to address local demands.

Furthermore this applies as much to non-electoral processes as it does to the elected institutions at local and national level. If, in order to by-pass the perceived dichotomy arising from local-national political expectations and responsibilities, the government establishes an agency to give effect to its policy objectives, those bodies may in fact become even more disaggregated from the national policy intent, a finding of the OECD review of the Irish public service. This occurs in the absence of clear policy outcome expectations. Such circumstances can arise if the mandates of local authorities do not have a specific set of objectives. These objectives have to be underpinned, it is argued, with pre-determined (but agreed) policy outcomes. These outcomes in turn are subject to review by a national political process rather than a national policy review process that does not include the political process at the national level. The research suggests that such review is currently absent.

*The Task Force Report on the Integration of the Local Government and Local Development Systems* in Ireland supported a continued, sectoral-based, approach to development at national level. This has conflicted with the need for cross-cutting sectoral approaches to development. There is a failure to adequately address the national issues of not having integrated thinking taking

place at the national level. Under these circumstances, the process of inter-institutional conflict could have moved from the local level to the national level. . This however, was not to be the case. Therefore the opportunity to instigate a national debate on local-national policy priorities was lost.

In Ireland, the CDBs, as the primary institutional setting for local co-ordination of public service delivery, were in effect isolated from the national policy arena and were largely expected to work in a national policy vacuum in regard to the joining up of public services and planning. There was, and is, no substantial guidance on what local government as leader of the CDB process is expected to deliver at the local level. The absence of any protocols between the local and national levels results in the local having to apply interpretations to national expectations which may not actually 'fit' the national objectives. Equally, national expectations can and do get 'lost' in the local political environment and therefore may not get implemented.

A key gap therefore in the Irish local-national relationship is the lack of a shared local-national interpretation of national and local policy perspective. Such a protocol, common practice in almost all other European systems of local government, results in serious gaps arising in service planning and a resulting limited forward planning process that currently is restricted to the broad parameters of, among others, the National Spatial Strategy, the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and, to a more limited extent, the National Development Plans of the past decade. This limited approach, when applied alongside a regime where there is a direct lack of control of local government income and expenditure or administrative regulation and prescription, can result

in a poor understanding of, and competence in, the setting of a strategic direction for local government by local government. This is equally the case for national government's responsibilities in regard to the implementation of policy through local government. Therefore the Irish system cannot be described as centralised.

In those instances where local government access to central state decision-making processes is permitted, evidence from the research suggests that its influence can be used to underpin public transparency and accountability. In a system which is reliant on actual autonomy of governance at the local level, the competences associated with democratisation of the central-local relationship must be complemented by a reduced level of central supervision and as a result a transfer of resources and power. Responsibility grows through the deconcentration of a public service delivery regime that is a feature of a substantive decentralisation of service delivery. The planning associated with such an approach, therefore becomes a critical aspect of the coherence and coordination of local strategic direction. The State, in other words, provides oversight without impinging on either a sense of devolution or local leadership. The evidence in the Irish case suggests however that this is only partially the case and therefore considerable confusion exists on the part of the national policy-makers in regard to actual delivery of public services at the local level. This confusion is replicated to a similar extent at the local level. Therefore the Irish system cannot be described as autonomous.

This is not wholly a debate on who does what and with whom but rather a substantive challenge as to how the public management process can handle

the multiple risks associated with being no longer solely in control. The process is a hub in an environment which is informed and influenced by local, national and international processes of democratisation, and increasingly influential models of participative functionality in public service delivery. With added dimensions of democracy and participation comes the reality of an increased demand for distributive policy-making or co-governance. This can present as a complex interface of conflicting perspectives that range from the need to underpin innovation in public policy development to maintaining the twin principles (and discipline) of public accountability and transparency. National government works, under such conditions, not so much by direction but by influencing, cajoling and rewarding performance which is pre-determined and mutually agreed. Local government works by accepting the principle that ultimately the national authorities do have the right to intervene if local policy-making conflicts with national and international policy expectations and service demands.

This means that government, particularly (but not solely) central government, becomes an inspector and not a manager of service delivery. The inspection is based upon a political legitimacy alongside a legal and financial framework of supporting pillars. These pillars in turn are increasingly territorial in application rather than only linked to specific functions and professionalised policy strands. In such an environment the effort to create self-sustaining local government policy processes that are integrated therefore becomes a major concern for both the national and the local policy-maker. The challenge however, is to take the policy process in hand at the local level and apply it when viewed from the perspective of the national or international policy arena. This is not merely a

matter of applying a clear direction through firm policy direction. Such an application clearly cannot be the case given the dispersed nature of public management. It is, rather, a question of embedding a mutual acceptance of the political identity which exists at the local level in the local institutional setting with that of the national policy setting, something which may be informed by a national set of policy expectations.

In the case of Ireland, where there is an absence of firm guidance generally in the local-central relationship, a lack of clarity can arise in areas of apparently shared responsibility such as spatial planning, social inclusion and universal services provision. This can result, the research acknowledges, in the creation of conflicting pressures and, as a result, ad hoc and uncoordinated policy planning and implementation. It also can facilitate a local institution to resist central demands, sometimes resulting in the State having to engage in mediated enforcement rather than direct and secured co-ordination of policy implementation.

Such policy systems, as in the case of Ireland, can be influenced by having a place-based perspective where the brokering of agreement is central to having responsive local governance. Such responsiveness is characterised by having collaborative capacity within the policy process whilst the regulating of the character of a community is based upon local flexibility and the creation of a more equal balance of influence. Such systems can also, in the absence of national guidance, result in fragmentation and dispersion when it comes to the delivery of public services. This mainly arises in institutional models which

reflect a sectoral approach to the integration of government, particularly when a territorial perspective may be the more appropriate application.

The joining up of public policy, and the planning which is central to public service delivery, must therefore be a key feature in the revitalisation of local government. This requires the setting of realistic expectations against the background of a blurred accountability that requires the integration of local choice with at least some limited application of standardisation. Whilst not immediately apparent in terms of underpinning a concept such as subsidiarity, at least it does allow for a meeting of local expectations within a shared agenda for improving well being at both the national and local level.

The councillor, mayor, or indeed manager, is no longer one who has a representational role in the traditional meaning of the term but is in fact one who brokers the agreements with the centre that are necessary to underpin the meeting of local expectations within an internationalised policy context that is translated into national policy by central government. The centre is becoming dependent upon the local representative, elected or executive, rather than just being the other way round, to achieve the international and national commitments that increasingly are a feature of the policy process being agreed at the national level. In addition, the centre begins to note that the local representative is dependent upon the cooperation secured between the other local actors and stakeholders and therefore the local representative becomes the platform on which policy development can take place.

Such shifts in thinking point to the need to more fully explore the inconsistency of the different objectives pursued by local actors in the absence of a regulatory structure which is underpinned by the necessary institutional capacity to manage policies.. In addition, the interdependence between the local and the national becomes more apparent when policy is developed without an understanding of the misalignment which can be a feature of disaggregated governance. In such conditions there will inevitably be a contradiction between different perspectives and expectations of local and national government. These differences become clearer within an environment where the absence of long term planning and long delays in government reaction become the norm.

The elimination of barriers to effective joined-up policy-making, between the local and the centre, has therefore to be based on systems where the monopoly on democratic government by the centre is no longer a feature of the local-centre relationship. The creation of the linkages that provide the platform on which the relationship is established may be based on improving the level of public service delivery. More importantly, it arguably has to be established on the principle, as the Council of Europe would suggest, of democratic accountability across all levels of public sector planning and service implementation. In post-modern systems of government, where the institutional arrangements are most likely to reflect a dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions, this requires the internalisation of the external stakeholders into the policy process. It requires the establishment of access points into the policy framework where the power to influence is realistically established and an accepted part of the policy process.

Such thinking is now a feature of most European systems of public management, even in the United Kingdom, traditionally regarded as the most centralised of systems. In Scotland, for example, under the terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 2003 the Scottish Executive has established a covenant where the commitment to a local-centre policy interface is provided. Whilst the covenant is a non-binding document between the local and the centre there is recognition on the part of the centre that having the resources to underpin the commitments of the local government system is a central feature to meeting the national policy expectations which are agreed between the local and the centre. There is also an understanding that:

*Local variations in economic and social conditions militate against the centralisation of relevant policies. The gains from decentralised policy design and implementation arise because policies can be formulated in the context of better local information of local conditions, clearer knowledge of local preferences, and an ability to coordinate the design of a particular policy with adjacent relevant policies-local or otherwise."*

(Burrows, Carter, Fletcher and Scott 2005)

### **7.3 Alignment of the local and the national policy arena in Ireland**

The OECD as far back as 1997 suggested that:

*Aligning central and sub-national government policies is critical to the successful implementation of reform.... This requires coherence in the goals and values at all levels of government, but is often exacerbated by political differences between levels.... The centre seeks ...overall control to protect the national interest-both economic and democratic-while sub-national governments want sufficient autonomy to be responsive to local preferences and needs.*

What the OECD was seeking to argue is that both local and national government must now co-operate within an environment that is considerably more unstable due to international influences. The institutional models that suggest greater centralisation or greater decentralisation cannot equip public service policy-making processes with the capacity to meet the challenges of these international influences. This is due to the inherent conflicts that arise in the absence of any effort to negotiate an agreed framework within which the

institutional relationship between local and national level can be placed. This thinking is supported by the outcomes in the research.

