

**LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING IN BRITAIN:**

**the tensions between Compulsory Competitive Tendering and Local  
Agenda 21**

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awarded by Brunel University

by

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>ADLO</b>	<b>Association of Direct Labour Organisations</b>
<b>ALG</b>	<b>Association of London Government</b>
<b>AMA</b>	<b>Association of Metropolitan Authorities</b>
<b>CCT</b>	<b>Compulsory Competitive Tendering</b>
<b>CIPFA</b>	<b>Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy</b>
<b>CPS</b>	<b>Centre for Public Services</b>
<b>DETR</b>	<b>Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions</b>
<b>DLO</b>	<b>Direct Labour Organisation</b>
<b>DoE</b>	<b>Department of the Environment</b>
<b>DSO</b>	<b>Direct Service Organisation</b>
<b>EMAS</b>	<b>Environmental Management and Audit Scheme</b>
<b>FoE</b>	<b>Friends of the Earth</b>
<b>GMB</b>	<b>General, Municipal, and Boilermakers (Trade Union)</b>
<b>ICLEI</b>	<b>International Centre for Local Environmental Initiatives</b>
<b>IDeA</b>	<b>Improvement and Development Agency (formerly LGMB)</b>
<b>KWS</b>	<b>Keynsian Welfare State</b>
<b>LA21</b>	<b>Local Agenda 21</b>
<b>LGA</b>	<b>Local Government Association</b>
<b>LGIU</b>	<b>Local Government Information Unit</b>
<b>LGMB</b>	<b>Local Government Management Board</b>
<b>PSPRU</b>	<b>Public Sector Privatisation Research Unit</b>
<b>SWS</b>	<b>Schumpeterian Workfare State</b>
<b>TGWU</b>	<b>Transport and General Worker Union</b>
<b>UNCED</b>	<b>United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</b>

# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing concern about environmental degradation, with an increasing realisation by governments of the impacts of industrialisation on the global environment (Connelly & Smith, 1999). The international policy response since the late 1980s has been based on the concept of sustainable development, within which the aim is to integrate environmental sustainability with economic development (Brundtland, 1987), and this concept has been enshrined in Agenda 21, an internationally-agreed document emanating from the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992), commonly known as the Rio Summit. National governments have an important role to play in achieving sustainable development, however, local government is also regarded in Agenda 21 as central to the achievement of sustainable development. Indeed, historically, local government in Britain has been responding to environmental issues, and providing a range of local environmental services (defined for the purposes of this thesis as services which are intended to improve public health, and well-being, but also to improve the aesthetic quality of a local area). It is assumed in Agenda 21 that local authorities will adopt local sustainable development strategies, or Local Agenda 21s which integrate economic development, environmental protection, and social regeneration, and which involve the local population in making decisions about their local environment. These

expectations of local authorities are based on a view that local government has the capacity and structures to achieve this process. However, local authorities in Britain are restricted in their activities due to central government control over their activities and powers (Patterson & Theobald, 1999). Moreover, since the late 1970s, there have been increasing constraints on local government in terms of raising their own finances, in conjunction with increasing pressure on local authorities to reduce costs, as central government funds have not been increased in line with demand. This raises a question about the ability of local government to respond to the demands of sustainable development. The next section describes the focus of the research.

## **1.2 The research focus**

This thesis focuses on the development of local environmental policy in Britain, and considers the consequences of local government restructuring. The term 'restructuring' is employed to describe far-reaching changes to the form, purpose, and ethos of local government as part of the state. One aspect of this restructuring is through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) - legislation which forces local authority workforces to compete with the private sector for the provision of services traditionally performed by a local government workforce. The research considers the implications of these changes for the ability of local authorities to fulfil their role as providers of local environmental services, and to respond to the demands of sustainable development.

The research is framed within two currently distinct debates: the first is the discourse of environmentalism and of sustainable development, and the second relates to the nature and purpose of local government. The scope of the empirical research encompasses the period from 1988 (the introduction of CCT to a range of manual services, including environmental services) to 1998, when the current Government introduced a new 'modernisation' framework for local government, which included the abolition of CCT. Clearly these new initiatives are likely to impact on local government, and these are considered in the concluding chapter. Having set out the research focus, the next section discusses the theoretical and personal origins of the research.

### **1.3 Origins of the research**

The origins of this research lie in two distinct theoretical frameworks. The first is the contemporary debate on the nature and resolution of environmental problems. This debate can be described as being between the dominant technocentric approach to the environment, and the ecocentric perspective (O'Riordan, 1981). Technocentrism recognises that environmental problems exist, but believes they can be ameliorated through careful economic and environmental management. Thus faith is placed in the usefulness of conventional scientific practice and in technology. Ecocentrism is based on a belief that humans should live in harmony with the environment, rather than exploiting it, and therefore it calls for radical changes to the patterns of production and consumption. The second debate is about the nature and purpose of local government. There are a number of competing theories on this within the broad frameworks of pluralism; the New Right; and Marxism. Each of the perspectives provides radically different explanations for the existence of local government.

Research on the tensions between the two debates has been neglected to date, and in particular there has been little research into the implications of these tensions for local government environmental practices. One contribution of this thesis is that it develops links between the currently distinct debates on the environment, and those on local government, through developing an empirically-based analysis of local government environmental policy and practices.

#### *1.3.1 Personal reasons for undertaking the research*

The personal origins of the thesis lie in two particular concerns. First, I had worked within local government in London for several years during the late 1980s to early 1990s, and had become familiar with the internal *mechanisms of* local government, and the increasing constraints on the powers, and financing of local authorities. This knowledge was extended further in my current post, through conducting research into public sector restructuring, specifically in local government and its impact on employment practices. In undertaking this research, I became particularly interested in the possible links between changes to working practices, and the impact of this on the quality of the local environment. Secondly, my involvement in national and local environmental activities, through being a member of Friends of the Earth, has contributed to my awareness of environmental issues at the global, national, and local level,

and has led me to question how the current form of local government is able to respond to the demands of sustainable development.

#### **1.4 Aims and objectives of the research**

The research has three general aims:

- 1) To examine the role of local government in addressing environmental issues, and its response to the demands of sustainable development.
- 2) To examine the consequences of contemporary forms of restructuring for the ability of local government to fulfil its environmental role.
- 3) To explore the relationship between debates on the environment and on local government, through a consideration of local environmental practices.

In relation to these aims, the research has four main objectives:

- 1) To provide empirical evidence of the contemporary changes to local government, in particular those associated with CCT.
- 2) To consider the impact of CCT on the provision of three core environmental services traditionally delivered by local government: refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance.
- 3) To provide empirical evidence of local authority progress in the establishment of local sustainable development strategies, termed Local Agenda 21s.
- 4) To explore the tensions between CCT and Local Agenda 21.

#### **1.5 Outline of chapters**

The first of the literature review chapters, Chapter Two, explores the changing state/society/environment relationship, through considering the historical development of concerns relating to the detrimental environmental impact of industrialisation and urbanisation, and government responses to these. The modern environmental debate has been based on a broad distinction between an ecocentric and technocentric position (O'Riordan, 1981), although more

recent approaches have combined elements of both (Dobson, 1991; Red-Green Study Group, 1995; Pepper, 1996). The chapter explores how the technocentric concept of sustainable development, which is intended to resolve the conflicts between environmental sustainability, and economic development, has been developed since the 1980s. The chapter discusses the adoption of sustainable development as a policy framework at international level, through global agreements such as Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) and examines the response of the British Government to the sustainable development agenda.

Local government in Britain plays an important environmental role as part of the state's response to environmental problems (Lowe & Ward, 1998; Connelly & Smith, 1999). The remainder of Chapter Two therefore undertakes an examination of the development of local government's environmental responsibilities, in both responding to environmental problems, and providing environmental services. It then considers the role of local government, as defined in Agenda 21, in responding to the demands of sustainable development, through the establishment and implementation by local authorities of a Local Agenda 21 strategy. Agenda 21 is based on an assumption (inherent in a pluralist conception of local government), that local authorities have the capacity to involve local people in decision-making processes, and to integrate economic development with environmental protection. The chapter concludes however, that there are a number of barriers to local government developing LA21, in terms of a lack of resources, a lack of support from central government, and inadequate powers.

The constraints on local government, highlighted in Chapter Two, necessitate a wider evaluation of the contemporary restructuring of local government in Britain. Chapter Three therefore explores how central government policy has impacted on local government, and considers the implications for the role and purpose of local government. The chapter first provides a historical context to the development of modern local government since the mid-nineteenth century, and considers the impact on local authorities of reorganisation, internal modernisation, loss and accretion of functions, and increasing politicisation in the 1970s. The chapter then provides an account of, and reasons for, the restructuring of local government from 1976 (the origin of the most recent set of constraints on local government expenditure) to 1998. The changes to finance and organisation are examined, and then the politics of



privatising service provision, in particular the negative consequences of CCT for local government are considered.

Having provided an account of the restructuring of local government, Chapter Four attempts to explain these changes through an evaluation of different theoretical perspectives on the role of local government in Britain. Three broad approaches are considered: pluralist and neo-pluralist; New Right; and Marxist. First, those broadly based on the dominant, pluralist conceptualisation of local government are discussed. Critiques of this from within a neo-pluralist framework, in terms of corporatist, managerialist, and dual state approaches, and 'local' perspectives are then considered. It is proposed that both localism and communitarianism (the latter based on the New Urban Left local authority experiences of the 1980s) are relevant to the concerns of this thesis, as they focus on the democratic role of local government, and the importance of involving local people in decision-making processes, a theme of LA21. However, it is argued that localism is limited in that it does not account for the political processes of local government, and for the conflictual relationship with central government. Secondly, a New Right critique of pluralism is examined, through an analysis of the two strands of New Right thinking: neo-liberalism, and neo-conservatism. The discussion focuses on public choice theory within the neo-liberal perspective, as it specifically considers the role of local government. An explanation is then provided of how the strands were combined in Conservative Government policymaking during the 1980s and early 1990s, and it is concluded that the New Right analysis is limited in its explanation of local government as it is based on an individualistic notion of service provision, and one which is competitive and market-driven. Thirdly, Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses of local government as a response to the limitations of the pluralist and New Right positions are considered. The discussion focuses on local state theories of the 1970s and 1980s. It then suggests that the regulationist perspective, which emphasises the role of the state in the regulation of capitalism, is helpful in explaining local government's role as part of the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS), and therefore of crises in the KWS. The application of regulation theory to environmental policymaking, by Gandy (1992) and Gibbs (1996, 1998) is also particularly useful as it provides an analysis at the theoretical and policy level of conflicts between local economic regulation and local environmental policy. The 'restructuring' thesis is then explored, as it offers an empirically-based conceptualisation of local government in providing public services, in terms of the shift from mass production to flexible forms of

production in public sector service provision . The chapter concludes that elements of neo-pluralist, and of Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches to local government provide the most relevant analysis of local government restructuring, and these form the underpinning of the empirical research.

The conclusions drawn from the literature review on the environmental debate, and on the nature of local government, are that there are fundamental contradictions between the development of an appropriate policy response to sustainable development at local level, and the lack of powers and resources possessed by local government in Britain. Based on these findings, the purpose of the empirical research is to evaluate whether these contradictions are manifested in practice. Chapter Five therefore sets out the methodological framework in which the empirical research is conducted. The research draws on two approaches to social research: a realist methodology, which is based on the premise that real objects exist to be studied, but that knowledge of these is subjective and continuously developing (Sayer, 1992); and a feminist perspective, which emphasises the subjectivity of the researcher, and the influence of the researcher's positionality on the process (England, 1994). These approaches are combined to provide a framework in which intensive, grounded research is conducted in three West London Boroughs. The research involves qualitative techniques in the form of semi-structured interviews, supported by extensive survey material. This permits an evaluation of the quality of provision of three environmental services subject to CCT, in particular localities, and of the responses of a number of postholders in particular positions within each Borough to the CCT process and to the issues raised by LA21. A critical analysis of the different stages of the primary research is presented, from the pilot stage through to the dissemination of the findings, and there is an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted.

Chapter Six, the first of two empirical chapters, examines the impact of contemporary forms of local government restructuring, particularly CCT, on the refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services. The empirical research, in conjunction with the wider literature, permits a consideration of how the contemporary form and content of local government is constraining local authorities in the provision of these services. A number of detrimental consequences of CCT are considered: the impact of CCT on local authority internal structures; the impact on the terms and conditions, and working practices of those providing environmental services; the difficulties

involved in the incorporation of environmental criteria into contracts; the lack of flexibility in contracts and lack of initiative required of the workforce; the level and quality of monitoring service provision; the loss of councillor control due to the client-contractor split; and the implications of the CCT process for the social welfare role of local government. The chapter concludes that the restructuring of local government reduces its ability to deliver good quality environmental services, and more generally, constrains its ability to adequately respond to the demands of sustainable development.

Chapter Seven, the second empirical chapter, considers the response of local authorities to a recent environmental initiative, LA21, which has implications for local government policymaking as it requires the integration of environmental protection with economic development and social welfare policies. The chapter first provides an account of the development of environmental strategies and LA21 in the three West London Boroughs. Secondly, drawing on the findings from the empirical research, and the wider literature on LA21, the chapter discusses the barriers faced by local government in attempting to implement and develop a Local Agenda 21 process. It considers the relationship between central and local government, and the impact of reduced funding for the ability of local authorities to develop LA21 strategies, and to implement them. There is an assessment of the response of local authorities, in terms of making changes to their internal mechanisms, to accommodate LA21. The level of integration of LA21 with environmental services, and with socio-economic strategies is evaluated, and finally the response of local authorities to the need to develop more participatory approaches is considered. The chapter concludes that the current form of local government in Britain is not conducive to addressing the demands of sustainable development, partly due to a lack of awareness within local authorities, and the local population about the importance of LA21, but also due to the lack of resources, powers, and support from central government.