It is from this perspective that, at the international level, the UN, EU Commission and, most notably, the Council of Europe (2007) have sought to establish what it means to have an institutional framework that allows for policy development on an integrated basis, hence the argument for using the models suggested in the document review.

Most interestingly however is that, if seen as an integral part of government generally, there is no dichotomy between the centre and the local as they have to be a part of a unified policy-making framework. This is central to the implementation of strategies for sustainable development and the reform of local and national institutional arrangements. In the absence of a unified policy-making framework, i.e. an iterative co-governance model, one of the key failings of the Irish process of governance has been the transfer of responsibility from those who should actually hold it to others who do not have a clear understanding of their mandate or the resources to make decisions and apply them. This can have the effect of reducing decision-making and policy development to a state of inaction. Such transfers of responsibility reflect the fragmentation of public management which results in the creation of ambiguity about where the real decision-making happens, and a level of disaggregation where many policy overlaps are created.

A current challenge for local government in Ireland is the creation, through the county development board structure, of a sense of mutual responsibility for, and identity with, a particular area. It has to do so across a range of public bodies

operating without the necessary understanding or authority to match local expectations with resources. This can result in these bodies having conflicting policies with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area as set by the planning authority. The process of policy development, in the absence of central direction, fails to equip them (i.e. other state agencies operating within the area including government departments) to provide the internal corporate mechanisms necessary to effect change or to, indeed, call a halt to their actions.

Given this reality, Boyle, (1999) acknowledges that it is at the local level that cross-cutting issues (and how they are managed) most directly impact on service users. In doing so he recognises that in a society as increasingly diverse and open to international policy impacts, as is the case in Ireland, solutions to the joining-up of the local and national policy process are an essential feature to public management reforms generally.

In an era of whole of government responses to international as well as local policy expectations the idea that a central government can adequately function in isolation from its delivery processes is as much a policy non-starter as is the case of local government being autonomous from such influences. In seeking to develop policy across the hierarchical layers of public management, and within a partnership framework such as that pertaining to policy development in Ireland, there is the risk of erosion of the policy-making role of the democratically-elected representatives. There is also a risk that efforts at creating innovative policy responses to local conditions can be limited in the

expectation that the national authorities will, at some point, provide the leadership required to meet these local needs.

As Casserley, 2007 p26 notes:

*The local government reform process, based on principles of inclusion, participation, thematic and area-based approaches, integration and value for money, derives largely from sustainable development principles....*

But he goes on to acknowledge that notwithstanding the reform process, local as well as democratic interests continue to find it challenging to access the policy process while there is an absence of national direction which also restricts the policy process at the local level. This has the effect of other agencies seemingly by-passing local government planning functions and policies. Maclaran et al, (2007 p3) also seems to underpin this perspective where they note that this:

*...could result in a significant weakening of local influence as planning functions might be scattered across a range of area-based development agencies, creating an almost total absence of strategic spatial planning.*

The principle of attempting to embed policy development within a shared national/local spatial and sustainable perspective is therefore understood in the Irish context. There is an acknowledgement that there is a need to apply whole-of-government action to whole-of-government issues. There is however the challenge of operating within institutional boundaries which, while having deep historical roots, are limited in their recognition of functionality as suggested in the National Spatial Strategy.

There is no neat fit within organisational boundaries, and attempting to integrate national policies in sustainable development, social inclusion or spatial

perspective, into a policy framework that remains fixed to such boundaries remains an on-going challenge.

The concept of the local authority being the local hub for guiding, mediating and influencing policy from the local up into the national level as suggested by a co-governance model becomes less probable and therefore the political and participative role of the local authority falls to one side.

All of these impacts have the potential effect of delimiting local government into largely infrastructure type activities rather than into the place shaping role as Lyons (2007) would suggest is a necessary feature of the local-centre policy interface. The goal, it seems, might be to have a local government system which operates within an integrated national policy context, creating opportunities for community growth and development. The reality may however, be somewhat different.

Where does that place the current institutional setting for the local authority system in Ireland when, as set out previously, there is an on-going reform process, a move towards greater democratisation and participation, and attempts to create opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness? Both Boyle (1999) and the OECD in 2008 suggest that the level of local coherence in Ireland is subject to question due to the absence of clear, government wide, objectives that are translated across both central government and local government and the agencies that apply much of central government policy. This is borne out in the research undertaken for this thesis. What this means is that in the absence of specific targets for local government, the local authorities

have the room to interpret national policy should national priorities conflict with local need or expectations. In the absence of direct intervention from the centre the local-centre policy interface only becomes "centralised" when something goes wrong and there is a need to address what might become a national political issue. Therefore with the lack of clearer linkage between the strategic objectives of government and the setting of measurable policy outcome targets, local authorities and other local operators have greater freedom than may otherwise be expected within a unitary structure as would have been argued by writers such as Loughlin (2000). This is clearly highlighted in the research in regard to social inclusion but it is in fact a feature generally, the research suggests, of local government.

The 2008 OECD Report concludes that the Irish Government needs to put in place whole of government planning processes which would allow for the translation of central government strategic objectives into direct implementation at local level through the local government system. The scope for policy flexibility on the part of local government should be restricted to implementation applications alone and not to whether such policies would be, in the first instance, applied. It goes on to suggest that it is the responsibility of government at the centre and not local government given the international policy context, to consider the scope for the application of local perspective and greater autonomy. In doing so central government needs to acknowledge the opportunity that networks of both central bodies, agencies and local authorities can bring to the policy process.

In applying such an approach, the elements of which Dukes (2007) recognises as already being in place:

*... The basic elements of the structure are in place...but their operations must in future be more harmoniously integrated and co-ordinated....*

The OECD suggests that the centre needs to free itself up by retaining a focus on the strategic policy process whilst over time engaging with the local level to build on the existing acknowledged experience and capacity. This parallels the experience of the national partnership process where government and the centre generally engage in strategic perspective with the social partners. The way the centre might therefore free itself in regard to the integration of the local-national process is to establish strategic overview by considering emerging or anticipated future and external policy trends in public management processes. Central government should then apply a risk management approach through engagement with all interested parties at the appropriate level and stage of policy development. In effect the OECD recommendations in regard to Ireland are broadly those same principles reflected in the Principles of Local Government Reform from the Council of Europe and the Outcomes of the EU High Level Report adopted under the Dutch Presidency in 2005. The recommendations also reflect the thinking of Healey (1997) and Lejano (2007) and Sullivan (2004).

#### **7.4 Integrating policy development in Ireland**

With the establishment of national policy frameworks for among others, sustainable development, social inclusion and physical/economic development, in the National Development Plan process, has come the creation of evaluation processes that in large part are based on outputs, introducing the idea of accountability that could be readily measured and thus transparent. However, whilst this could be seen as a considerable advance on previous forms of accountability of public expenditure, the research provides enough evidence to suggest that the extent to which evaluation has actually contributed to having an understanding and meeting of local need remains questionable. Clearly more work remains to be done on recasting such outputs in the form of policy outcomes, an area that is in much need of consideration if there is to be a realistic resolution to the long standing challenges around social exclusion, for example, in the country.

It could nonetheless, be argued that for the first time since the foundation of the State, there is at one level a national policy framework for coherent local planning and sustainable development which not just recognises the importance of local governance but more interestingly seeks to actively promote the development of both local elective and participatory democracy. This is the point which Dukes (2007) seems to acknowledge. However this opportunity, it seems, has been lost given the failure to have a corresponding process at the national level, one which would have sought to seek greater joined-up thinking based on a spatial perspective rather than a sectoral perspective. It seems, therefore, that both national and local government are having to establish long-term strategic partnerships at local, regional and national level to facilitate a

process of inclusion within a national framework. Both systems, the national policy system in particular, fail to recognise critical policies which would need to be prepared on an integrated basis to reflect shared aims and objectives. The State recognises in policy documents such as the *National Sustainable Development Strategy*, *NAPinclusion* and *Better Local Government* that a balanced policy relationship depends upon having a local capacity capable of delivering within a national framework. The understanding that the activity of both national and local government agencies operates within a continually expanding environment of inter-organisational webs or networks means that the overall policy system must be reformed to facilitate rather than control the relationships between the three key elements of society - the economy, the environment and the political process. Herein is the rationale for the processes of policy-making moving from provider to enabler and thus the demand for increased openness in order to avoid public perceptions of over-influence from the major lobby groups and “key sectors” in public policy-making.

#### *7.4.1 Integration with the national/regional frameworks*

In regard to addressing the local-national relationship in making policy, the tendency has been to remove the local policy influence (i.e. the elected members) from traditional areas of local government and pass it to the professional/executive role i.e. the city/county manager. This means that, increasingly, local elected members are able to shy away from taking robust policy decisions as they can always pass it to another level (generally the manager and, in limited instances, the minister). These levels in turn may not be willing to take the decision and pass the decision-making to either a professional body or an independent quango. In effect this is what has

happened to development control and waste management, and more recently, as is evident from the case study, social inclusion.

In exploring the form of policy interface that should be considered, it is worth reconsidering the need to re-address the institutional setting against the backdrop of recent thinking across Europe and elsewhere. Substantively the argument is made that, for local governance and regional institutional settings to work, a more integrated strategic framework which recognises the multiplicity of demands, expectations and need for targeted organisational restructuring is required. Even the models, therefore, identified in the document review become insufficient to allow the characterisation of a "best model" for Ireland. Such frameworks are seen, nonetheless, as providing the researcher with the basis for developing an ideal model which falls out of a consideration of the overlap across the models.

#### *7.4.2 Factors challenging greater policy integration in Ireland-Towards a conclusion*

*A local community or regional authority that develops plans and strategies for development that they themselves do not have faith in or believe can be realised, is seldom successful. Such planning is often a task stimulated from above to get access to funds or to fulfil national goals, a symbolic or ritual kind of planning.*

(Jorgen Amdam, 2000, 8, p 581 ).

In the great debates on local government reform, that occur on occasion, and generally before a local election in Ireland, the national political process often seeks to address issues surrounding the need to reform local institutional frameworks. The reality of such efforts is that in matters institutional, Ireland, like many of the other Member States of the European Union and beyond, is

seeking to work through the need for considerable reform in light of global influences, economic progress and sustainable development.

While policy development in local government needs to be placed within this international context, there is an obligation to be constantly challenging current reform processes with an appreciation of the international models of socio-economic planning which underpin a continued emphasis on soundly based economic principles and sustainable development objectives. Equally there is a need to respect the validity of the characteristics that are wholly applicable to the Irish local-national policy interface.

In the Irish context, like much of Western Europe and indeed other advanced economies such as the wider membership of the OECD, government at the centre has created institutional processes which, not unreasonably, are based on maximising economic returns from international opportunities such as, the World Trade talks, European Regional Policy and the reform of agricultural markets. It could be argued, that much of the reform process associated with good policy-making, fell into the trap of designing institutional arrangements to fit with the immediacy of having a policy response and implementation mechanism in order to maximise the benefits of sectoral based policies and the market place. This, it is argued, is particularly the case with reforms associated with new public management.

### *7.4.3 Structural alignment of the policy process-What is now known*

A generally accepted approach to strategic collaborative planning (Healey, 1997) is that it is a process based upon a mutual acceptance of all actors which design, shape and implement decisions that guide an organisation or area from an existing environment towards a new operational environment within a framework of future scenarios. This could not be argued to be the case in Ireland, but could in other OECD countries, albeit that some suggest that this has the effect of creating a centralising effect in traditionally decentralised states. Ireland, as demonstrated earlier, has the veneer of a centralised system of policy development, but in reality, has a disaggregated regime which allows for sufficient ambiguity of where decision-making responsibilities fall, to allow both central and local bodies to almost disengage from the responsibility for making a decision. This results in considerable confusion institutionally but more particularly for those immediately affected by disaggregated policy-making. It also allows for internal entrepreneurs within local government to try new ideas in the absence of central direction, a feature highlighted in the case study responses.

In light of the above considerations, developed through the literature review and the outcomes of both the document review and the case study it can, in general, be put forward that the following features could underpin consideration of an appropriate model of policy integration in Ireland.

- Local authorities must begin to see themselves as involved in national policy formulation and therefore they must actively seek to contribute to national policy development even if sometimes this is seen by the centre as being in

direct contrast to the national agenda. There will be a clear lack of adequate embedding of the national policy framework into local policy implementation if this is not the case as an unwillingness to allow access can result in a local interpretation of the policy which is from the national perspective seen as inappropriate.

- Ireland, like many other European countries, is increasingly seeing a pattern of professionalisation of service initiatives that reflects a need for an increased role in policy-making as well as policy implementation of specialists and communities of interest. In the absence of full policy integration the delivery of public services will increasingly be subject to local professional determination which might counter both local and national political priorities.
- Contrasts in local and national policy perspectives and priorities can increasingly cause disruption to national and local policy application. This factor is increasingly seen as an influence in spatial terms, where local planning authorities, for example, do not provide any real embedding of national policies such as the National Spatial Strategy or the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. In part this reflects, it could be argued, the lack of awareness and understanding that results from not being a part of the preparation of nationally determined programmes. In order to resolve such challenges the necessary institutional structures to facilitate policy dialogue must be put in place.
- There can be a regime of contrasting and conflicting priorities particularly within local government given the extent of its current role delivering investment in Ireland's capital base and acting as a local regulator through for example the planning process. This is a critical feature of the many

demands now being placed on the local and regional authorities, the local, community and rural development sector as well as on the local delivery mechanisms of national government. The institutional spectrum has expanded rapidly over the past decade but equally expectations on the part of government in regard to responding to local need without a major overhaul of local resourcing has created considerable difficulty in meeting co-financing obligations for example.

- ‘Silo’ thinking is a problem which is not confined to Ireland but rather seems to be a manifestation of current public management structures in most advanced economies. Nonetheless its impact can be such that even in instances where there is clear political integration, administrative or organisational cultures can block progress in the implementation of policy. Such silos need to be continuously challenged within a national policy framework.

So where in the above context can we place Irish local-centre government policy processes in light of recent reform processes and national partnership processes such as *Towards 2016*, the *National Spatial Strategy* and the *National Development Plan*, along with the substantive efforts under the *NAPinclusion* to place local government at the heart of the local policy environment?

In the Irish context it is evident that national government does not directly seek to set specific direction for individual local authorities. It reacts to actions of a local authority, for example under the provisions of Section 31 of the 2000 Planning Act or Section 69 of the Local Government Act, 2001, or to specific

project approval applications generally involving infrastructure delivery. (In effect it is the financier of first call for local government.) The initiative for these tends to remain with local government in Ireland with only broad policy direction being made available by the national authorities. The centre does not set specific targets unless these arise from a particular regulatory requirement which in almost all cases is derived from an EU based policy initiative.

This has the effect of national government and other national agencies creating a process of change without necessarily having a clear perspective on the role of national and local policy-making and how local delivery can underpin national objectives. In the absence of such perspective the argument that Ireland is centralised is one which must be treated with caution if the reality is to be addressed as a part of a reform process.

In addition, given the unlikely scenario that is painted in the case study, of a policy interface that can be anything and not just centralised, what model provides the researcher with a best fit for the Irish context? The research suggests that the requirements of post modern society, are encouraging some regimes of local government to commence a process of renewal and self-regeneration. However, this is more likely to be the case if such reforms as arise across the OECD, do so against the background of a national policy change.

The key challenge is to actually create a process which can overcome the obstacles to change which remain within both the elective and participative process at local level while addressing the problems which are associated with

the national framework which, despite the SMI, remains fragmented. It is now clear from reflecting on the thinking set out in the *National Sustainable Development Strategy*, the *Better Local Government* reforms and the proposals of the *Task Force on Local Government and Local Development* and the objectives of the *NAPinclusion*, that at least two approaches to integrated policy development are necessary in engaging in the process of integrated policy planning i.e. through internal actions for each participant organisation, and through external / inter-institutional actions at local, regional and national level.

These reflect the issues concerned with horizontal and vertical integration of governance. Taking these, the question might be asked as to where next in the Irish context. In policy terms the research suggests that there clearly is a need for:

- Institutional and policy reform in local government to continue;
- Institutional and policy reform across the local development arena to continue;
- Institutional and policy reform at regional and national level. This issue needs to be addressed in the context of regionalisation, and the concept of integrated government at the national level.

The above require an accepted and shared overview of the long term prospects of a community (this being the basis on which Brundtland, for example, makes its definition of sustainable development). Thus spatial perspective needs to be an integral element of all public management reforms in the State. The key challenges therefore in designing an ideal "Irish Model", it would seem at this point, are those that centre round the following:

- Integration rather than 'decentralisation' or 'devolution'. This remains a key challenge for central administration; can central political and public management regimes be expected to genuinely seek horizontal and vertical integration let alone diagonal integration?
- Integration through organisational corporate alignment is a central feature of good corporate governance, however how realistic is this as a goal under the current political and economic environment?
- Integration of both formal government and informal governance- where does the balance lie and can we set real interface processes that are outcome based?

It seems that unless dialogue can be created at both the national and the local/regional levels the local government system in Ireland, and increasingly in other traditionally devolved countries, will come to find that despite considerable effort, public management reform at all levels will remain restricted in impact. This will be no longer acceptable to local stakeholders and electorates if there is the wish to develop services that will underpin, among other arenas, continuing economic development, social inclusion and a greater spatial balance and a maximisation of potential for all areas in the State.

The local government system in Ireland is generally regarded at the national level<sup>116</sup> as not being capable of self-regeneration. It can be argued with some justification that this view is accurate. The process of establishment of strategic policy committees and the preparation of a strategic forum in the form of the CDB for the local authority areas reflect a formal incorporation into the local

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<sup>116</sup> Various comments from interviews with central government officials

authority system of the national partnership process. It is true, however, that the introduction of such arrangements met with resistance on the part of both elected members and officials, due in part to a failure to involve them in the original policy process at the national level.