Chapter Eight presents the conclusions. It returns to consider the main aims of the thesis, and the central findings of the literature review. It then re-examines the key findings from the empirical research, and reflects on the methodological approaches adopted for this research. The chapter draws out the main themes which have emerged from the research, and considers future avenues of study which have emerged from the research, in particular the scope for further analysis of the conflicts between environmental practices and

LA21, but also the need for an assessment of the implications of the 'Best Value' programme (the replacement for CCT), introduced in 1998, for the development of LA21. Finally, wider conclusions on the nature and purpose of local government, in responding to the sustainable development agenda are set out.

## 2

# Environmentalism and Sustainable Development

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the contradictions between contemporary theoretical and policy approaches to the environment, and the current forms of restructuring taking place in local government in Britain. An evaluation of these contradictions necessitates an understanding of the environmental problems arising from industrial capitalism, and of the ways in which these have been addressed at theoretical level and in policymaking at the national and local level of government. This chapter begins by discussing the historical context of the environmental debate, and the state response to environmental problems, in order to situate the subsequent analysis of the contemporary environmental debate. The discussion then focuses on how the environmental debate has developed through the emerging discourses of sustainability and sustainable development during the 1980s and 1990s. It briefly considers the ways in which these are underpinned by the broad technocentrism/ecocentrism perspectives within the environmental debate, and explains why sustainable development has become the dominant discourse. It assesses the implications of the concept of sustainable development for policymaking at international and national level, in particular through the implementation of the principles of Agenda 21 (a key document emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992). The discussion then provides an account of the role of local government in environmental policymaking. It explores how the environmental role of local government developed, and then

focuses on its contemporary environmental responsibilities and regulatory powers. This permits an assessment of the ability of local authorities to respond to the sustainable development agenda, and to develop a Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategy. Finally the chapter draws some conclusions on the role of local government in responding to environmental issues.

## **2.2 Historical development of the environmental debate**

A concern for the environment has been in evidence since the early 1800s with the emergence of industrial capitalism, and the particular forms of production this involved (O'Riordan, 1981). The conservation movement emerged during this period, with academics such as Malthus questioning how far industrial capitalism could take society towards progress (Dryzek, 1997). Lowe & Goyder (1983), however, situate the beginning of the formal environmental movement in the late Victorian period. They suggest this arose from a reassessment by social reformers of the social and economic changes of the nineteenth century, and a pessimistic perception of the prospects for social and economic advance when environmental problems needed to be resolved. There was particular concern about the impact on urban life and urban growth, from problems such as smoke pollution from factories, and poor housing standards. The focus at this time related to localised and more specific issues, such as public health and the establishment of municipal parks to improve the health and well being of the urban population. There was also a recognition of the impact of environmental degradation on future generations - as Lowe & Goyder (1983) comment - the notion of a collective interest within Victorian environmentalism was often conceived to extend beyond the present. It was argued, for example, by reformers such as William Morris and Edwin Chadwick that there was a duty to preserve the natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations, and this was framed in an appeal for a collective approach to resolving environmental problems, as opposed to the principles of economic liberalism and the class conflict of industrial cities, which existed at this time.

Morris and Chadwick were influential in highlighting the environmental consequences of urban and technological change. Chadwick was a campaigner for improvements to public health, while Morris's ideas stemmed from a vision of London in which its population and industry were largely dispersed, leaving the city in a clean and healthy state (Sandbach, 1980; Whitney, 1995). Kropotkin (1899) argued for the establishment of decentralised communities in

which agriculture, industry and the arts were all practised (Bowlby & Lowe, 1994), and his ideas have been influential in the tradition of town planning in Britain in the twentieth century, through the work of Patrick Geddes, Patrick Abercrombie, and Ebenezer Howard. The Garden Cities Movement in the early twentieth century, of which Howard was a key proponent, expressed similar concerns to those of earlier social reformers about the state of the environment, regarding cities as environmentally and socially degraded (Haughton & Hunter, 1995).

Victorian environmentalists conceived an active role for the state, "...to temper rampant individualism, and to promote the collective interest in environmental protection" (Lowe & Goyder 1983, p22). Lowe & Goyder (1983) suggest that, with the growth of the power of the state during the early 1900s, environmental groups increasingly lobbied for its regulatory function to be strengthened, particularly in relation to land use planning, pollution control and the loss of natural or historic features. Indeed the state's regulatory role did expand during the late nineteenth century, in terms of regulating polluting industries, the protection of buildings and sites, and the development of land-use planning. The state also provided the infrastructure for environmental improvements through investment in public health measures and transport. Further examples of the state's increased role included the guardianship of monuments, under the 1882 Ancient Monuments Act, which enabled central government to assume responsibility for the protection and maintenance of a monument and meant the owner abdicated the right to destroy it. This was replaced in 1913 by stronger legislation, which permitted central government to impose Preservation Orders on building, and similar arguments developed for the state to protect 'natural' monuments. The responsibility of the state also increased in the area of promoting, either directly or indirectly, developments with considerable environmental impacts, for example roads, power stations, and New Towns.

During the first half of the twentieth century, there were a number of areas where the state intervened in response to the pollution caused by the processes of industrial capitalism. First, technological development required a response from government in terms of controlling the adverse effects of pollution, noise, social and economic uncertainties and risks associated with technological change. Secondly, the state took on increased responsibility for the operation and management of the economy, including, for example, the nationalisation of public utilities, intervention to rescue failing industries, and the provision of

major items of infrastructure, such as railways and telecommunications. Thirdly, social change was closely related to changes in the economic system, and involved a response by the state to issues of geographical mobility, the changing structure of families, and increased demands for public expenditure on welfare services (Self, 1985).

The state's environmental role was therefore clearly expanding in response to increasing concerns about the impact of capitalism on the environment during the first half of the twentieth century. However, Dryzek (1997) has argued that, despite the growth of the environmental movement, and the development of policies by the state to regulate pollution and provide amenity services, 'the environment' did not exist as a concept in politics and policymaking in any country until the 1960s. Dobson (1991) suggests that the beginning of the inclusion of environmental issues in policy discourses was in the early 1960s, with the publication of Rachel Carson's book 'Silent Spring' (1962), which tells of the indiscriminate use of modern chemical pesticides, fungicides and herbicides on the land and warns of the ensuing environmental destruction. Subsequent to this, the environmental movement took a distinctive form in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Torgerson, 1995) with global crises helping to explain the growing awareness at a global level of the international nature of many environmental problems. During this period a mass of hitherto unsuspected environmental problems were uncovered, such as marine pollution, and these created a sense of insecurity and catastrophe amongst the general public (Sandbach, 1980). Global environmental problems were highlighted in key publications such as 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (Hardin, 1968), which focused on the role of individuals in overusing scarce resources; and the 'Limits to Growth' report (Meadows *et al.*, 1972) which considered the issue of population growth and global resources, and concluded that population increases would constitute a major barrier to conserving resources. These and other issues were brought into the political arena through the establishment of the UK Ecology Party (later renamed the Green Party) and other western European Green Parties in the early 1970s, as part of a wider environmental movement.

The contemporary debate (since the 1960s) around the nature of environmental problems, and their resolution has been characterised as being divided between an anthropocentric (or human-centred) approach to the environment, also termed 'technocentric' by O'Riordan (1981), and its emergent ecocentric critics. Theobald (1996) provides an overview and



discussion of these approaches, but a brief summary will suffice here. Technocentrists recognise that environmental problems exist, but believe that, by careful economic and environmental management, they can be ameliorated. Thus faith is placed in the usefulness of conventional scientific practice and technology, rather than the ecocentrist emphasis on making changes to the present forms of production and consumption. Ecocentrism is based on a belief that humans should live in harmony with the environment, rather than exploiting it (Naess, 1988; 1997; Durning, 1995; Trainer, 1995; Mercier, 1996). The following section evaluates the contemporary discourses of sustainability and sustainable development, which have emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, and explains that these are radically different perspectives, being underpinned respectively by ecocentrist, and technocentrist views.

### **2.3 Conceptualising sustainable development**

The principles incorporated in the notions of sustainability, and sustainable development and are presented in a 'ladder of sustainable development' (Baker *et al.*, 1997 - see Table 2.1) which reflects the divisions between broadly technocentric/anthropocentric, and ecocentric positions. This table can be misleading, as it places what it refers to as the 'Ideal Model' (synonymous with sustainability), within the same framework as different forms of sustainable development, despite the concepts being fundamentally different. As discussed below, the table is, however, useful as it shows the different perspectives in terms of geographical focus, the role of the economy, and appropriate institutions.

The notion of sustainability is enshrined in ecocentrist perspectives, and originates in the context of discussions about harvesting and managing renewable resources, in such a way as not to damage future supplies (Baker *et al.*, 1997). Advocates of sustainability position the natural above the social. They emphasise the benefits of decentralised self-sustaining communities, based upon co-operation and participation, which operate within an economic framework radically different to the current system in developed, capitalist countries. The approach promotes equity between all sectors of society, and for future generations, through the sustainable use of natural resources.

**Table 2.1 Ladder of sustainable development in advanced industrial societies**

Approach to sustainable development	Role of economy and nature of growth	Geographical focus	Institutions
'Ideal Model'	Meeting needs not wants; changes in patterns of consumption and production	Bioregionalism; extensive local self-sufficiency	Decentralisation of political, legal, social and economic institutions
Strong sustainable development	Environmentally regulated market; changes in production and consumption	Heightened local self-sufficiency; promoted in general context of global markets	Some restructuring of functions
Weak sustainable development	Market-reliant policy; changes in patterns of consumption	Initial moves to self-sufficiency; minor initiatives to alleviate power of global markets	Minimal amendments to institutions
Treadmill	Exponential growth	Global markets and global economy	No change

Source: Baker *et al.*, 1997, p11

Sustainable development has a radically different theoretical framework to that of sustainability, as it is based on a technocentrist and therefore human-based conceptualisation of the nature of environmental problems, and the resolution of these. Sustainable development as a concept incorporates the basic premise that conflicts between economic growth, environmental degradation, and social justice, can be reconciled without the need for radical changes to the current socio-economic system. Sustainable development is argued by some commentators (e.g. McManus, 1996; Myerson & Rydin, 1997) to be far more complex than the concept of sustainability as it adds a further, significant, dimension to the debate, with its proponents accepting that economic growth will continue. Sustainable development has recently been defined as:

... development judged to be both economically and environmentally sound, so that the needs of the world's current population can be met without jeopardising those of future generations (Kemp, 1998, p389).

Yet capitalist economic development does not seek to meet collective needs, nor does it place environmental sustainability as a necessary aspect of economic development. This is exacerbated by the complexity and ambiguity of the concept and the ensuing confusion around its implementation (discussed further in section 2.4).

Three alternative frameworks for putting sustainable development into practice have been described by Baker *et al.* (1997) in their ladder of sustainable development: a treadmill approach (although, as shown in Table 2.1, this is not about sustainable development, rather it is a 'do nothing' approach); weak sustainable development, and strong sustainable development and these are now considered in turn. A 'treadmill' approach is at the bottom of the ladder, and according to Baker *et al.*, adherents to a 'treadmill' approach, such as Simon & Kahn (1984), view development in terms of an extension of Western capitalism into areas which they believe have not yet experienced the advantages of development in material terms. As Baker *et al.* comment, the:

... underlying assumption of this approach is that, given the freedom to innovate, human ingenuity, especially expressed through technology, can solve any environmental or technical problems (1997, p12).

These ideas are similar to the mainstream technocentric perspective, as the emphasis is on the ability of humans to address environmental problems through the use of technology.

'Weak sustainable development' differs from the 'treadmill' approach since it emphasises the need to integrate capitalist growth with environmental concerns, and this conceptualisation forms the context for contemporary liberal-democratic approaches to environmental policymaking. According to Pearce *et al.* (1989; 1994), the principles of neo-classical economics can be applied to the solution of environmental problems. Sustainable development is thus viewed as economic growth achieved by economic efficiency within a capitalist system, which is subject to the constancy of the natural resources. There have been a number of criticisms of this approach, for instance Baker *et al.* (1997) point to the ethnocentrism of the particular form of development, based on the experience of wealthier countries such as Britain. They argue that this values the environment only in monetary terms, reducing environmental problems to managerial ones, and thus it does not take into account the importance of valuing the environment in its own right.

The third notion proposed by Baker *et al.* is 'strong sustainable development', argued by them to be represented by proponents such as Weale (1992). Whilst Pearce *et al.* (1989), and Pearce (1994) argue that economic development is a precondition of environmental protection, advocates of strong sustainable development assert that environmental protection is a precondition of economic development (for example Baker *et al.*, 1997). This strong sustainable development approach requires market regulation and state intervention at national level, but also emphasises the need to involve local communities when discussing changes to the local economy and the protection of the local environment, although it is not clear who determines these changes, or whether they are necessary (this point is developed in Chapter Seven). The strong sustainable development perspective has been adopted in recent years by those advocating 'ecological modernisation'.

An ecological modernisation approach is in an attempt to address more fully, and move beyond, the conflictual relationship between economic development and environmental protection. Advocates (for example Gouldson & Murphy, 1997; Jacobs, 1997; Tindale, 1997) propose that these can be combined to synergistic effect in the framework of an advanced industrial economy. Gouldson & Murphy (1997) stress that environmental degradation is not an incidental by-product of economic activity, which can be solved only by pollution control techniques. Rather it arises from the fundamental features of modern industrial economies, such as the burning of fossil fuels, the production of food, and patterns of employment; and social inequalities. Changing these requires a radical restructuring of economic and social organisation, but this is not seen as incompatible with the maintenance of capitalism and continuing (but possibly slower) economic growth.

According to Blowers & Pain (1999), ecological modernisation has four main aspects in terms of policymaking: the first is that by introducing ecological criteria into the production and consumption process, it will be possible to reduce resource consumption and pollution to sustainable levels; secondly, there is a key role for the market economy which is seen as the most efficient way of achieving sustainable development objectives; thirdly, the partnership between the state and the market is emphasised, in providing a regulatory framework for environmental protection; fourthly, other interested groups or 'stakeholders' are incorporated into the policy process through participation in decision-making, the aim being to involve environmental

groups and citizens in the development of ideas and policies for sustainable development.

In relation to the latter two aspects, Blowers & Pain (1999) suggest that the social tensions and conflicts with and between local authorities, and 'stakeholder' groups are ignored, thus serving to legitimate what they regard as the most powerful partnership - that between government and business (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Moreover, the premise that the state and market are in a compatible relationship is true only if "... the state undertakes to provide infrastructure, to assume the costs of welfare and to exercise its regulatory function lightly" (Blowers & Pain, 1999, p269). In addition, the state is expected to manage the political consequences of low levels of social welfare spending and continuing environmental pollution. Thus, the form of the state has implications for the implementation of policies underpinned by sustainable development principles. The strong sustainable development approach, as exemplified by ecological modernisation, does not seek to radically challenge the current economic or political system. However, it is clear that more radical changes to the capitalist system and to current forms of democracy are required in order to empower communities locally, regionally, nationally and globally to protect the environment.

Having considered the range of positions which form the contemporary discourse on sustainable development, and their limitations, it is possible to conclude that sustainable development is an attempt at a theoretical level to reconcile economic development with increasing environmental protection. An ecological modernisation approach is an important development in the debate, as it recognises the enormity of the conflicts between economic development and environmental protection. Its solution is based on maintaining current forms of production and consumption, but attempting to reduce levels of resource use, and pollution. However, even the strong form of sustainable development does not provide the means to reduce the wide economic and social inequalities between and within societies. Sustainable development, particularly in the form of ecological modernisation, is however, one way in which some negative outcomes of capitalism, in terms of the environment, could be addressed (for example, as in other European countries such as Norway and Germany).

A considerable obstacle to successfully incorporating the concept of sustainable development into policymaking, is its inherent ambiguity and

vagueness, although Myerson & Rydin (1996) suggest that ambiguity is potentially a creative resource, since it provides scope for debate. Perhaps because of this ambiguity, Agyeman & Evans (1994) argue that sustainable development can span the divisions between environmentalists, and economic and political interests who may not have immediately obvious environmental concerns. Lukes (1995) points to the unresolved questions which the vagueness of the concept has raised, suggesting that there has been little discussion of the time period of sustainable development; which groups in society the concept is aimed at, or the conditions under which sustainable development could be integrated into policymaking. Moreover, O'Riordan and Voisey (1997) argue that there has been no consensus on the definition of sustainable development to be adopted, and no discussion of the concept itself, with an in-built assumption that the best way to harmonise economic development and environmental protection is to bring environmental costs and benefits into the heart of economic decisions, best achieved in a vigorous market economy. However, Blowers (1996) argues that, under current political and economic conditions, action will be taken only by governments if it is clear that inaction will prove more costly, and it is therefore pertinent to ask *whose* environment and *whose* development is to be sustained, and moreover, to *whom* is inaction more costly. There is clearly an issue of social justice to be considered, as inaction is more costly to those not equipped to improve their environment, who tend to be the least wealthy in society, and who are already marginalised from policymaking processes (Benton, 1997). For instance, Bullard (1999), in his work on environmental racism in the United States, discusses the growing evidence (Mann, 1991; Golman & Fitten, 1994) that 'people of colour' and on low incomes have borne greater environmental and health risks than society at large, in neighbourhoods, work places and playgrounds.

There remain unresolved issues at the heart of the sustainable development debate, in terms of defining what the concept implies in policy terms, and in the continuing tensions between the aim of protecting the environment, issues of environmental and social justice, and currently the most influential objective of maintaining economic growth. In policymaking, greater consideration needs to be given to the role of different levels of government. Yet due to the emphasis on liberalisation of economic management, the state response is inadequate. According to Gibbs (1996), the currently ascendant neo-liberal 'solution' to environmental problems not only has a number of social and

economic problems, but it continues to foster a use of the natural environment which undermines its own basis.

The sustainable development debate has been played out in the international arena, through a number of global conferences on the environment and development. The next section focuses on the response during the late 1980s and 1990s of global organisations, in particular the United Nations, to the sustainable development agenda.

## **2.4 Incorporating the concept of sustainable development into international policy**

The concept of sustainable development was marginal at the international level until 1987, when the Brundtland Commission presented its report 'Our Common Future' (1987) in the wake of environmental disasters such as the discovery of the ozone hole over Antarctica, and the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. McManus (1996) suggests it is likely that, given the prevailing global economic discourse of neo-liberalism, the Commissioners at the Conference perceived that 'no-growth' or 'limits to growth' approaches would be unacceptable to wealthier Northern nations as well as to the developing countries of the South. According to McManus:

(T)he Commission was about improving the efficiency of growth so that it used less material resources, and redistributed the costs and benefits of increased growth in a more equitable manner than had previously occurred. From a political perspective the Brundtland Commission's definition of 'sustainable development' managed to unify many concerns in a way that enabled further accumulation, but within a 'green framework' in the richer, industrialised countries and within a discourse of development in the poorer countries which had yet to enjoy the material benefits of increased production and consumption (1996, p52).

The ambiguity and vagueness of the concept was central to its use by the Commission, and ecocentric solutions to environmental degradation were not part of the framework. The Brundtland Report is based on a notion of sustainable development which incorporates the principles of inter-generational equity in the use of the world's resources. There is an optimism about human nature, and in the ability, and desire, of humans to protect the environment. This stance was continued in the 1990s through the United Nations approach to sustainable development. The high point was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, also widely

known as the Rio Summit) which took place in 1992, and was attended by government representatives from around the world. O'Riordan & Voisey cite the Rio Summit as "... not an end in itself but the start of a process of institutional adaptation at all levels of government" (1998, p93), although they argue that, even then, the environment as an issue requiring concerted action was slipping down political agendas across the world.

The material outcome of the Rio Summit was the documentation of a number of agreements, with Agenda 21, a framework for achieving global sustainable development into the twenty-first century, forming the centrepiece. The remit of the Rio Summit did not challenge the economic and political status quo and its approach was a combination of weak and strong sustainable development, assuming the ability of the lightly regulated market to find solutions (O'Keefe & Kirby, 1994; Williams, 1994). There were some concessions to environmental protection, but economic growth and materialism were taken as givens. Doyle & McEachern (1998) point out that the assumption underpinning Rio was that all environmental problems are efficiency issues which have to be managed more effectively.

Much has been written on the detailed outcomes of UNCED, however, for this thesis, the significant aspect of the Conference is the Agenda 21 report, as this is fundamental to a consideration of the UK central government response, and more specifically Chapter 28 of the report, as this stresses the importance of a local response, to the sustainable development agenda. The main elements of Agenda 21 are considered below.

#### *2.4.1 Agenda 21*

Agenda 21 urges national governments to construct a policy framework which attempts to protect the environment, whilst maintaining economic growth, to be achieved through the involvement of all levels of government in a process of sustainable development. Agenda 21 is intended to be implemented through a 'bottom-up' process, with the notion of subsidiarity, which is the decentralisation of decision-making to the most appropriate level, embodied within the document as a crucial element in the achievement of sustainable development. Thus, as Buckingham-Hatfield & Evans (1996) suggest, the policy goal of sustainable development (although they acknowledge the ambiguity in the concept) is distinctive and qualitatively different from other policy goals traditionally associated with British government, since it is in principle both long-term and all-embracing, and necessitates political and



institutional structures that facilitate the building of a democratic consensus. Moreover, it requires decision-making processes which are able to translate such consensus into effective policy solutions (Fischer & Black, 1995). There are certain themes recurring throughout the document which require an assessment of the role of local government, such as the importance of open and democratic government; the need for more information to be made available to the public on environmental issues, and to raise awareness; the importance of integrated and coherent approaches to policymaking; and the need for all levels of government to achieve a balance between environmental regulation and market mechanisms.

A number of commentators (Agyeman & Evans, 1994; Baines, 1995; Buckingham-Hatfield & Evans, 1996; Baker *et al.*, 1997; Young, 1997) argue that the promotion of sustainable development must be participatory if it is to succeed, partly as it will mean sacrifices for populations in developed countries, due to the requirement to reduce consumption, the need to move away from environmentally damaging modes of private transport, and the questioning of acquired rights and established interests. The current system of representative democracy is based on a pluralist conception of decision making which assumes the equal opportunities of all groups to participate, yet (as the critique of pluralism in Chapter Four argues), clearly some groups do not have the capacity or power to fully participate in decision making processes.

At the European level, environmental initiatives, such as the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, and the Fifth Environmental Action Programme on the Environment (CEC, 1992), operative from 1993 to 2000, have followed similar principles to Agenda 21 (Lowe & Ward, 1998). The Fifth Action Programme translates the political and social components of Agenda 21 into the 'subsidiarity' principle adopted by the European Commission (EC) in implementing legislation. This Programme provides a context in which national and local government is expected to take action in specific areas relating to the environment. The EC has therefore played an important role in introducing the framework of sustainable development to European Union countries.

The concept of sustainable development has therefore become embedded in policy rhetoric at an international level, however, the transnational character of environmental problems seriously complicates the search for effective policy solutions. International governmental organisations, such as the United

Nations, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), remain politically weak compared to national regimes, thus it is at national government level where there is potentially the capacity to construct policies in line with sustainable development, and to devolve power and resources to local and regional level. However, the political impediments to this are many, particularly in terms of reforming the present economic system; but also in terms of redefining the role of the state and local government. Agenda 21's focus on democratic, participatory mechanisms for the delivery of sustainable development glosses over a number of the problems which the British political system is encountering, such as the tensions between traditional democratic structures of policymaking; the relationship between different levels of government; and the requirements of sustainable development (Agyeman & Tuxworth, 1996). The following section considers the response of the British Government to Agenda 21.

## **2.5 Response of the British Government to Agenda 21**

Environmental policymaking in Britain has traditionally been fragmented and departmentalised at national level. Indeed, Carter & Lowe (1994) note that because of the *ad hoc* way in which British environmental legislation has developed, environmental policy continues to lack overall coherence. This continued with the Conservative Government's response to Agenda 21, although there was a slight shift in the Government's position from the late 1980s onwards, with certain ministers taking the problems of environmental degradation more seriously. The Government gave a cautious welcome to the Brundtland Report, and some elements of sustainable development were built into its 1990 White Paper 'This Common Inheritance', the UK's first environmental strategy. In this Paper, the future for environmental policy is based on market-based policy instruments, in line with neo-liberal philosophy (Gandy, 1991). It also envisages a greater role for the voluntary sector and individuals, and plays down the public sector role, instead emphasising the importance of non-state provision in responding to environmental problems.

There were two further reports following the White Paper, which followed a similar line, and, subsequent to the Rio Summit recommendations, the Government produced 'Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy' in February 1994, which stated that all sectors of society have a vital role to play in the achievement of sustainable development. However, the focus remained on reducing industrial regulation and the primacy of market forces, and there are

few proactive policy initiatives at national level. Moreover, there is a lack of guidance, and resources for local government to implement the principles of Agenda 21 through Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

There have been several joint initiatives between local and central government, for which central government has provided limited or no resources. During the early 1990s it established a Central and Local Government Environment Forum, which set targets on energy consumption, and provided guidance to local authorities on producing Local Government Green Charters covering a broad range of sustainable development issues (Whitney, 1994). A further joint project, the Eco-Management and Audit (EMAS) scheme for local government, was launched by the Government in October 1993 (DoE/LGMB, 1993). This is an evaluative framework developed by the Local Government Management Board and other agencies on the basis of the European Union's EMAS scheme for industry. Selman (1996) suggests EMAS is the most systematic attempt to integrate environmental decision-making into the internal practices of local government, its aim being to describe and quantify a local authority's impacts on the environment on a corporate basis, and to help it improve on its environmental performance, however the response by local authorities has been limited (see Chapters Six and Seven).

More recently, the Government launched, in 1995 'The Citizen's Initiative' (since named 'Going for Green'), to be implemented at local level. The explicit aim is to:

... increase people's awareness of the part their personal choices can play in delivering sustainable development, and enlist their support and commitment in the coming years (DoE, 1994, p236).

This initiative focuses on individual environmental responsibility, rather than collective solutions, and does not aim to open up opportunities for political engagement (Connelly & Smith, 1999), thus it does not provide resources for local authorities to improve consultation and participation processes, and has wider negative consequences for environmental policymaking, as it fails to address the need for a radical response to environmental problems at central state level. The initiative has meagre resources (£2.2 million in 1996, and a further £1.5 million per year until 1999/2000) and lacks any co-ordinated political support. Voisey & O'Riordan (1997) note that some small-scale, local projects have been established through this scheme, but that these represent no real advances in terms of local sustainable development.

In concluding the discussion on the response of central government to Agenda 21, there has been limited change in environmental policymaking at national level, and joint initiatives with local government have not radically challenged the current system of environmental policymaking, nor have extra resources been provided for the LA21 process. Yet the role of local government as an element of the state response to environmental crises, and also in implementing local policies in line with sustainable development, is crucial to achieving a shift to more environmentally sustainable forms of economic development, and in addressing the issue of social justice. The discussion now turns to describe the contemporary role of local government in the environmental arena, and situates this within a historical context, in order to illustrate how local government has acquired additional responsibilities, as the involvement of the state in environmental issues has increased. Secondly it examines the implications of Agenda 21 for local government, and considers the requirements of local authorities in responding to the demands of sustainable development.

## **2.6 Local government's environmental role**

The contemporary role of local government in environmental policy making is of particular relevance to this thesis as it is the means through which much environmental policy is carried out in practice, and in many instances central government is reliant on local authorities to implement its policies. The emergence of local environmental policy has been driven by central government recommendations and legislation, but (as indicated above) more recently by international agreements such as Agenda 21 and the EU Fifth Action Programme on the Environment; through pressure from environmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth; through local political pressure; through lobbying by professional bodies; and by initiatives from local authorities themselves. Thus the environmental goals of local authorities are highly complex, often involving different sets of local, national, and international objectives (Gandy, 1991). Local authorities have a vast range of environmental responsibilities, both statutory and non-statutory. These include town and country planning, economic development, housing, parks and leisure management, environmental health, nature conservation, highways and transport, waste management, and education. Connelly & Smith (1999) draw on Leach & Davis's (1996) study of the different functions of local government, to show how local authority environmental responsibilities typically cut across different types of functions, for example land-use planning

involves planning and regulatory functions, and environmental health involves regulation, and promotion, and advocacy functions.