There remains a considerable distance to be travelled before it can be claimed that there is an integrated policy framework in Ireland, one that is based upon agreed policy outcomes and joined up government. There is a lack of impetus at the national level, is such that any attempts to deliver real integration at the local level, be it through County Development Boards or other innovative institutional arrangements such as community partnerships remains more hopeful than substantive. There is clear evidence of personnel, representing national organisations at the regional and local level, not having a clear or understood mandate in which to operate when acting as a representative of the nominating agency on such local boards and bodies. This failure to provide a national perspective leaves such representatives in a weak position to influence local, regional or national policy and yet they remain positioned to play a role, and local expectations in their playing such a role remain in place.

A concern, however, which requires greater understanding in the Irish context, is that of central / regional / local integration. The *Task Force Report on the Integration of the Local Government and Local Development Systems* supported a continued sectoral approach to development at national level. This conflicted with the need for cross-sectoral approaches to development and failed to adequately address the national issue of not having integrated thinking taking place at the national level. Under these circumstances, the process of inter-institutional conflict could move from the local level to the national level

provided that there was the means to enable the communication of local priorities to the national level. This however, was not the case.

The absence of any protocols between the local and national levels has resulted in the local policy arena having to apply interpretations to national expectations which may not actually 'fit' the national objectives. Equally national expectations can and do get 'lost' in the local political environment and therefore may not get implemented.

### **7.5 The model for Ireland-key learning**

The creation of a unique model pertaining to the Irish local-national policy interface is therefore a valid proposition in light of the challenge to embed the Irish case into the existing models developed in the document review. Whilst the features of a possible model continue to complement those set out in the literature review, the policy dynamic must be regarded as separate from the arguments set out in the issues posed in chapter 3 when the interface is examined in detail. This arises, as developed from the research, for the following reasons:

- **Long term strategic partnerships:** Social and political inclusion can no longer be addressed within the operational context of a single agency such as a local authority or government department/agency. Rather such a process calls for a variety of stakeholders, some formal others informal, to operate within a strategic partnership framework that may and probably will change over time. The argument that local government must ideally be completely autonomous is therefore no longer valid;

- **Collaborative planning:** Even those that are a part of the strategic partnership cannot see themselves as being positioned to address all issues and therefore need to work collaboratively with other similar partnerships at other levels of governance, a process of collaboration that is both horizontal and vertical in terms of public management. The exclusion therefore of local government, elective and executive, from national participative models such as the national partnership framework is no longer appropriate;
- **Process of socio-economic development;** a key aspect of collaborative planning is that it is set within an agreed socio-economic context and is delivered through integrated socio-economic strategies that are set within the horizontal/vertical framework. In Ireland this takes place at the national level involving the social partners. Given this, local government in its spatial planning role can no longer therefore be the sole determinant of the local spatial planning policy framework but equally spatial policy cannot be restricted to solely national objectives;
- **Cultural Perspective:** Integrated policy planning must recognise the differing cultural perspectives that apply in a particular area and across institutional settings. Therefore what may be an appropriate institutional setting for one area may be completely inappropriate for another. Thus the national planning framework must seek to provide the necessary flexibility to enable the application of differing institutional settings, including those relating to organisational boundaries;
- **Sustainable development:** Such integrated and culturally derived frameworks must be based upon a real understanding of the socio-ecological footprint of the community and an iterative process needs to be

in place to ensure that where conflict arises through international and national demands that the planning process can realistically take on board top-down sustainability pressures;

- **Critical monitoring and evaluation:** A critical feature is to have a real understanding of the capacity to deliver change at each level of the policy framework. This entails having an agreed level of minimum standards in public service delivery, an acceptance that a balance needs to be determined in terms of geographic trade offs and having the capacity to measure and evaluate implementation processes within an agreed corporate framework that applies within the context of nationally determined standards and policy expectations which are informed by local and regional perspectives.

Based on the above, the features of the local-national policy interface suggest that variations of models may be applied to the current Irish case as follows in Table 57 and more fully discussed in Chapter 8. It also suggests, in line with the thinking enumerated by the NESF and the OECD/Council of Europe, where an ideal model for Ireland might be applied:

**Table 57: The Model for the local-national policy interface**

<b>Features of a local-centre public policy interface</b>	<b>Suggested current applicable model</b>	<b>Suggested Ideal Model for Ireland ?</b>	<b>Rationale for Implementation</b>	<b>Actions to establish Model</b>
<b>National standard for service delivery</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Central determination only- Centralised policy direction</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority Evaluation.	<i>Establishment of minimum public service standards.</i>
<b>Delegation to front line services</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Local determination only- Deconcentrated/ autonomous policy framework</i>	Provision for equality and fairness based on local demographic characteristics.	<i>Translation of national standards to local corporate objectives.</i>
<b>Universality of Service Provision</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ Ambiguity Policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for Equality and Fairness based on local demographic characteristics.	<i>Design/Planning of Services around Users Needs.</i>
<b>Rights based service planning</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for equality and fairness based on local demographic characteristics.	<i>Design/Planning of services around users needs.</i>
<b>Citizen based service design</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Design/Planning of services around users needs.</i>
<b>Enhancement of the role of local elective governance</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Cross- local electoral cycle service planning</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Setting of political priorities</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service</i>

				<i>provision.</i>
<b>Political embedding</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Integration within a local-regional-national planning hierarchy.</i>
<b>Consultation with external stakeholders</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for equality and fairness based on local demographic characteristics.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Access to policy process</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Inter-agency service delivery</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Ensure joined up strategic planning and provision of multi-annual funding</i>
<b>Internal policy innovation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Integrate service Provision within corporate plans through the joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Inter-temporal application</b>	<i>Local determination only- Deconcentrated/ autonomous policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Integrate service provision within corporate plans through the joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Flexibility in policy interpretation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>

<b>Level of application of policy endorsement</b>	<i>Central determination only-Centralised policy direction</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Establishment of minimum public service standards with ex post appraisal.</i>
<b>Alignment of service responsibilities</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Integrate service provision within corporate plans through the joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>
<b>Subordination of local policy</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for spatial integration based on local demographic characteristics, regional differences and national policy applications.	<i>Design/Planning of services around users needs.</i>
<b>Subordination of national policy</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for spatial integration based on local demographic characteristics, regional differences and national policy applications.	<i>Design/Planning of services around users needs.</i>
<b>Shared policy perspective</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for spatial integration based on local demographic characteristics, regional differences and national policy applications.	<i>Adopt 'life-cycle' approach and utilise 'Case management' approach to cross boundary service responsibilities.</i>
<b>Clear lines of policy accountability</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for spatial integration based on local demographic characteristics, regional differences and national policy applications.	<i>Ensure joined up strategic planning and provision of multi-annual funding</i>
<b>Agreed delineation of boundaries</b>	<i>Central determination only-Centralised policy direction</i>	<i>Central determination only-Centralised policy direction</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Retain existing approach.</i>
<b>Cross boundary policy implementation</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>

<b>Developing spatial direction</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for spatial integration based on local demographic characteristics, regional differences and national policy applications.	<i>Integration within a local-regional-national planning hierarchy.</i>
<b>Provision of Resourcing</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity Policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of Transparency, Cost-effectiveness, Accountability, and provision for inter-authority Evaluation.	<i>Ensure joined up strategic planning and provision of multi-annual funding.</i>
<b>Formality of policy appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Establishment of minimum public service standards with ex post appraisal.</i>
<b>Frameworks for outcome appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Underpinning of transparency, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and provision for inter-authority evaluation.	<i>Establishment of minimum public service standards with ex post appraisal.</i>
<b>Outcomes based policy appraisal</b>	<i>Disaggregation/ambiguity policy framework</i>	<i>Iterative/co-governance policy application</i>	Provision for equality, fairness, transparency, Cost-effectiveness, accountability, and evaluation	<i>Joint annual/multi-annual agreement based on the national standards of service provision.</i>

The above analysis suggests that the proposed Irish centre-local policy interface has several hallmarks of each model but that in the unique environment that has shaped the relationship, the relationship may be unbalanced depending on the area under consideration. This allows for the necessary flexibility to shift policy perspective on a shared basis where the local and international environment can change. It also suggests that the move towards a person centred public service at all levels of government could be achieved within the existing framework, provided greater focus could be given to determining the nature and extent of the service delivery. Such a move would also allow for consideration of service entitlement and resourcing to underpin such entitlement, especially in regard to universal service planning.

#### *7.5.1 Implications of the suggested model*

There are implications of applying an ideal model as set out above, even if it appears that the leap required is not as great as might have been expected. The principal shift is one where the centre accepts the obligation to negotiate with the local policy environment in regard to the actual meeting of national policy expectations on the part of the local policy arena. This would involve an acceptance of the need for greater clarity in setting policy direction on the basis of an established institutional framework which in the case of social inclusion is actually in place but not used. There would be a need to replicate such an institutional framework across the wider local government policy environment. In addition, it would place an obligation to ensure that policy development becomes iterative. Such an approach would underpin the identification of shared policy outcomes. Such outcomes could if considered as appropriate, be cross sectoral or even across the local and national electoral cycle.