The development of local environmental policymaking is linked to the expansion of the state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. State intervention in the environmental arena, in terms of regulating polluting industries, and providing public health measures such as the supply of pure water, sewers and other health and social measures, increased during this period. Thus a regulatory function, and the provision of public health services, public utilities such as gas and electricity, primary and secondary education, and poor relief provided the main source of justification for the emerging local government system in the mid-nineteenth century (discussed further in Chapter Three). Local government constructed and maintained much of Britain's basic infrastructure for public health and economic development, and has played a key role in providing sewerage treatment facilities, pollution monitoring programmes and other public health measures (ICLEI, 1997).

Local government environmental functions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards include environmental health and trading standards. Local authorities also gained responsibilities for providing amenity services, for instance Welch (1995) discusses the historical development of urban parks, which came through the Towns Improvement Act 1847 and the Public Health Act 1848, both of which allowed the rates to be used to provide municipal parks. Welch notes that providing this service was not a statutory requirement (and indeed remains a discretionary service today) yet parks became municipal status symbols, "... willingly provided, maintained and superintended" (1995, p79). It is important to consider the reasons for the government's reliance on local provision during this period, with local authorities performing the majority of government functions up until the early twentieth century. Butcher *et al.* (1990) argue that local provision was relied upon, when the state was opposed in principle to direct service provision, because there was a relative absence of appropriate administrative machinery at national level; and that a city, or even a medium-sized town, had the capacity to supply its own services.

Thus Butcher *et al.* (1990) suggest that by the early twentieth century it had become accepted by governments that local government responsibility for municipal services such as education, housing, social services, recreational facilities such as parks and open spaces, and waste collection and disposal was the most appropriate form of provision (also see Wilson & Game, 1998). The

role of local government as direct provider of environmental services continued to expand up until the first world war. In the 1920s there was a drive at national level to build more publicly owned housing, to be carried out at local authority level, and local government also acquired control of the public utilities - gas, electricity, and water, and gained responsibility for local public transport. There was, however, a subsequent loss of responsibility for gas and electricity in the 1940s, as part of a more general shift towards centralisation of control of services (during and after the Second World War), away from municipal control.

An important area where local government responsibilities have increased since the late nineteenth century has been in town and country planning. The planning system grew from nineteenth century concerns about unhealthy and over-crowded industrial cities, and was associated in its early days with the creation of Garden Cities. Town and country planning as a specific area of local government policy came into existence in the 1930s, and during the thirty years following the end of the Second World War, 'planning' as a profession and an activity of government became established as the peculiarly British mechanism for managing 'the environment' (Buckingham-Hatfield & Evans, 1996). It remains central to environmental protection in Britain (Agyeman & Tuxworth, 1996) and to the implementation of sustainable development policies at the local level. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act shifted the main responsibilities of local authorities from districts to counties. It also regulated all forms of development, and brought the whole of the country within the remit of planning law. Thus planning control became increasingly important as a local government function, and gradually expanded to encompass recreation, the natural environment, conservation of buildings, and other environmental aspects. However, there were restrictions on the discretion of local government, for instance local development plans were subject to ministerial consent, and refusal of planning permission by local authorities could mean appeal to central government. During its growth in the twentieth century, the planning system has expanded to include management, design, and engineering but its main focus is still on environmental quality (Selman, 1996), and Blowers (1997) emphasise the importance of planning as a means of long-term environmental management at both central and local government level. Thus planning is a central function of local government, as it cuts across a number of areas, such as economic development, the built and non-built environment, and transport.

Local government was not widely regarded as a custodian of the environment until the 1960s, as environmental protection was not a political issue prior to this (Lowe & Ward, 1994). The following section considers the contemporary environmental role of local government, from this period onwards, when there have been considerable changes to the structure, organisation, and finance of local government (see Chapter Three).

## **2.7 Local environmental policymaking since 1960**

Since the 1960s a number of measures have been introduced by central government, with implications for the nature of local authority environmental responsibilities. Gandy (1991) suggests that environmental policy in local government has undergone a transformation, with local authorities being expected to play an increasingly important role in protecting the environment, due to rising public awareness of the increasing severity of environmental problems from the 1960s onwards, and particularly since the late 1980s, a period of increasing pressure on Britain, and other European governments, in particular from the European Commission, for higher standards of environmental protection. Simultaneously, local government has been under economic and political pressure from central government to decrease its expenditure, and to move away from direct service provision to an 'enabling' role whereby local government is expected to work in partnership with external agencies in delivering services (see Chapter Three).

Local government has continued to retain responsibility for the majority of environmental services provided prior to 1960, although local authorities lost an important environmental function - that of water supply - under the provisions of the Water Act 1973. Government policies in the early to mid 1980s represented a further loss of environmental responsibilities for local government in two areas. First, the 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act had implications for the planning function of local authorities as it represented a change from the provisions of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act (which had underpinned the planning system up to this time), by removing planning powers for certain areas from local government), with unelected Urban Development Corporations taking over responsibility for regenerating deprived urban areas, such as London Docklands. Secondly, in the case of public transport, conflict between local authorities and central government, over some local authorities' desire to continue to provide a subsidised service, culminated in legislation, in the form of the 1987 Transport

Act which reduced local government control over financing such measures. During the 1980s, local government also lost control of business rates, and changes to the rating system, culminating in the poll tax, and subsequently the council tax, have had implications for local discretion in service provision (discussed in Chapter Three).

Despite these losses, local government gained further responsibilities in the area of planning during the 1980s, with the broadening of the conception of planning through the introduction of structure plans, which require councils to assess the relationship between land use policies and economic policies (Loughlin, 1986). In other aspects of planning, local government responsibilities also increased, for instance, a significant addition to environmental protection came in 1988, with the introduction of regulations requiring environmental impact assessments as a standard element of planning procedure. More recently, the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act (in conjunction with earlier legislation) brought all aspects of the use and development of land together, with the main task of local authorities being the processing and determining of planning applications, and the enforcement of planning control, whereby they have the power to take action against unauthorised development. Within the general remit of planning, local government has responsibility for mineral planning, reclamation of derelict land, building control, conservation areas, coastal protection, and land drainage, although this latter function is often left to local Drainage Boards, and the water companies, together with the Environment Agency. Since 1991 local authorities, under the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act, have been required by central government to produce a Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which has to take into consideration the environmental impacts of development.

The planning role is therefore an important aspect of environmental protection, however, there is some disagreement as to whether the planning system has a positive influence on the environment and on the establishment of policies in line with sustainable development. According to Selman (1996), the Conservative government, through its use of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), explicitly sought to include aspects of sustainable development in local authority planning practice, many of the PPGs being revised from 1992 onwards to reflect this shift, and Hall (1989) also argues that planning has been positive for the environment. Freeman (1995) adopts an opposing view, arguing that the strategic guidance given to local authorities in terms of their



development plans is very limited, with no requirement to consult outside the local authority or to think strategically across local authorities. She suggests this reflects the tendency of British policymaking to rely on crisis management, and short-termism.

One important area where the remit of local government has expanded, and one of particular relevance to the remit of this thesis, is that of nature conservation, and the management of open spaces. In 1977 Government Circular 108/77 charged local authorities with a duty to 'promote nature conservation across all aspects of their work', although no specific measures were specified. Despite the importance of this aspect of their environmental role, the vagueness and lack of direction of government policy has been argued to partly explain why local authorities were slow to respond to the need to protect open spaces. This changed, however, during the early 1980s, when stronger pressures through European legislation prompted greater action at national and local levels. The current statutory framework for open spaces is aimed both at protection of such areas through the use of Environmental Impact Assessments, introduced in 1988, and better management of open spaces enshrined in the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, and the 1985 Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act. The grounds maintenance service, which involves the management of parks and open spaces, is however non-statutory, and is not covered by the legislation (this service is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six).

During the 1990s, two important pieces of legislation were introduced, which have had direct consequences for the responsibilities of local government in the areas of waste management and waste disposal. In 1990 the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) was enacted, according to Carter & Lowe (1994), as a response to criticism by environmentalists of the UK record in waste management. However it is also probable that this was linked to another government agenda which was to extend compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) further into local government services (see Chapter Three). Under the EPA, lower tier district, borough, and city authorities were designated as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), and county councils in England, district councils in Scotland and Wales were responsible for disposal of waste from their constituent WCAs. The county councils in England, and district councils in Scotland and Wales also had responsibility for the regulation of controlled waste. Local authorities were already required to open provision of the waste collection service to competition from the private sector through Compulsory

Competitive Tendering (CCT). They were now also required by the legislation to produce a recycling plan, with a target of 25% of household waste to be recycled by the year 2000. A further provision in the EPA was the introduction of statutory environmental standards for street cleansing, which increased the responsibilities of local authorities, with no additional funding (Wilson & Game, 1998). The Act brought in new measures requiring councils to keep land to which the public has access free from litter and refuse. These responsibilities were underpinned by a Code of Practice which established acceptable standards of cleanliness. One area in which the regulatory function of local government was increased through the EPA was in the area of pollution control, with the powers of local authorities increased to deal with the air pollution aspects of a number of industrial processes. Under the 1995 Environment Act there were further changes to the waste responsibilities of local government. There was a transferral of powers from local government to the newly formed Environment Agency, which took over all local authority waste regulation functions. Local government did however gain a new responsibility, as there was a regime established for identifying and managing contaminated land, with a new duty on local authorities to deal with contaminated sites.

Therefore, during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, local government has gained responsibilities, particularly in terms of its regulatory function in planning, and pollution control. These powers, however, are determined by central government, and local authorities have little discretion over how these responsibilities are implemented. Local authorities have had their environmental role reduced in the areas of waste management and disposal, and in the provision of municipal transport systems, although they are still required to produce local transport plans, and liaise with providers on transport issues. These changes clearly have negative implications for local government's ability to respond to the demands of sustainable development (discussed in Chapter Seven). The discussion now turns to an examination of how, since the mid-1980s, local government began to recognise the importance of the 'environment' as a corporate issue, and considers the implications of this shift for the environmental role of local government.

### *2.7.1 The emergence of the 'environment' as a corporate issue*

Despite the increasing range of environmental responsibilities in local government these were, however, addressed as separate functions, to be dealt with by individual departments, and, according to Agyeman & Evans (1994), it

was not until the mid-1980s that historically discrete local authority policy areas began to converge under the corporate banner of 'environment', and the 'Environment Committee'. Connelly & Smith (1999) regard the Friends of the Earth (FoE) Model Environment Charter (1989) as providing the starting point at which local authorities considered a more corporate approach to environmental policy-making. In 1989 the UK's first State of the Environment Report (FoE and Kirklees District Council) was published, and following this the adoption of environmental audits and charters, became widespread, with Leicester City Council becoming Britain's first 'Environment City'. This was part of an initiative set up by the a title awarded by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the Civic Trust, and UK 2000. The initiative aimed to create a network of British cities as models of environmental excellence.

By 1992, the year of the Rio Summit, some initial changes had been made to local authority structures to incorporate the environment as a corporate issue, although progress varied considerably between local authorities, and Gibbs (1993) found that few environmental strategies or statements explicitly addressed economic development issues. It is in this context that local authorities were to respond to the Agenda 21 proposal that they adopt a strategic approach to local sustainable development, through establishing Local Agenda 21(LA21) programmes. Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, entitled 'Local Authorities Initiatives' makes explicit the need for action at the local level, and states that a suitable framework already exists in the system of local authorities (presumed to be a democratic level of government, with the potential for encouraging participation by all sectors of the local community, including local authorities employees and councillors), for the achievement of sustainable development. The following section examines how a national LA21 initiative has been established in Britain, and considers the requirements of local government.

## **2.8 Agenda 21 and local government in Britain**

Immediately following the Rio Summit, the local authority associations in the United Kingdom collectively established a national LA21 initiative. A cross-sectoral group was set up for the initiative, which includes representatives of local government, non-governmental organisations, women, business, trade unions, and other major groups (LGMB, 1997), and a LA21 Steering Group was established in 1992, to co-ordinate local government's response to LA21. Its guide (LA21 Steering Group, 1994) calls for action by local authorities as

they are major players in the local economy, they manage or control important aspects of the local environment, and can strongly influence the environmental behaviour of others. However, the guide admits that local authorities will have to make choices about what they can realistically tackle in the short term, owing to factors outside their control such as funding and reorganisation (Levett, 1994). Tuxworth (1994) points out that local government is aware of the potential of the sustainable development agenda as a new mandate for local democracy, but he questions the degree to which the traditional patterns of local democracy are able to adapt to these changes.

Agenda 21 requires local government to be involved in a process of building partnerships with other sectors to implement and develop local policies for sustainable development (Bateman, 1995; Baines, 1995), based on a pluralist vision of local government (see Chapter Four). However, ICLEI (1997) argues that there has not been realistic discussion by policymakers at the international and national level of the ability of local governments and communities to implement LA21 action plans or other sustainable development responsibilities. The role of local government is given more serious consideration in the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme (CEC, 1992), which states that, as they operate in the front line, local authorities have an important part to play in the implementation of a sustainable development process through the exercise of their statutory functions. However, Patterson & Theobald (1996) note that these functions need strengthening, and that further regulatory processes are also required at national, regional and local level (see also Chapter Eight). The 1996 review of the European Programme accords an even more central role to local and regional authorities, yet it is a mission statement only (Whitney, 1995), thus in practice it has little influence on expanding local government's powers and resources. Little consideration is given by international documents such as Agenda 21 to the complexities of partnership and the uneven power relationships between local authorities and other agencies.

In addition to the provision of explicitly environmental services, local government has a wider economic and social role, through intervening in areas such as local economic development and being a local employer; through the implementation of national policies in the areas of health, education, and social services; and through making changes to its internal operations. Baker *et al.* (1997), using the analogy of a 'ladder of sustainable development' (as discussed in section 2.3), suggest that in the economic sphere local governments can be

either on the weak or strong rung of sustainable development in that they have the capacity to move beyond reactive responses, in areas such as economic development and planning. They suggest there is scope for the development of local policies aimed at equity in environmental resource use and distribution, for example through steering resources into tackling social aspects of regeneration. Clearly, local authorities also have a direct impact on the local environment, through all their activities. Thus Baines (1995) argues that local authorities have a major role to play in the process of moving towards an environmentally sustainable economy since they are a major consumer of resources and in many cases the biggest employer in a locality, and can potentially act as a force for change in the market place through implementing sustainable purchasing policies. This is an important issue for local authorities, as if they are requiring the local population to make changes in their lifestyle, in terms of production and consumption, it could be argued that they should be seen to be setting an example. However, this requires the powers and resources to make such changes, and local authorities are restricted by insufficient powers and resources to respond to the demands of sustainable development (see Chapter Three).

Local government has little influence over issues such as energy production, distribution and consumption, where the market is highly liberalised (Connelly & Smith, 1999). Moreover, there are limitations to the extent that individual local authorities can address environmental and economic problems which affect a much wider geographical area, for instance, according to Breheny:

(F)ar from being self-contained, localities are involved in complex webs of interactions by which they import natural resources such as water and fuel energy. They also import and export raw materials, food, manufactured products, services and people and businesses (1994, p9).

Therefore localities can never be self-contained, rather they need to form part of a wider regional, national and international framework in order to adequately implement policies that can be environmentally sustainable, and address the wider social and economic issues (Patterson & Theobald, 1996; Evans, 1998). The following section considers the participatory element of Agenda 21, and the implications for the traditional structures of decision-making in local government.

### 2.8.1 *Participatory mechanisms for LA21*

A central requirement of local government in adopting a Local Agenda 21 process is to develop adequate structures of decision-making, which allow all members of society to participate, and this involves a shift to more 'bottom-up' approaches to policymaking (Littlewood & While, 1997). Local authorities need to be closer and more accessible to the communities they serve, and to have the structures to operate a transparent and accountable system of decision-making. This requires local government to radically change its own relationship with those it represents (Pinfield, 1996). The expectations of local government, set out in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, are based on an assumption that it has the capacity and democratic legitimacy to involve citizens in the decision-making processes for LA21. Local government is expected to play a central role in guiding and developing the LA21 process, and in implementing appropriate policies. It is also required to establish participatory mechanisms to encourage local people to take an active part in policymaking. Clearly there are tensions between having a corporate approach within local authorities (in order to provide an overarching framework for LA21), yet also decentralising policymaking. Thus an approach is required which promotes a shared vision within a local authority of the importance of sustainable development and of public participation, for instance, through area-based decision-making, or through the individual working groups on different aspects of sustainable development. However, there remains a significant barrier to participation: according to Connelly & Smith (1999), the state-society relationship at present is one in which LA21 is perceived with disillusionment within large sections of the community. They suggest citizens need the scope to participate in political processes but note that the distrust and apathy, which they believe to be prevalent in the British political system, are unlikely to be fertile ground for collective action.

Further consideration also needs to be given to the restrictions on local government due to its constitutional status. Local government has never had constitutional powers, instead having to respond to ideological and policy changes imposed by central government (see Chapter Three). But Gilbert *et al.* (1996) point out that local authorities could act more effectively if their responsibilities were constitutionally grounded (see also Patterson & Theobald, 1999). It is also necessary to situate local government in the wider framework of a liberal-democratic capitalist system, which dictates the ways in which it can respond to issues such as environmental pollution. Agyeman & Tuxworth (1996) stress that the role of local authorities in statutory environmental

management and protection throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as well as in wider policy-making for sustainable development, must be seen in the context of the previous Government's approach, which can be characterised by the rejection of long-term planning; a reliance on market forces; deregulation in some areas, and inadequate regulation in others.

Marvin & Guy (1997) refer to a new intellectual and policy discourse on urban environmentalism, which they term the 'new localism', based on localist perspectives of local government, developed to theorise the changes to local government during the 1990s (see Chapter Four). 'New localism' proposes that environmental policy initiatives at the local level will effectively deal with the ecological chaos of the present by creating a more rational future, with local government leading the development of more sustainable communities, life and work styles. Marvin & Guy argue that, through such an approach, cities will regain political leverage by constructing a new form of transformative local governance around the environmental agenda. However, it is not clear what form of local government is required in the 'new localist' approach, in terms of its powers, finance, responsibilities, and structure. Furthermore, this perspective fails to consider the long-term problems of environmental degradation at the regional, national and international level, and the geographical restrictions on local government being able to resolve cross-border environmental problems, as raised by Breheny (1994).

According to Selman (1996), many European towns and cities have endorsed the need to prepare LA21s, through joining the European Sustainable Towns and Cities Campaign. The Charter for LA21 (also known as the Aalborg Charter, after the town in which it was signed), which emanated from this Campaign, specifically refers to the need for local consensus in the production of a local sustainable development, and sets out key principles for this. These include extensive public consultation, the recognition of existing planning and finance frameworks, participation by all sectors of the local population, and long term local planning and measurable targets. These ideas are reinforced by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) 'model communities' programme. Clearly many of the principles of urban LA21 are similar to the general themes of sustainable development, but there are also particular issues for urban government in responding to the demands of sustainable development. The EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment (1994) has argued that the urban economy is where policy integration between environmental protection and economic development is

most crucial. Gilbert *et al.* (1996) argue that, on the one hand, competition among cities for resources has forced local authorities to focus on their competitive strengths and weaknesses, and has therefore constrained them from taking measures that would improve the local and global environment and thus advance sustainable development. On the other hand, they stress that there is no inherent incompatibility between sustainable development and competitiveness, although, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, there are in fact tensions between these.

The central problem, however, in Britain, as emphasised throughout this thesis, is that local government does not have constitutionally grounded powers, nor sufficient resources, and this has implications for its ability to respond adequately to the sustainable development agenda. Local government is fragmented in its approach to policymaking, both internally and between individual local authorities, and in cities such as London, decision-making is split between a large number of individual local authorities, thus creating barriers to developing cross-border strategies for sustainable development (although the proposed Greater London Authority may address this). Clearly, urban local government has particular environmental problems to be addressed, which require in many cases a cross-boundary response and the integration of economic development, social regeneration, and environmental protection in ways which recognise the specific nature of towns and cities. The next section draws some conclusions on the environmental debate and subsequent policy developments, and the implications for local government's environmental role.

## **2.9 Conclusions**

The contemporary policy discourse of sustainable development, which enshrines technocentric principles, aims to achieve the global management of capitalism in an environmental framework, yet there are fundamental barriers to reconciling the tensions between economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. A weak form of sustainable development is dominant in Britain, yet there is a need for a stronger approach to sustainable development, perhaps through an ecological modernisation framework, which stresses the need to address environmental problems through tighter state regulation of industry, planning for sustainable development, and greater co-operation between local, regional, and national levels of policymaking. The integration of sustainable development principles into policymaking at all levels is a complex process, due to the inherent ambiguity of the concept, the



unresolved conflict between economic growth and environmental protection, and the powerful interests which seek to uphold the current system of economic growth. The British Government's response to Agenda 21 has been one of introducing weak regulation, but mainly relying on the market to respond to environmental crises. Local authorities have been provided with some guidance, but no resources, to assist them in establishing LA21 strategies.

Local authorities, however, continue to play an important part in managing and protecting the environment. Their responsibilities, both statutory and non-statutory, cover essential environmental services in the areas of leisure and amenities, public health, waste management, and other regulatory functions. Many other areas of local authority responsibility, such as education, social services, local economic development, and transport have environmental impacts. There has been a loss of control over these responsibilities, due to the restructuring of local government (see Chapter Three). Moreover, local authorities have also lost responsibilities to unelected bodies such as the Environment Agency, and regional bodies as a system of local governance has increasingly replaced one of local government (discussed in Chapter Four). The implementation of LA21 requires appropriate participatory mechanisms, yet this conflicts with traditional structures of policymaking in many local authorities.

The form of so-called 'liberal-democratic' government in Britain, clearly has consequences for the activities of the state in responding to environmental problems, and thus for the environmental role of local government. The political implications of the sustainable development discourse for local government have not been considered in sufficient depth, either at a theoretical level, or in the government's approach to environmental policymaking. Clearly this is linked to the relationship between central government and local government, and needs to be drawn out. The next chapter therefore gives an account of the restructuring of local government, and draws conclusions from this for the capacity of local government to provide effective environmental services in response to the demands of LA21.

# 3

## **The Contemporary Restructuring of Local Government in England**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers contemporary changes to local government in England in terms of the restructuring of its organisation, powers and functions. These changes are the outcome of a rebalancing of political power, and a changing perception of the role and purpose of local government (discussed further in Chapter Four). This chapter examines how and why the restructuring of local government has occurred. It first describes the historical development of local government, as this is necessary to an understanding of more recent changes. Secondly it evaluates the changes in local government during the period 1960 to 1975, when a number of organisational and internal changes took place. Thirdly it explores the period from 1976 to 1998, examining the impact of global economic recession and the oil crisis in the mid-1970s on government policies towards public sector spending. The discussion then considers in particular the impact of financial and other legislation in the 1980s and 1990s, and examines the changes brought about through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), a form of privatisation of service provision (Patterson & Pinch, 1995; Patterson & Theobald, 1996). Arguments about the implications

of the restructuring for the role of local government, as a provider of services and as a representative of the local community, are evaluated.

### **3.2 A brief history of local government**

Before embarking on an analysis of the nature and purpose of contemporary local government in the UK, it is necessary to provide an overview of the development of the modern system of local government, and thus to show how contemporary local government has evolved. Local government in England and Wales has evolved gradually and piecemeal over the centuries, with bodies being established as need became apparent (Keith-Lucas & Richards, 1978; Wilson & Game, 1998). In 1835 the Municipal Corporations Act created 78 multi-purpose elected local authorities, although it was only by the end of the nineteenth century that some form of a 'system' of local government existed (Wilson & Game, 1998). Local Government Acts in 1888 and 1894 led to the creation of the county and borough system, with the introduction of directly elected councillors, and the 1899 Act created 28 metropolitan boroughs. In 1889, county councils gained responsibility for functions such as technical and further education, and there was a consolidation of the structure of local government in the late nineteenth century, with the establishment of the London County Council (Keating, 1995). During the late nineteenth century the environmental responsibilities of local government increased in the areas of public health and pollution control, as the environmental role of the state expanded in response to the impacts of the Industrial Revolution (discussed in Chapter Two).

There was an extension of local government's functions at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1902 school boards were abolished, with the duty of providing primary schools becoming the shared responsibility of counties, and the larger boroughs and urban districts, and the provision of secondary schools becoming the responsibility of both counties and county boroughs. During the following two decades, local government also gained further health services, and responsibilities in the areas of housing, town planning, and libraries. The period from the 1920s through to the mid-1940s was one of further, but gradual, expansion in the role of local government in administering national policies, in the areas of welfare, town and country planning, and transport. However during this period local authorities also lost responsibilities such as gas, electricity, and Public Assistance. From the late 1940s, a massive programme of health, welfare and nationalisation legislation, meant that local

government's administrative role increased further. These changes, however, had implications for the autonomy of local government, as its financial dependence on the centre increased significantly from the late 1940s onwards (Keith-Lucas & Richards, 1978). However, local authorities continued to be restricted in the way they could operate, and they were empowered to only do what the law explicitly allowed, with all council powers being acquired through Acts of Parliament. This situation has remained through to the present day: should any local authority provide a service or spend money for a purpose not specifically permitted by Parliament, it would be acting illegally, the legal term being '*ultra vires*', although the principle originally underlying this was that local authorities should be able to judge when an activity was outside of their remit. Loughlin (1986) suggests that *ultra vires* is more restrictive than a form of general competence power, but the main effect up to the 1970s was not intended to hinder effective service provision, rather to require that in certain circumstances there be central approval for a new activity. Thus the crucial issue was the attitude of central government towards local authorities. The functions of local government during the post-war period did not change dramatically, following the 1950s expansion of services, and the majority of its environmental responsibilities remained (as described in Chapter Two). The next section considers the development of local government from 1960 to 1975.

### **3.3 Development of local government: 1960-1975**

From 1960 onwards a number of reforms were introduced, which had significant consequences for local government. There was a large-scale reorganisation of local authorities, which involved a shift to larger units of government, and an increasing emphasis on a corporate management approach, and there was a widespread development of party politics in local authorities. The following discussion examines these changes in turn, first considering the reorganisation of local government.

#### *3.3.1 The reorganisation of local government*

The 1960s and 1970s was a period during which the role of national government was expanding, particularly due to the expansion of the modern welfare state, and it was widely asserted by policymakers that small scale local government was ill-fitted to the needs of a modern, complex society (Keating, 1995). This assertion was based on the perceived importance of efficiency and planning in service provision; the belief by government that larger units of

local government could exploit economies of scale; and the argument that these units would be more democratic as they could be given greater powers and functional competence (Keating, 1995). Moreover, the case for reorganising local government boundaries and creating larger local authorities was grounded in a perception that this might have the effect of increasing the likelihood that large urban local authority councillors would be comprised of business people and professionals, as the calibre of councillors was held to be deficient (Dearlove, 1979; Butcher *et al.*, 1990). This argument was strengthened by the earlier findings of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London (1960) which considered that there was some relationship between the size and scope of a local authority and the calibre of councillors.