Ultimately the agreement around policy outcomes would also allow for a more independent appraisal of individual policies, in the first instance, but would also allow for appraisal of policy implementation on an individual authority basis thus allowing for greater understanding of the efficiency and effectiveness of individual local authorities, as is the case in Nordic countries. The next and final chapter considers what would necessarily have to be done to move towards the suggested model and will outline the means by which it might be achieved.

## **Chapter 8: Findings, recommendations and conclusions**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis started out with a perspective largely driven by an accepted understanding of the nature of the local-centre relationship in Ireland. There was however, a sense that the delineation of Irish local-centre policy-making as centralised was never fully adequate and in any event never really provided the scope to consider the nature of a more appropriate model for Ireland. Given this the thesis developed a series of issues for consideration in the Irish case, having regard for the on-going process of change to the local-national policy process. The thesis focused on a series of considerations to establish the fundamental nature of the local-centre policy process. This included:

- The need to address current thinking in public management generally, and the strands of academic perspective which inform such thinking. This included the development of the characteristics and fields of influence which more appropriately define the nature of local-centre policy development
- Having addressed the local-centre relationship, the literature review allowed the researcher to create new models to delineate the range of such relationships. These models were used to consider the public management structures in Ireland and whether they sufficiently reflect the nature of the changed policy environment.
- In addition, the models were examined to test for their applicability to the Irish local-centre policy-making process. The outcome of this was an acknowledgement that a variant which encompasses a uniquely Irish institutional type is necessary. In that context, the researcher also examined recent efforts to reform the institutional arrangements of local government.

Specific examination of the individual characteristics developed through the literature review allowed determination of the nature of the Irish local-centre relationship. In addition, it allowed the researcher to define structures that are more appropriate to the local-centre policy relationship. In doing so it analysed the implementation of the local government modernisation process in Ireland.

## **8.2 Application of the methodology**

Chapter four set out the methodology. A mixed method approach was taken which allowed the researcher to develop the thesis over an extended time frame within a dynamic environment. This is so as it built on an already developed series of academic strands but did so in the knowledge that the research area itself was relatively under explored. The combination of the literature review and primary official document review with the case study, underpinned by a series of initial open interviews and questionnaire, allowed the researcher to establish a clear perspective on the nature of the policy relationship. This was then underpinned by the completion of the elite interviews. The principal surprise came through the official document review where it became evident, early on, that accepting the idea that the Irish local-centre policy process was one driven by national interests was not tenable. Rather, it became apparent that the researcher's initial thinking would have to shift considerably in light of the thinking associated with the transition from modern public management into post-modern public management. This reassessment was subsequently underpinned by the open interviews and the case study.

### **8.3 The key findings**

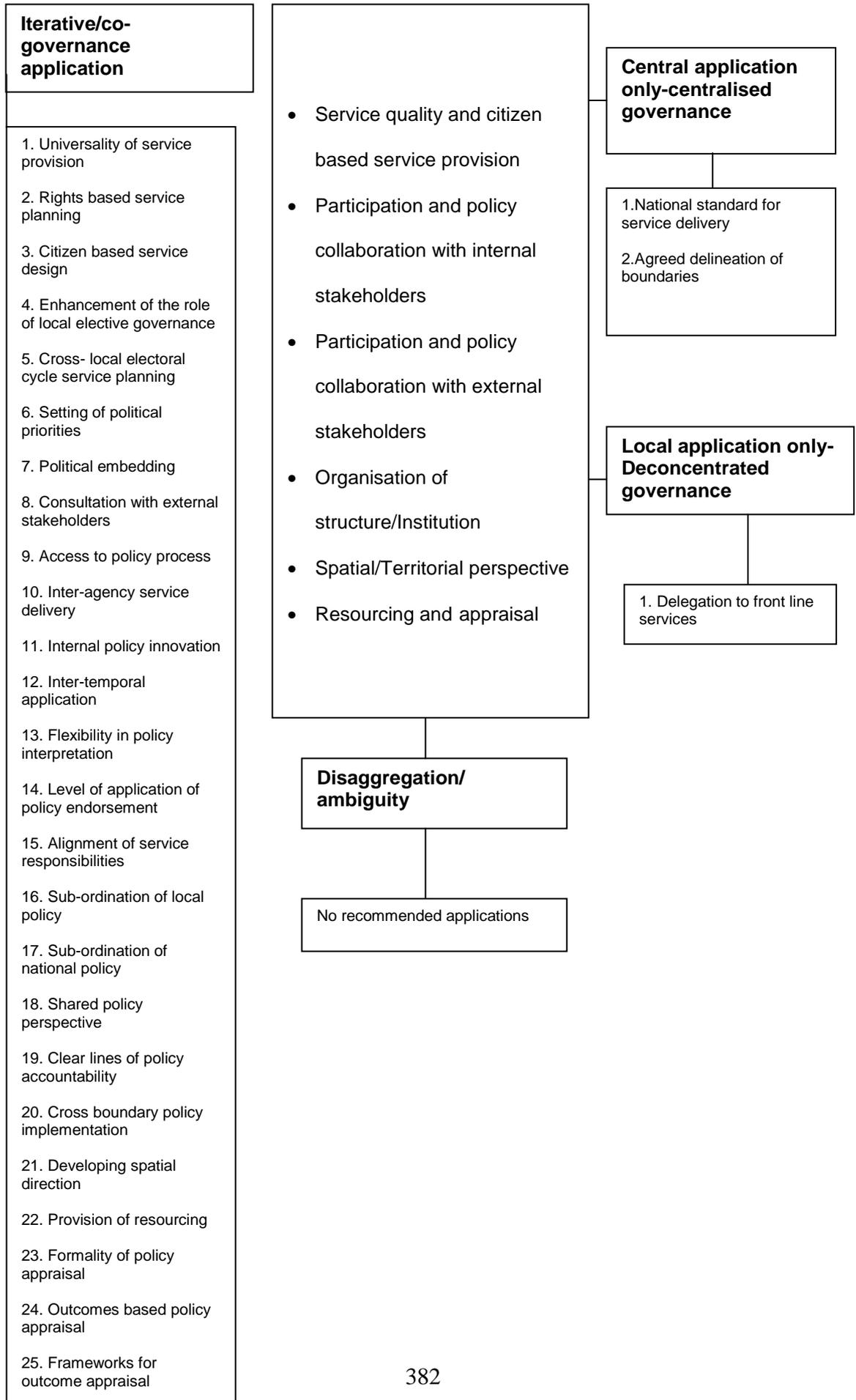
The essential point to be drawn from the research undertaken for this thesis is that it is no longer valid to categorise local-centre policy-making within the narrow confines of either centralisation or local autonomy. Rather what is requiring acknowledgement, as the research demonstrates, is that policy-making across the two levels of government has to be iterative and ultimately based on a shared perspective determined within a negotiated space. A failure to establish iteration across the horizontal, vertical and crucially, the diagonal layers of public management will simply enhance the opportunity for ambiguity and disaggregation. This may, for some, be a perfectly acceptable approach to policy-making in its own right. When considered, however, against the thinking associated with collaborative planning, spatial perspective, strategic planning, sustainability, multi-level and joined-up government, it is an approach unsuitable to meet the needs of a post-modern society. The research demonstrates that local authorities can "ignore" national policy if there is a perceived conflict with local priorities and that the setting of such priorities is in any case clearly within the ambit of either the manager, or in some limited, if critical, instances the elected members. It is only with a specific direction from the national authorities that a particular policy line will be followed by a local authority. Such directions are rarely issued. Equally, the research demonstrates that the centre can find it useful to have a large measure of ambiguity when it comes to the acceptance of responsibility for poor service delivery.

The research identified the elements of an ideal model which would overcome the weakness of the existing Irish system. The next sections will outline how those elements could be implemented within the specificities of the Irish

context. The policy model in Ireland, the research clarifies, may currently be delineated as one of disaggregated ambiguity. Equally however, it is demonstrated in the research that there would be very real difficulty applying a deconcentrated policy regime in Ireland given the characteristics of such a policy system. In reality, due to international influences as well as the conflict between national policy obligations and local policy needs and demands, there is limited scope to have an autonomous policy environment generally in a post modern society. This, the research acknowledges, applies as much to the Nordic countries as it would to a country like Ireland.

Many of the characteristics associated with a model of co-governance would however be worth developing. This, in some sense, should come as no surprise given that such thinking has been a hallmark of the many reform efforts promoted since the publication of the Barrington Report. Nonetheless the actual delivery of such a model would be a huge challenge and could, if fully embedded, cause difficulties in terms of the current flexibility which is a hallmark of a number of local authorities. The key, it seems, is to build a negotiated space for policy development which would allow application of a co-governance model. Such a model would have to be tailored to meet the specific need for flexibility in the Irish local-centre policy environment. Given this need, the research points to a particular model that could be appropriate for Ireland as set out in Figure 16 below. The challenge is to translate this into a process which could underpin the on-going reform of the local-centre policy process. In doing so the policy framework would move from its current designation as being one which is disaggregated ambiguity towards a variant of the co-governance model.

**Figure 16: The recommended Irish model**



## **8.4 Characteristics of the preferred model**

### *8.4.1 Service quality and citizen based service provision*

#### 8.4.1.1 National standards for service delivery

The research clearly demonstrates that the current gap in national standards in most local authority policy areas is causing considerable frustration. There is an inescapable barrier to undertaking a comparative analysis of the actual efficiency of services provided. Senior management, councillors and staff are obliged with the exception of environmental requirements to put in place locally determined standards. This was noted by the OECD in its review of the Irish public service. There is resistance at the national level to their use, due in part to a fear that the setting of such standards would place an unnecessary burden on the national exchequer. Nonetheless, it is clear from the on-going development of thinking in regard to the local-centre policy process that national authorities elsewhere are putting such standards in place to provide a unified evaluation system. The drivers for such change are derived from the need to have greater transparency across public management systems, enhanced cost-effectiveness and accountability. This allows for national authorities to then undertake inter-authority evaluation to ensure that minimum public service standards are achieved.

In the Irish case this process would necessarily have to be driven at national level given the need to have cross-authority implementation. The implementation of the standards would necessarily be a feature of negotiation. This point is borne out by the recommendations of the OECD review of the Irish public service and is a central plank of *Transforming Public Service*.

#### 8.4.1.2 Delegation to front line services

Provision for equality and fairness based on local demographic characteristics is a central feature of inclusiveness. The research suggests that currently there is considerable freedom to determine the nature and extent of service delegation to front-line services. What is missing are the minimum standards referred to above. The enabling of service delivery to a minimum standard could be set in train through unified education and training for coalface personnel. More critical is the creation of an environment where such staff have a clear mandate as to what they can do and what they cannot. The experience to date of such an approach to environmental regulation suggests that this option would be feasible.

#### 8.4.1.3 Universality of service provision

The design/planning of services around users needs is recognised as a critical challenge confronting the local authority system. Currently there is very limited evidence of a unified approach to universal services even in those regulated by EU obligations such as water quality and environmental services generally. There is a complete absence of efforts to define what and where universality might apply to local services. Nonetheless the setting of minimum standards which would have application across all local authorities requires a negotiated process where differences in local priority could be resolved across the local authorities.

#### 8.4.1.4 Rights based service planning

Given current constitutional arrangements, rights based service planning would necessarily have to be included within a statutory process based ideally upon

the negotiated process associated with the establishment of universal service provision. The capacity for appeal through third party action would necessarily have to remain, notwithstanding the recognition of the principle of rights based service provision.

#### 8.4.1.5 Citizen based service design

The demands of citizens can vary over a spatial policy arena. Nonetheless a co-governance model would place the citizen at the heart of the local-national policy process. In doing so the needs of the wider community would be defined and thus could be incorporated into the policy formation engagement between the local and the national.

### *8.4.2 Participation and policy collaboration with internal stakeholders*

#### 8.4.2.1 Enhancement of the role of the local elective governance

The local-centre policy process needs to recognise the cultural reality of the councillor's role as a local ombudsman. This means that the councillor's role is understood. i.e. they are currently elected by their constituents to intervene where the constituents perception is that minimum service levels are not being achieved. Alternatively the constituents' see their councillors as a source of access to influencing a local executive decision. Policy development in a co-governance model could therefore focus on ensuring councillor inputs on the basis of the role as a policy ombudsman rather than the current perspective which falsely suggests that the councillor makes policy. This would allow for the role to return to one which the constituents recognise as appropriate. In addition, however, the necessity to have a senior local political leader/manager remains. The question is whether, this person should be directly elected and a

whole-time politician such as the Mayor in London or Rome, or be an appointee of the elected members as in France and Denmark or, as current arrangements apply, be an appointee of a central system of appointments as in the Netherlands where the Crown makes the relevant appointment on the advice of the Government.

#### 8.4.2.2 Cross- local electoral cycle service planning

The designation of the councillor as a local ombudsman would remove the pressures arising from cross-local electoral cycle planning. This would free the policy process to apply a longer term perspective whilst allowing the councillors to concentrate on the determination of annual budgets to deliver services to agreed local standards.

#### 8.4.2.3 Setting of political priorities

Political priorities in a co-governance model would be negotiated between the local political representatives and the national political framework. This would necessarily require a contribution from the national representative bodies into the national policy process. This is currently the case for other social partners. Examples for such processes are increasingly common throughout the OECD but are most notable in Scandinavia.

#### 8.4.2.4 Political embedding

The establishment of an agreed set of political priorities would necessarily require embedding into the setting of standards and agreement on levels of resourcing. A programme for local government to complement the national programmes for government would be a demonstration of a compact between

the local political process and the national partnership framework to achieve such an arrangement.

#### *8.4.3 Participation and policy collaboration with external stakeholders*

##### 8.4.3.1 Consultation with external stakeholders

The existing local institutional arrangements should either be worked as originally intended or abolished. Consultation could then be limited to project based programmes, which seems to be a successful model in social inclusion and water services. Alternatively, and ideally, the institutional arrangements would however become the formal means for policy engagement across the local-centre policy arena. Such processes could then have the role of determining local service priorities for inclusion in a national negotiated programme.

##### 8.4.3.2 Access to policy process

Current access on the part of many stakeholders and citizens is actually restricted at the local level. This approach should either be fully accepted with the resulting accountability applying or the institutional framework should create the space for transparent policy engagement.

##### 8.4.3.3 Inter-agency service delivery

With the establishment of a space for policy engagement should come an obligation for integrated service provision on an inter-agency basis. The local authority role as a facilitator through the CDB is relatively well established and could therefore be developed on the basis of the state- determined national

standards. The local authority would become the local monitor of such standards for the local public service generally.

#### 8.4.3.4 Internal policy innovation

Continued openness to internal policy development and innovation is a hallmark of a future policy model for Ireland. The considerable gap in mainstreaming innovation into local service delivery could then be addressed. The embedding of policy, addressed above in 8.4.2.4, would necessarily need to allow for such processes.

#### 8.4.3.5 Inter-temporal application

The model as developed in 8.2.2 would allow for greater integration into sustainable development innovation which is primarily driven by external factors and top-down policy initiative such as European regulation or the outcome of talks facilitated through the United Nations Environment Programme. In addition, by changing the role of the elected representative to that of local ombudsman, the short-term priorities of local constituency needs could be mitigated in the development of the policy programme applied at local level.

### *8.4.4 Organisation of structure/institution*

#### 8.4.4.1 Flexibility in policy interpretation

One of the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy process is that there can be considerable flexibility at local level in determining the application or otherwise of a national policy. The development of a negotiated national compact could restrict this flexibility and could impact negatively in some instances on the local capacity to be innovative in regard to specific locational issues. This issue could be addressed by allowing the policy space for local

innovation to be pushed to the national policy arena on the basis of creating demonstration actions which would be allowed if necessary to fail. Successful innovation could then be mainstreamed across the system in line with the move towards service universality if applicable.

#### 8.4.4.2 Level of application of policy endorsement

Current policy endorsement is limited. This, if introduced, would necessarily arise within the national policy compact discussions. Local implementation would then be informed by the national agreement and would be transparent for those under-going an endorsement process. The recommendations of the OECD review have been underpinned by *Transforming Public Services* and the *Croke Park Agreement* where development boards would be positioned to apply such endorsement processes, albeit in a limited number of instances. The Green Paper on Local Government Reform makes similar recommendations but most notably in light of on-going economic conditions, specific recommendations are included in both the *Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes 2009* and the *Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group, 2010*.

#### 8.4.4.3 Alignment of service responsibilities

There is limited alignment, the research suggests, between the internal service mandate of the local authorities and of other local public services. The implementation of a local endorsement process based on a national compact and within a service framework which sets minimum service standards would allow alignment to take place. There would be considerable added value, those

interviewed suggest, and related synergy were such an approach to be put in place.

#### 8.4.4.4 Subordination of local policy

In a negotiated policy framework sub-ordination of local policy would likely arise against the backdrop of national and universal standards. This is suggested to be the case in other public service arenas, including the traditionally locally autonomous Nordic States. The key advantage for the local policy process is that its direct input in the first instance to the national policy arena is assured. The system is therefore placed to influence that national policy arena in a manner that is currently not available to the local government system.

#### 8.4.4.5 Subordination of national policy

Current national policy development, as acknowledged in the research, is haphazard and in many instances when it comes to local implementation, the national policy-makers are unable to determine the rate of implementation. The development of a shared policy space with negotiated delivery underpinned by a shared evaluation framework would equip the national level to determine the degree to which subordination of national expectations is arising.

#### 8.4.4.6 Shared policy perspective

This is perhaps the most critical feature of a co-governance model. Aspects of co-governance are acknowledged in the research as being in place. Nonetheless there remains a significant cultural jump if a shared policy perspective is to be put in place. In addition to the re-designation of the role of the councillor to that of local ombudsman, the manager-chairman-mayor

relationship needs to be resolved as well as a determination of who it is that will contribute on behalf of local government into the national policy process. The limited co-governance engagement that does take place is facilitated through the Local Government Management Agency. The national representative bodies do not have the resources for policy engagement. The creation of a unified manager/councillor structure based on the LGMA would replicate similar examples of unified policy bodies throughout the European Union, most notably, Denmark.