There has been criticism of the view that larger units of local government would provide more efficient services, and this implied that financial benefits were more important than the democratic costs of enlargement. Yet Dearlove (1979) points to evidence that population size, on its own, accounted for only a small proportion of the difference between the provision of services by local authorities. This was evident in the findings of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England (1969), which showed that scale appeared to have little measurable relationship with performance except in fairly limited ways. However, Dearlove (1979) notes that the Royal Commission, whose recommendations were to form the basis for the 1974 reorganisation, advanced the argument for larger scale units on the grounds of efficiency, despite contrary evidence from its own research unit.

The 1974 reorganisation established a new system of local government which greatly reduced the number, and greatly increased the average size of authorities. A two-tier structure was created in urban and rural areas, with responsibilities split between county councils and district councils. Dearlove (1979) argues that two major issues were ignored in the reorganisation - regionalism, and finance, with the issue of rating in particular being avoided, as it had been since the previous changes to the system in 1900. Thus, as Alexander (1985) argues, the new structure was left to operate on an inappropriate financing system, which itself had been allowed to become a vehicle for centralisation, as local government became increasingly more reliant on central government contributions to its budget.

According to Dearlove (1979), the 1974 reorganisation had a major impact on the style of local government, for several reasons. First, units became larger, with implications for the local nature of local government, as elected representatives became further removed from the electorate; secondly central control was facilitated as the number of authorities was reduced; and thirdly there was a loss of functions in terms of responsibility for healthcare being removed to unelected regional health authorities, and water and sewerage services being shifted to unelected regional water authorities. This also began a gradual shift from local government to local governance, whereby the activities of elected local authorities are being carried out by local, unelected agencies (Stoker, 1991; Cochrane, 1993). Butcher *et al.* (1990) argue that the loss of functions was not due to a political concern by government at the extent of local government responsibilities, or a hostility to local authorities, rather they were justified in terms of technological or administrative benefits. Cockburn's (1977) and Dearlove's (1979) analyses, however suggest that there was a political process operating, conveniently wrapped up in the supposedly neutral, and rational arguments for increased efficiency. The reforms to the organisation and functions of local government were implemented in conjunction with the introduction of a corporate management approach, and this development is considered next.

### *3.3.2 Introduction of corporate management*

The internal restructuring of local government towards a management-oriented and corporate approach began in the late 1960s. According to Cockburn (1977), the political context for corporate management was the government's concern about the health of the economy, and the principles and practice of the reforms travelled from the private sector into both central and local government structures. The ideas of corporate management were set out in the Maud Report (1967), and the Bains Report (1972), whose recommendations were closely linked with the reorganisation of boundaries and functions in the mid 1970s (Butcher *et al.*, 1990). The Bains Report was particularly influential, according to Stewart (1985), as it marked the formal acceptance of the need for a corporate approach for local authorities. Dearlove (1979) describes how the timing of the Bains Report was important, as its findings were in accordance with the Conservative Government's philosophy, which regarded the reforms as being a way of cutting costs and improving standards of management, rather than being aimed at expanding opportunities for local government. The traditional administrative system was seen by the Bains Committee as deficient, as it fragmented the operation of local authority

business. The Report also argued that incremental decision-making and the bureaucratic and time-consuming nature of the system deterred professional people from becoming councillors. The aim was therefore to create more business-like local authorities and to facilitate co-operation between departments (Dearlove & Saunders, 1994), with an emphasis on the management structure required to support this.

The major recommendations of Bains were the establishment of a 'corporate management team' of chief officers under the leadership of a Chief Executive, and the setting up of an inner cabinet of elected councillors from the majority group, headed by the leader of the group, to liaise with the corporate management team. These recommendations were implemented by the majority of local authorities. Wilson & Game (1994) argue that the changes did not automatically change the style or working processes, of local government on a day-to-day basis, although Cockburn (1977) adopts a different view, suggesting that there was a shift towards corporate management, which came mainly from the officer side of local government, with elected members being more cautious about making these changes. In her study of urban managers and of the views of those being managed in the London Borough of Lambeth, Cockburn (1977) considers from a marxist perspective the tensions between the trend towards corporate management, and the emergence of policies for community development. She suggests the moves towards modernisation of local government management systems were designed to increase local government control over finance and over the workforce, and highlights the implications of the reforms for the workforce and for the local electorate. In particular she argues that there was an increasing pressure to improve productivity and reduce labour costs, concerns which continue today (as discussed in Chapter Six). Yet the issue of 'corporate management' (as with the 1974 reorganisation) was put forward by government as a 'neutral' approach, used to justify changes internally but also to justify large-scale reorganisation. It was explained as being an inevitable response to the technical problems of government, and was therefore an 'apolitical' reform in the simple interest of good government (Bains, 1972). This was part of the established discourse or 'accepted wisdom' about local government and its problems, which served to limit the debate about the appropriate form of local government to issues of efficiency and rationality. There were strong continuities between the corporate management reforms and the restructuring which took place in the 1980s (see section 3.4), in terms of the impact on the participation of local communities in decision-making processes.

According to Cockburn (1977), the management reforms had consequences for local authorities in several ways: first, the changes were occurring in the top-level of management, and therefore had little impact on putting policies into effect on a day-to-day basis; secondly they did little to enhance the contact between the council and its population, yet at the same time local authorities were ostensibly seeking to encourage greater 'participation' by local communities; and thirdly the increased influence of senior officers meant local government became open to democratic influences. As Gyford (1985) argues, the proposals for the resolution of perceived tensions between increased officer influence and enhancing public participation, differed between the political Left and Right, the former seeking greater public accountability and participation through the expansion of collective decision-making at the grass roots, and the latter through individual consumer control in a free market.

Neither the Bains Report (1972) nor the earlier Maud Report (1967) on internal management structures and processes anticipated one of the most significant consequences of external reorganisation for the internal workings of local government, in the form of increased party political involvement at local level, and greater ideological polarisation (Butcher *et al.*, 1990), and the consequences of these changes are now considered.

### *3.3.3 Party politics in local government*

From 1945 onwards, local government was argued to be operating in an ideological context of 'welfare consensus' (Stoker, 1991). The local ideological context was in most areas not party political, and only half of all local authorities were under the control of a particular party. According to Rhodes, when parties did control local authorities, "... this control could be purely nominal with little or no impact over and beyond the election" (1985, p43), and Stoker (1991) points out that only in some major towns and cities did party politics have any influence over policy-making.

However, by 1975, party politics had become increasingly prominent in local government (Keith-Lucas & Richards, 1978). This development is explained in a number of ways. There was an expansion in the local government professions, social reformers became concerned about the limitations of welfare services, and there was an increase in political and community activists calling for greater involvement of citizens in decisions affecting their lives (Cockburn, 1977; Stoker, 1991). Reforms to the internal management of both central government and local government had been



introduced, and the reorganisation of local government in 1974 had caused conflict and uncertainty (Stoker, 1991). In the early 1970s, public sector workers, including local government employees, took action over the wages policy of the Heath government. The situation by the mid-1970s was therefore one in which the 'welfare consensus' was weakening, with governments adopting national policies which were increasingly removed from the consensus politics of the post war period. Party politics became more dominant in local elections than previously, in particular in London and other urban areas, where there was a greater proportion of working class politicians, than in rural areas. Gyford (1985) describes the 1970s as a period of reappraisal in local politics, with the emergence of debates between and within political parties about the role of local government in society, reflecting theories re-conceptualising local government (examined in Chapter Four). There was a 'rediscovery' of urban poverty, and increased working class militancy in cities (Cockburn, 1977), therefore local government regarded it as vital to introduce policies to address these issues. As discussed below (section 3.4), this increase in party politics at local level set the scene for future conflicts with central government, in particular with the Conservative Government of the 1980s. The next section examines the changes to the financing of local government during the 1970s.

#### *3.3.4 Local government finance*

The overall expansion in local government responsibilities up to the mid-1970s was reflected in increased public expenditure. By 1975 local authority expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had risen to 14.9%, from 9.1% in 1950 (see Table 3.1). Between 1952 and 1972 there was a fifty per cent increase in the number of full-time employees and in part-time workers (see Figure 3.1). Between 1973 and 1975 the world capitalist economy (excluding the USSR and China) underwent a slump unparalleled since the 1930s. The 1973 international energy crisis caused fuel prices to soar, pushing inflation into double figures, and creating government concern about the level of public sector finance (Newton & Karran, 1985). World trade declined by 14% and in Britain the effect was worsened by the underlying weakness of the economy (Stoker, 1991). However, Duncan & Goodwin (1988) note that, up until 1975, local government retained an element of financial autonomy, albeit within strict overall constraints. Opportunities existed for local authorities to raise money through the rates, and to develop local initiatives, for instance through a 2p rate extension, introduced in 1972.

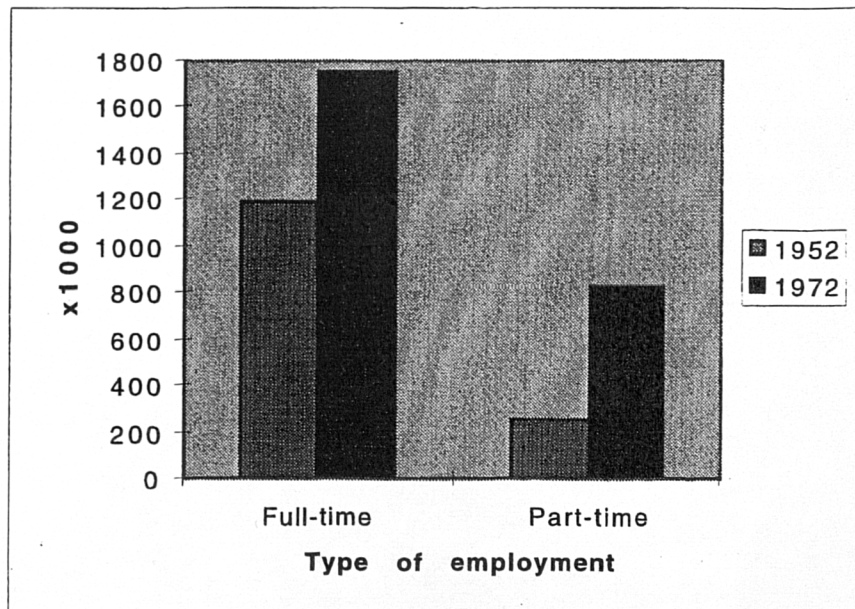
The period of 1960-1975 can be characterised as a period of reform in local government which impacted in a number of different ways - organisationally, functionally, internally, politically, and financially. However, local government still retained a range of responsibilities, playing a major role as service provider, and local employer. The following section considers the changing situation for local government after this period.

**Table 3.1 Local authority expenditure in the UK 1950-1975**

YEAR	Local exp as % of GDP	Local exp as % of public expenditure
1950	9.1	25.8
1955	9.1	28.0
1960	10.3	27.8
1965	12.8	32.0
1970	14.7	34.1
1975	14.9	30.3

Source: Newton & Karran, 1985, p11

**Figure 3.1 UK local authority employment 1952-72**



Source: Stoker, 1991 p9

### 3.4 Restructuring of local government 1976-1998

In 1976, as a result of the economic recession, Britain took out a loan from the International Monetary Fund, a condition of which was to curb the growth of public expenditure. Local government was directly affected by this, and, as

Table 3.2 shows, local authority expenditure as a proportion of GDP, and as a proportion of public expenditure decreased. According to the Commission for Local Democracy (1995), this represented a fundamental change in the power relations between the centre and local government, as local authorities became increasingly restricted in their freedom to spend money raised locally and received from government grants. These financial changes formed the origin of future changes in policy direction, including the adoption of an economic policy based on monetarism, and policies to reduce public expenditure.

**Table 3.2 Local authority expenditure in the UK 1976-1980**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>Local exp as % of GDP</b>	<b>Local exp as % of public expenditure</b>
<b>1976</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>32.8</b>
<b>1977</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>31.8</b>
<b>1978</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>29.6</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>28.1</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>27.2</b>

Source: Newton & Karran, 1985, p11

The Labour Government's programme of cuts to local government expenditure in the late 1970s was targeted mainly at the capital spending of local authorities, but cash limits on current expenditure were also introduced. The cuts in government grants created conflict between central and local government, illustrating how central and local governments can become polarised in their policies as fiscal stress increases (Greenwood, 1982). Despite the reductions in public sector expenditure from 1976 onwards, the Labour Government incorporated these changes into existing local government legislation, rather than introducing new legislation. However, this agenda changed with the election of a Conservative Government in 1979. As discussed below (section 3.4.1), the Government expanded on these financial reforms, as part of a wider programme of changes to local government during the 1980s and early 1990s. Many academic and political commentators (Dearlove & Saunders, 1994; Gamble, 1995; Sanderson & Foreman, 1996) argue that this Government had its roots in the basic principles of both neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, and these were combined and articulated within the Conservative Party in the 1970s and 1980s with a considerable impact on the policy agenda during the 1980s. New Right thinkers such as

Brittan (1977), and King (1987), and influential politicians of the time such as Keith Joseph, and Nicholas Ridley, argued that the expansion of the state was producing 'overloaded' government. (see Chapter Four for further discussion of the New Right position). Williams (1993) claims that the Thatcherites accepted Hayek's critique of liberal democracy (see section 4.3.1) and the Government endorsed the thesis that the growth of the public sector causes inflation *and* creates disincentives for self-help and self-reliance, therefore it sought to reduce the size and scope of the public sector.

The New Right also emphasised the need to undermine the power of the trade unions (seen as the 'enemy within' - see section 4.3) and the professions through policies affecting public sector employees in areas such as education and the health service. Stoker (1991) suggests that the years of growth in local government functions, in particular from the 1950s to the 1970s, had given considerable scope for the expansion and influence of professions, and he argues that in many cases these groups dominated local authority policy and decision-making. There had also been a considerable increase in public sector manual workers joining trade unions from the 1960s through to the mid-1970s. In local government, the percentage of unionised workers rose from 62% in 1948 to 86% in 1974, making it one of the most unionised workforces in the country (Ascher, 1987). Many of these workers were involved in large-scale industrial action over wages in response to the Heath government's industrial relations and incomes policy of the early 1970s. This situation was regarded by the incoming Government in 1979 as problematic in terms of the power that local government employees, both blue and white collar, were believed to possess.

The Government sought to reform local government through introducing the notion of competition into aspects of service provision. The arguments for such reforms reflected a key site of conflict for the government - the ideological battle between collectivism and individualism (Butcher *et al.*, 1990). In local government, it saw an institution which it regarded as underpinning the 'alliances of dependency' on the state, in that it played a central role in administering many of the aspects of the welfare state, such as education, social services, and welfare benefits. The belief was that this role made it unfit to provide an effective and efficient means of delivery of local services to local people. Loughlin describes how this approach was radically different to the position prior to 1979:

The attempt to reorganise local government on the basis of market exchange is fundamentally ideological: it denies that public bodies have a different rationale to private bodies, it asserts as an article of faith that private bodies, are more efficient than public bodies, and rests on an atomistic view of individuals and an idealised view of the operation of the market (1986, p199).

The Government also used the appeal of 'popular capitalism', in the form of rhetoric about empowering the 'consumer'. Kearns (1995) argues that it wished to leave behind the politics of advocacy and of protest - seen as the product of the irresponsible 1960s and 1970s. Thus it did not want a politically vocal or engaged citizenship, but rather a politically uninterested public, and this was dressed in the rhetoric of 'consumer choice' (Blunkett & Jackson, 1995), based on the belief that consumers or customers are not politically active (the deficiencies of this New Right perspective are discussed in Chapter Four).

The Conservative administration regarded local government as wasteful, profligate, unaccountable, and out of control (Wilson & Game, 1998), and it therefore pursued a strategy of exerting greater control over local government. This strategy gathered momentum during the early 1980s, taking the form of radical changes to the finance and powers of local government. The following discussion examines the impact of these changes. It first considers the financial reforms; secondly it examines changes to local authority internal structures; and thirdly it examines the changes to local authority functions. These issues are then explored in the context of the government's strategy to privatise elements of local government service provision.

### *3.4.1 Financial reforms*

Up until 1980, local government had received a proportion of its revenue through the Rate Support Grant, a central government grant which was introduced in the 1950s to replace a number of single grants. This was given to local authorities each year, to be apportioned to services at the discretion of each local authority. The reform of the grant system, under the 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act, restructured the system, removing the supporting element of the Rate Support Grant, which was renamed the Block Grant. The Block Grant was still calculated according to demographic and social factors, but rather than higher rates being favoured, high-spending authorities, as determined by central government, were penalised through a reduction in the grant. Thus the Block Grant involved a new principle - that central government should determine what each local authority should be spending, and penalise 'overspenders' (Butcher *et al.*, 1990). The Block Grant

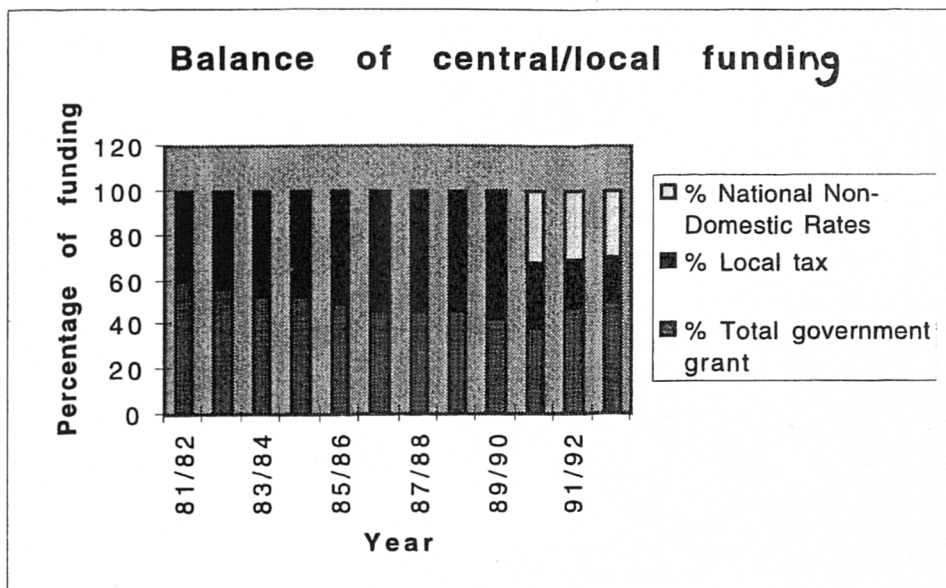
was replaced in 1990 by the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which continues to be used today. The annual distribution of this grant is based on an assessment by central government of the amount of money local authorities in aggregate will be permitted to spend in the coming financial year - their Total Standard Spending (TSS). The government also sets out how much of this will be funded through national taxation, and by implication the proportion that local authorities will have to raise themselves. An assessment is then made of what each individual local authority needs to spend, both in total and in seven principal service areas, and these figures constitute a local authority's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The calculations are based on a limited range of indicators, such as total residential population, and number of school-aged children. The RSG is then calculated by deducting the amount the government estimates the local authority will receive from its residential rates, and from the business rate.

Throughout the 1980s the government reduced the level, in real terms, of grants to local authorities, and shifted the balance of responsibility for paying for local services from central to local taxation (LGIU, 1993). As Figure 3.2 shows, this shift was dramatic. In 1981/82 local taxation (both domestic and non-domestic rates) contributed roughly 40% of the cost of local services with the remaining 60% being met by central government. By 1989/90 the level of government grant had fallen to 43.3%, whilst the rates had risen to 56.7% of the total. The situation changed in 1990/91, as the Community Charge, and National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) were introduced. The NNDR is a nationally determined business tax, and this reduced local authority flexibility further as it meant that central government had greater control over local government finance.

The impact on local government of the reduction in the proportion of central government grant was significant, as a huge burden was placed on local rates, and local authorities had to make the decision either to raise local rates to make up for the shortfall, in order to maintain existing services (LGIU, 1993) or reduce the level of service it provided. Some local authorities increased rates substantially, yet the grant mechanism meant that such councils lost government grants (LGIU, 1993). As this continued through the early 1980s, and rates bills rose to cover the loss of grant, eventually some councils lost entitlement to Block Grant entirely. The Government response to this was to introduce 'rate-capping' in 1984, which allowed it to control rate levels, to curb what it perceived as the profligacy of some local authorities (Wilson &

Game, 1998). Thus, a limited number of English, predominantly Labour local authorities were 'rate-capped', the move being an overtly political one, to exert control over those councils who were refusing to co-operate with government policy. Moreover, new controls on capital expenditure were introduced, which put further pressure on local authority revenue budgets. These changes involved further increases in central control, and weakened the financial base of local authorities (Travers, 1989). As Figure 3.2 below shows, the proportion of central government grant rose slightly during 1991/92 and 1992/93, reflecting the implementation of new policies, for example Care in the Community.

**Figure 3.2 The proportion of local council expenditure met by government grant and local taxation 1981/2-1992/3**



Source: Local Government Information Unit, 1993 p12

Until 1988, the rating system itself had remained relatively unchanged, mainly due to the lack of agreement on an alternative form of local taxation. However, in 1988 the Government introduced legislation to replace the domestic rates with the Community Charge. This was a flat-rate personal tax, and payable by nearly everyone over 18 years old. The poll tax strengthened the link between paying for local government and voting in local elections, and was introduced, due partly to the Government's belief that weak accountability in local authorities had allowed councils to spend in ways and on services which many voters would find unacceptable (Travers, 1989). The important point here is that the amount which local authorities had discretion over in

terms of the poll tax and local charges, was only 22.8 % in 1992/93, and had fallen further to 20.8% in 1995/96 (CIPFA, 1996b), therefore this reduced further their control over raising revenue. The poll tax was extremely unpopular with the public and also with local authorities, and was replaced by the Council Tax in April 1993. This is a hybrid of the poll tax and former property rates, as it is assessed on the rateable value of each dwelling, but is only loosely based on the principle of a property tax, as the bands do not differentiate sufficiently between the smallest and largest residences. Thus the poor pay a higher proportion of their income on the Council Tax than the more wealthy, and this tax has not addressed the inadequacy of the finance system (LGIU, 1993).

The financial changes described above are important to a consideration of the changing role and powers of local government, as they have represented a reduction in the discretion of local government in collecting revenue, in its expenditure, and in its control over service provision. Furthermore, there has been a continuing fall since 1976 in local authority expenditure as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), from 15.4% to 12.5% in 1980, and to only 8.5% in 1995 (CIPFA, 1996b). The discussion now turns to consider the further reorganisation of local government in 1986.

### *3.4.2 Reorganisation of local government 1986*

Following the reorganisation of local government in 1974, further reorganisation of the metropolitan authorities and the Greater London Council (GLC) took place in 1986, through the 1985 Local Government Act. All of these local authorities were Labour-led, and in many cases were directly challenging government policies on a range of issues (Wilson & Game, 1998). The reorganisation involved the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan city councils, and the devolving of some of their powers to the Boroughs and Metropolitan Districts, but also involved the loss of some functions to non-elected bodies. The reorganisation meant a shift away from county-wide strategic planning and according to Gandy this contributed to a:

... fragmentation of local government environmental policy, especially in urban areas, and the failure to integrate different aspects of policy such as the social, economic and environmental aspects of transport and energy needs (1991, p49).

These changes have consequences for urban local authorities as they attempt to implement policies in line with sustainable development, as such policies necessitate a strategic approach to policymaking (see Chapter Seven). The



reorganisation attracted criticism from an environmental perspective on the grounds that metropolitan districts and London Boroughs are too small to be able to respond to city-wide environmental, social and economic pressures (Connelly & Smith, 1999). The changes were exacerbated by a loss of functions from local government to centrally-appointed bodies, particularly in areas such as economic development, urban regeneration, transport provision, and education (Butcher *et al.*, 1990; Pickvance, 1990), and local authorities also lost their representation on health boards. Local government did inherit new functions in the 1980s and early 1990s, for example in assessing and paying housing benefits, and in the provision of community care, as well as further regulatory responsibilities in the areas of trading standards, and environmental health, due to an increasing number of EC Directives, enshrined in legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and Environment Act 1995 (described in Chapter Two) yet few extra resources were provided. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Government has not given additional powers to local government for implementing policies in line with sustainable development principles, and no additional funding for this function has been made available (O'Riordan & Voisey, 1997).

Further changes to local government were imposed by the Government, as part of its wider strategy on privatising service provision in the public sector. The next section discusses first the historical context of privatisation of service provision, and secondly examines the contemporary application of privatisation in Britain, through legislation which forces local authorities to compete with the private sector for the delivery of services.

### **3.5 Privatisation of service provision**

According to commentators such as Ascher (1987) and Hislop (1994), the provision of local public services by people directly employed by local authorities was traditionally accepted by central government as the most effective mode of delivery, due to the acceptance by previous governments that private companies are not appropriate organisations to provide collective services. The origins of direct provision date back to the late nineteenth century, when local authorities began to assume increasing responsibility for the health and well-being of the community, and these new activities became accepted as 'public services' by the majority of voters (Ascher, 1987). Local authorities have, during several periods in the twentieth century, shared service provision with private and voluntary organisations, on a voluntary basis, for

services not available in-house such as laundry, pest control, and management consultancy, but generally the perception in local government has been that 'indirect' delivery reduces accountability, democratic control, and quality of service (Ascher, 1987; Walsh, 1995). (These issues are developed in Chapter Six). According to Ascher (1987) public services are different from private services; first because they must be provided fairly and equitably to end-users, irrespective of income or wealth, and no such requirement exists in the commercial world; secondly there is a danger of private companies closing down, with implications for the supply of a service; thirdly, because of the need to make a profit, the private sector is unable to provide services to those who are on low incomes, who are unable to pay, as the cost is prohibitively high, hence the need for subsidy from the state; fourthly, few public services lend themselves to easy specification, due to the importance of quality in determining citizen satisfaction.

With an increasing number of people from the working classes becoming elected councillors during the early part of the twentieth century, they brought with them concerns about wages and conditions, but also about the cost and quality of service provision and many local authorities felt it was important that those who provided services were part of the local community, and that their wages constituted a fundamental part of the local economy (Ascher, 1987). Moreover, local authorities believed that they could control the quality of services better by employing the workforce directly rather than through the mechanism of a contract. Direct services were argued to offer a much wider range of opportunities for improving, maintaining and developing services through supervision, training and harnessing the potential of those who worked in them (Ascher, 1987). The discussion now turns to the government's policy of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) as a method of privatising service provision, introduced through two major pieces of legislation during the 1980s.

### *3.5.1 Introduction of CCT to local government services*

Contracting-out is a system in which public authorities continue to bear direct responsibility for the provision and monitoring of the service, although the work may be carried out by employees of private firms or other external agencies. It existed on a small scale prior to 1979, and was usually limited to areas such as major construction contracts. The Conservative Government, however, broke with this approach. Ascher (1987) cites the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-9, when local authority and National Health Service (NHS)

manual workers were at the forefront of industrial action, as sowing the seeds of interest of the incoming Conservative Government, in competitive tendering due to its determination to prevent such disruption occurring in the future. Its prime objectives were to exert greater central control over local authority spending and to weaken the power that it perceived local authority manual workers wielded over service provision.

#### 3.5.1.1 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act

The 1980 Local Government, Planning, and Land Act introduced CCT to a limited number of manual services: Building, Highways and Sewer Maintenance; and New Construction. This formed part of a wider programme of privatisation of service provision in the public sector, with the National Health Service undergoing similar changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Mohan, 1995). These measures formed the basis for the future extension of CCT to other services, enacted in 1988 legislation, and are therefore described here, although the particular services affected by the 1980 Act are not considered in this thesis. In order to assess the 'commercial efficiency' of the local authority's operations, the measures, which took effect from April 1981, required that the financial performance of every in-house workforce or Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) be compared against certain targets and that they should competitively tender alongside private sector organisations for certain local authority contracts.