#### 8.4.4.7 Clear lines of policy accountability

The research suggests that current experience with policy accountability is that it is largely ambiguous. There is a need to establish clear and minimum public service standards and through a local-centre compact determine where policy accountability rests. Various enforcement models have been attempted in other countries where such approaches have been put in place. The most notable example being the national role which the UK Audit Commission fulfils. Another notable example is the control model available in Denmark where the Local Government Denmark agency applies an overview and monitoring role on behalf of the central authorities. This is based on both annual and multi-annual criteria. A failure on the part of a local authority to meet its obligations as part of the national compact will ultimately be met by sanction on the entire local government system by way of financial penalty. There is therefore considerable peer pressure through the system as a whole to ensure that all authorities meet their obligations.

#### *8.4.5 Spatial/Territorial perspective*

##### 8.4.5.1 Agreed delineation of boundaries

The current local government system is not in a position to address policy boundaries or spatial boundaries. The national policy process necessarily retains this role albeit that it has tended to avoid addressing boundary issues until recent years. There remains a need to recognise that current local authority boundaries do not reflect the needs of existing communities and that these are restricted in addressing future planning needs in international competitiveness, among other policy arenas. The national policy process needs to become pro-active in addressing future spatial direction in a manner which complements other European planning systems. This will require a more rigorous application of national spatial criteria in an area currently largely free from such application.

##### 8.4.5.2 Cross boundary policy implementation

As for the above in regard to agreed delineation of boundaries, the national policy process needs to set direction on cross boundary policy implementation in the context of universal service provision and minimum service standards.

##### 8.4.5.3 Developing spatial direction

A similar national perspective needs to apply, particularly in regard to the provision of heavy infrastructure and other policy applications underpinning international obligations and competitiveness. It is acknowledged that the opportunity to do so may well be put in place with the adoption of the Planning and Development Act, 2010. However, in the absence of statutory enforcement through secondary legislation, this particular piece of legislation will remain

subject to ad hoc interpretation in much the same fashion of the out-going regulatory framework. The effect will be that administrative law, determined through the judicial process, will continue to set planning parameters in the country.

#### *8.4.6 Resourcing and appraisal*

##### 8.4.6.1 Resourcing of provision

The current local government system is, for current expenditure purposes, self-financed to a level of 57%, not including the Local Government Fund which is based on local motor taxation. There is limited transparency in the application of a needs based equalisation approach to the Fund. In a system where there is a national compact in regard to the range and extent of service provision set within a shared policy arena, resourcing would have to be put in place on the basis of an agreed multi-annual envelope. Current allocations, including in some instances for capital expenditure, are based on annual dispersed allocations that do not have regard for agreed service obligations. This applies even in the environmental policy arena, notwithstanding the rigor of EU standards. An essential feature of a co-governance model is the creation of a multi-annual resourcing of services which will be delivered on the basis of minimum standards and which allow for equalisation.

##### 8.4.6.2 Formality of policy appraisal

In a system where minimum standards are applied alongside agreed universal services, formal ex ante and ex post appraisal is necessary. A number of standards are in place in the Irish policy arena. However implementation is informal in some instances such as Poverty Impact Assessment and Regulatory

Impact Assessment. The research suggests that in the absence of a statutory obligation to apply such processes there is limited prospect of a national policy appraisal system developing.

#### 8.4.6.3 Frameworks for outcome appraisal

The research suggests that several local authorities have sought to introduce locally derived outcome frameworks such as various strategies to address social inclusion and other policy arenas. In the absence of minimum standards their impact is limited to the individual authorities. A system wide compact on expected outcomes would necessarily have to feature as a part of a shared policy arena.

#### 8.4.6.4 Outcomes based policy appraisal

There is a complete absence of outcomes based appraisal generally in public management in the OECD. The Irish local authorities in a number of instances and as acknowledged above have attempted to build up this form of appraisal. However there is limited acceptance of such techniques at the national level. There is limited benefit derived from such appraisal under current public management conditions.

### **8.5 Time for a local-national protocol?**

In the absence of a shared approach to policy development the prospect of a unified approach to meeting current and future policy challenges is unlikely. The reality, for Ireland, is that the existing ambiguity does, the research demonstrates, suit some if not all of those within the current framework. However, it could hardly be argued that the current arrangements meet the

needs of local and indeed the national populations. A co-governance model would require a considerable shift in ethos at both local and national level. The creation of auditable lines of accountability based on minimum service standards and transparent policy agreement would create an uncomfortable policy environment for both the local and the national policy-maker. Nonetheless increasingly such processes are becoming a feature of other local-centre policy arenas in the OECD.

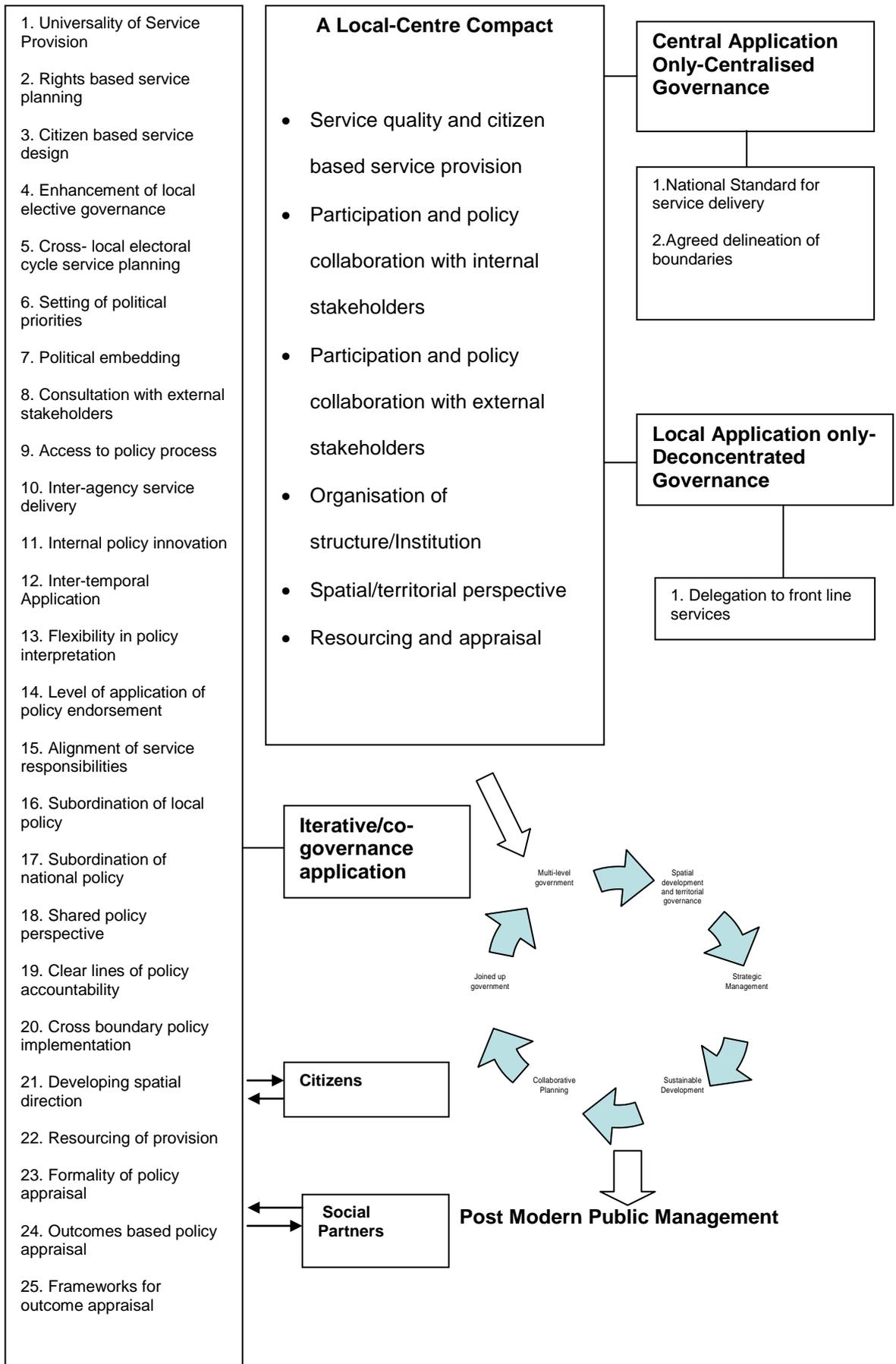
Essentially what is required, in a post modern public management environment, is a new variation of the framework suggested in Figure 3 as follows in Figure 17. The researcher is however realistic enough to accept that there is limited possibility of such a structure being put in place. Fundamentally the current system of disaggregation and ambiguity "fits" the structural needs of both national and local political figures. It allows sufficient scope for personal innovation among senior officials at both levels of government. Finally, it retains sufficient resources and delivers a range of services which seems to contain local dissatisfaction, given that there appears to be limited interest in genuine reform in Ireland of the local-centre policy framework.

The irony of the above is that, as demonstrated in the document review of the reform proposals for local government, many of the necessary institutional arrangements are readily available. The creation of the county/city development board structure provides a framework which could allow for local policy prioritisation if completed at the national level. The establishment of the Local Government Management Agency and its local-national committee for social inclusion does provide a model for the policy interface required to underpin an

expanded role for the development boards. Critically what is needed is a system for coordination across central departments and agencies. Usefully there is, in embryonic form, such a structure through the Senior Officers' Steering Group established under NAPinclusion. What is missing is the detailed road map, which the new model set out in Table 57 now provides, alongside the willingness at both senior political and administrative level to implement the suggested co-governance regime. These two critical building blocks remain absent in the Irish case and until this absence is acknowledged at national level, local reforms will continue to impact to a limited degree.

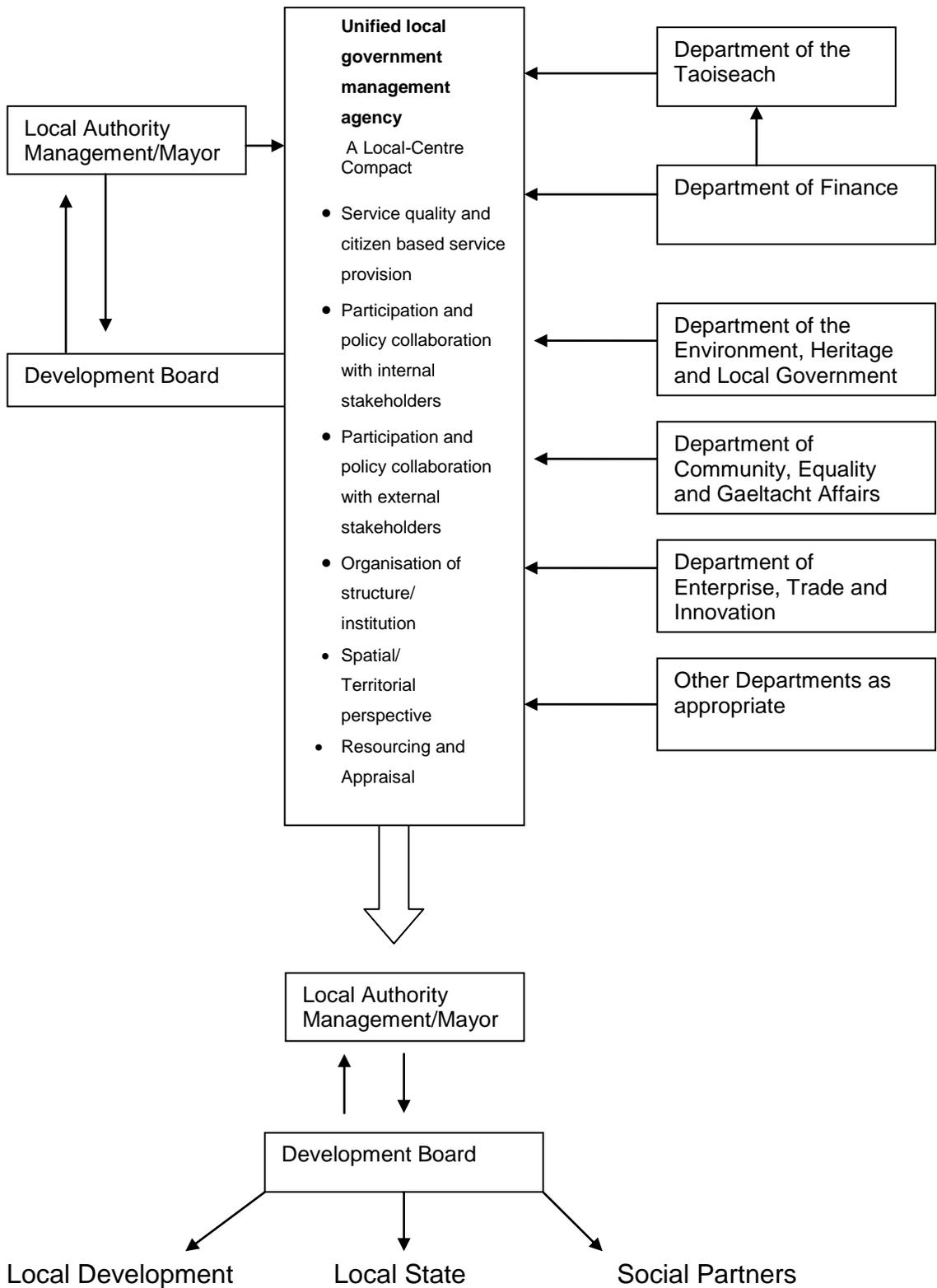
Nonetheless Figure 17 below provides a possible option to strengthen the local-centre policy process. The use of a local-centre policy compact is already a well established feature of public policy development and service delivery in other advanced economies. Indeed, as is evident from the research, Ireland tends to be an outlier in not having such institutional arrangements in place.

**Figure 17: A local-centre partnership agreement**



This translates structurally into a framework as suggested in Figure 18 below:

**Figure 18: The post-modern local-centre policy framework**



## **8.6 Towards further research**

The completion of this research should be seen simply as a starting point on a research journey that ideally would be open to an increasing circle of academic perspectives. Each characteristic of each field of influence in each model could in its own right be subject to much more detailed analysis in a manner not possible in this particular instance. The creation of a debate in regard to the validity of the findings of the research here would facilitate the creation of a more robust perspective and might even contribute to a process of reform that is so clearly required. If nothing else was to follow from the completion of this research project a debate around the validity of Ireland being a centralised state, challenged in depth here, would help the development of an on-going understanding of the nature of public management processes in Ireland. The lack of serious debate in the national media might be addressed, and a greater understanding of why it is that so much innovation fails to get translated into mainstream activities might develop. There might be the possibility that a greater comprehension could develop of the relationship between the councillor and the manager, the local authority and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Department and its peer departments.

Nonetheless, as acknowledged above, the local-centre policy interface is under researched. Future research effort should concentrate on understanding the nature of the policy relationship between the management structure and the elected members of local authorities. This need will become more urgent in the event of the likely recommendations in the forthcoming White Paper on Local Government. The enhancement of the role of the mayor will be a central feature of the White Paper. As such the internal policy dynamic will shift away from the

existing management and elected representative structure within local government towards a new institutional personality. The political standing of the mayor will also potentially have significant impact on the policy relationship from local to national and on the horizontal policy field at local level. The issues arising in this instance include the nature of the relationship between the individual mayor, whether they come together in a network of mayors, and how the interface works with central departments generally and not just the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In a complementary manner is the question of the Mayor and his/her role in the coordination of public services through the development board structure, as envisaged in the forthcoming legislation for the Dublin Regional Mayor.

In addition, the expanded role of local government will need to be examined in light of the recommendations of the *Report on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure* and the *Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group*. The implementation of these recommendations could have significant short term cost efficiency effects alongside longer term structural reforms which would roll back potentially much of the innovation associated with the development of the local partnership process. The creation of negative legacies, particularly in urban disadvantaged areas has resulted in considerable demand on resources not to mention the impact on the people living in such areas. The failure to integrate the policy implementation across public bodies in some instances has worsened the impact of national policy initiatives. This area remains substantially under researched, particularly through longitudinal analysis, and yet as demonstrated throughout the research in this thesis is a critical factor for much public service inadequacy.

## **8.7 Conclusion: Answering the key questions**

Chapter three identified key questions and posed a hypotheses based on the key issues developed at the start of the chapter. The research provides a comprehensive set of answers to the questions and clearly concludes that it is valid to argue in favour of the hypothesis. To sum up these answers the research holds:

- The policy characteristics and fields of influence identified in the literature review are applicable across the local-centre government policy relationship in Ireland. As such, delineation of the policy relationship as centralised is no longer valid.
- The application of the models establishes a greater understanding of the institutional relationships between the two levels. In doing so it places the existing policy interface within the model of disaggregated ambiguity. It finds that such a policy environment does provide the scope for innovative public service delivery at the local level but that this is subject to managerial direction rather than direction from the centre or the political process. It identifies examples of this innovation through the case study on social inclusion.
- The research determines that, with some limited refocusing on existing reform proposals, the local government system could move towards a co-governance model. However considerable reform at the national level would be necessary to underpin a genuine co-governance model.

In final conclusion, Ireland, as the hypothesis proposes, cannot be considered as centralised. The research demonstrates that there is limited application of the characteristics of centralisation. The existing environment is delineated by

limited direction, the absence of service standards and the failure to allocate resources on the basis of national policy expectations. Equally the system could not be described as decentralised. The disaggregated nature of the policy process suggests that where innovation is applied, generally by a management regime relatively unique within the OECD, there is considerable scope for local policy initiative. The weaknesses of the current policy interface could be overcome if there was the necessary political and administrative willingness at national level to more fully recognise that it exists within a policy environment where collaboration across levels of government, spatial and temporal dimension are necessary features for successful public management.

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