DLOs had to make a rate of return of 5% in each of the areas of work, and the 1980 Act gave the Secretary of State powers to close down a DLO if it did not achieve the required rate of return in three successive years (since reduced to two years). If the DLO won the work then the contract price became its budget, and it operated as if it were an arms-length organisation delivering the service for the local authority. If it lost in the bidding process, the service was contracted out to the private company or other external organisation that had won the contract, and the DLO was disbanded, or transferred to the successful tenderer. It is the *competitive* aspect - the cost comparison - that is compulsory, and not the contracting-out of the service, which may or may not result, depending on the comparative bids. Painter (1995) points out that CCT from the outset has been biased in favour of the private sector, since the time-consuming and costly procedure of putting a service out to tender and bidding for it is only required if the local authority wishes to try to retain services in-house.

According to Walsh (1989), the impact of the 1980 provisions was limited due to a number of exemptions, for example small DLOs were not required to compete for contracts, and contracts below a certain value did not have to go to tender. Local authorities also had the scope to let contracts in ways which were unattractive to bidders, for instance large amounts of work being let, or the ways in which aspects of the work was combined. The private sector therefore won relatively little building and highways work than they had done prior to the 1980 Act, although some London Boroughs lost contracts for building work to private companies. The Government actively encouraged the adoption by local authorities of competitive tendering on a voluntary basis for other services, and the contracting-out of services such as refuse collection and street cleansing started to occur in several Conservative local authorities, such as Southend District Council, and the London Borough of Wandsworth. Ascher (1987) suggests one reason for this was that some of these councils had felt hampered by restrictive practices in these services. Wandsworth in particular had a history of poor industrial relations with its manual workers, and the solution to this was seen to be in a move away from direct service provision (Wilson & Game, 1994).

The response of individual local authorities to CCT (as with other government reforms) was varied, depending on a number of factors such as local politics (Cochrane, 1993; Carmichael, 1994), and their geographical location (Patterson & Pinch, 1995). There was for instance considerable resistance to the policies of the early 1980s in some Labour metropolitan local authorities, such as Liverpool and Sheffield, which stressed the value of collective intervention by the state in service provision, and in areas such as economic development, where they aimed to intervene in and against the market in order to restructure the local economy in the interests of labour rather than capital (Loughlin, 1986; Atkinson & Moon, 1994). The majority of such local authorities chose not to pursue competitive tendering, as in many cases they were attempting to implement alternative strategies for service provision through the decentralisation of local services.

Contract compliance was used by many (mainly Labour) local authorities in the early 1980s to ensure that where services were won by the private sector, the tendering process supported employers with good records in equal opportunities, and health and safety. Despite some interest by a minority of Conservative local authorities in voluntary contracting-out, most local authorities had not extended competitive tendering beyond those services

which were subject to CCT. The Government was therefore increasingly persuaded by the argument for mandatory competitive tendering in a wider range of services. This momentum grew through the presence of two key ministers in the debate - Michael Forsyth and Christopher Chope - who:

... helped to transform what had been a piecemeal assault on the power of local authority manual workers into a Government commitment to enforce mandatory competitive tendering (Ascher, 1997, p38).

Between 1980 and 1985 the debate over private provision of public services rose to the top of the political agenda, and extended beyond local government to include both central government and the National Health Service. However it was not until 1985 that the intentions of the Government were made explicit, with the publication of 'Competition in the Provision of Local Authority Services', by the Department of the Environment (DoE), Scottish Office and Welsh Office (1985), which outlined plans to make competitive tendering mandatory from 1988 for a range of local authority services. This confirmed that the Government viewed contracting-out as an integral part of its aims to introduce private sector discipline and efficiency into local government (this approach being underpinned by the theories of the New Right - see Chapter Four). This represented a further shift by central government towards intervening in the form of provision of services, rather than simply in their financing (Pickvance, 1990). The Government had also appointed the Widdicombe Committee in 1985 to make recommendations on ways to curb the influence of party politics in local government (Wilson & Game, 1994). The Widdicombe report explicitly reflected the government view that local government should move away from its function of direct service provider:

(I)t is not a necessary element of local government that it should itself deliver services. In practice it normally does, but there are examples of local authorities abroad where all services are delivered by some other body under the direction of those authorities (Widdicombe, 1986, p5).

The findings therefore strengthened the argument for extending CCT in the late 1980s (although on their own they did not lead to radical changes to the political system in local government). The Conservative Government, on re-election in 1987, was explicit about its continuing determination to restructure Britain's system of local government (Cochrane, 1993) and acted quickly to bring in new legislation.

### 3.5.1.2 The 1988 Local Government Act

The 1988 Local Government Act extended CCT to a range of services, which had little or no tradition of external provision, namely: refuse collection, street cleansing, grounds maintenance, building cleaning, school catering, other catering, and vehicle maintenance. The provisions of the Act were also later extended to sports and leisure management, and to white collar services under the 1992 Local Government Act. The Government made clear its policy to weaken what it perceived as the coalition of local politicians, local government professionals and manual workers (and their unions), which had been the basis for local resistance to central government policies (Pickvance 1990). Under the 1988 Act, the term used for the in-house workforce changed from Direct Labour Organisation, to Direct Service Organisation (DSO), focusing, in line with Government rhetoric on the importance of the consumer, on the service rather than the workforce. As with the previous legislation, the 1988 Act subjects a local authority workforce, grouped into DSOs, to a series of detailed restrictions. It also gave powers to the Secretary of State for the Environment to issue notices to local authorities which failed either to tender in an adequately competitive fashion, or whose DSO failed to show an acceptable rate of financial return (generally specified at 5% per annum minimum). Contracts now have to be awarded on a strictly commercial basis, with no room for any social, or non-commercial considerations such as pay and conditions, or environmental issues. This represented a key change from the provisions of the 1980 Act. Local authorities are now prevented from acting in a manner having the effect or likely to have the effect of restricting, distorting or preventing competition. This clause has arguably proved the most powerful in the legislation since it has meant that local authorities have to examine the whole tendering process to ensure it is not perceived as being 'anti-competitive'. 'Anti-competitive' behaviour could include: the packaging of work into large contracts that might deter smaller contractors from bidding; the requirement that contractors provide large 'performance bonds' to cover the local authority against the possibility of default; and the rejection of a lower bid than that submitted by the DSO from private contractors without giving good reasons (see Patterson & Pinch, 1995).

Painter (1991) explores the response of local authorities to CCT in the first round of tendering, and notes how local authorities of different political complexes responded differently. He suggests four models in terms of local government responses: 1) a New Right model of local government where a core of staff awards and monitors contracts; 2) non-committal to public

provision (usually Conservative); 3) in-house commitment (any of the three main parties) but acceptance of cuts to pay and conditions; and 4) commitment to in-house provision, with no cuts in pay or reduction in conditions, and recognition of trade unions (strong Labour local authorities). Shaw *et al.* (1994) have also identified different responses to CCT, which range from 'hostility' to 'enthusiasm'. In their research, which studied 23 local authorities across the country, open hostility to the introduction of CCT was mainly expressed by Labour councillors, particularly in the larger urban local authorities. The second response was fear, where senior officers, mainly in small, rural authorities, were concerned about the likely consequences of implementing CCT, in particular the cost of complying with specification requirements. The third response was pragmatism, or a realistic acceptance of CCT, mainly found in the larger local authorities, especially in Conservative-controlled and more traditional Labour local authorities. The fourth response was neutrality, often found in smaller rural districts, particularly with a Conservative or Independent majority, and the response often reflected the 'depoliticisation' of the local authority, and an emphasis on a more 'enabling' role for local government (whereby local government loses its role as direct service provider, as discussed in Chapter Four). The fifth, and less common response was enthusiasm, which came from Conservative councillors, often with a business background, who saw the likely savings to be made through competition, and from senior officers who regarded CCT as a useful device to push through more general changes in management structures and practice.

Patterson & Pinch (1995) consider the geographical variations in local authority responses to CCT, both regionally, and between the North and South of England. London had the lowest proportion of DSOs winning contracts, partly due to the right-wing dominance in London Boroughs at the end of the 1980s, although the political balance shifted during the following years, with Labour and the Liberal Democrats becoming more prominent. One further response to CCT has been to externalise areas of service provision. Externalisation means that there is no competitive process, and the local authority effectively sells its operation to a private firm, negotiating on the terms and conditions on which staff are transferred. The local authority therefore withdraws from the activity, playing only an arms-length monitoring role. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU, 1994) points out that unlike enforced tendering, externalisation represents a positive choice by a council to end direct service provision and get rid of its workforce, although the organisation which takes over usually employs the incumbent workforce.

It also makes it very difficult for the local authority to influence the local economy through purchasing policies, or to promote equality for those who deliver services. A Department of the Environment (DoE, 1997) survey of local government's response to blue collar CCT shows that some local authorities perceive externalisation as a way of preserving a workforce that might otherwise disappear through the CCT process. The survey also found that other motivating factors in externalisation were political direction, an avoidance of the perceived restrictiveness of CCT, and the transference of risk. Manual services such as street cleansing and refuse collection have been externalised, for instance in the London Borough of Ealing's Technical Services Department, and in the London Borough of Hounslow (see PSPRU, 1992; LGIU 1994; Robbie & Wright, 1996 for further details on externalisation).

The CCT process, in conjunction with the requirement to cut costs has had considerable implications for the terms and conditions of the workforce, whether in-house or transferred to a private contractor. The application of the European Acquired Rights Directive 1977, in the form of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (DoE, 1981), otherwise known as TUPE, to local government in 1995 was regarded by local authorities as a way of protecting the terms and conditions of employees if they were transferred to a private company. However, there are loopholes in the regulations, which can be exploited by contractors, for instance an employer is allowed to alter jobs, pay and conditions before or after a transfer occurs, if they are in connection with 'economic, technical, or organisational matters' (DoE, 1981).

CCT has had significant consequences for the provision of local government services, due to its impact on the internal structure of local authorities; on the role of elected councillors; and due to the pressure on local authorities to reduce costs in order to compete with the private sector, which in itself has implications for the working practices and terms and conditions of employees (Patterson & Pinch, 1995; Patterson & Theobald, 1996; Tooke, 1998). Ascher raises two particular concerns about contracting-out. The first is that it raises serious issues of diminishing accountability and control within local communities, as it is not clear what effect the agreement between local authority and contractor will have on the former's ability to react to changing needs of, or complaints by, the community that it represents. Secondly, there

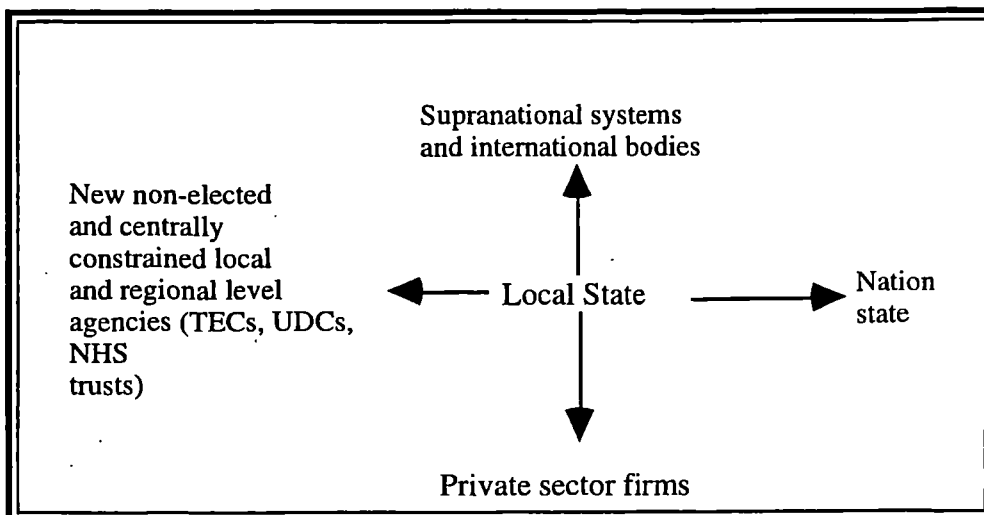


are questions about the replacement of the public service ethic with the private sector profit objective, which Ascher suggests:

... gives firms an indirect incentive to do good work (to keep the contract), but it also gives them a direct incentive to do a job as quickly and cheaply as possible (to cut costs and maximise profit) (1987, p20).

There is a potentially negative impact of this, since carrying out a job cheaply can mean a poor level of service, and often involves cutting labour costs, with detrimental consequences for employees (see Chapter Six). Wilson & Game (1998) suggest that, due to these changes brought about through CCT, the relationship between central and local government has become less confrontational because local authorities have had to engage in a radical re-evaluation of their functions as employer, democratic representative, contractor, service provider and regulator. Patterson & Pinch (1995) have used the concept of 'hollowing-out', as applied by Jessop (1994) to the nation state, adapting it to what they describe as the transfer of powers and responsibilities from local government to a range of non-elected agencies and to central government through a number of new strategies and policies, including CCT - see Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3 The 'hollowing out' of the local state**



Note: arrows represent the flow of power and functions away from the local state. TEC: Training and Enterprise Council; UDC: Urban Development Corporation; NHS: National Health Service

Source: Patterson & Pinch, 1995, p1459

### **3.6 Conclusions**

The restructuring of local government has occurred in a number of ways, which have resulted in significant and damaging consequences for the role and nature of local government. First, local authorities have, since the late 1970s, experienced increasing constraints on their financing, both in terms of the level of government grants, and due to the restrictions on local authorities in raising local revenue. Secondly, the introduction of CCT into the provision of some services has had damaging consequences for local authority employees; and thirdly, new forms of political management have negative implications for local democracy and for the autonomy of local councillors. Fourthly, local government is losing a range of powers to non-elected agencies, and to central government, which has considerable consequences for its role and purpose. These changes described above require theoretical explanation, and Chapter Four therefore explores a range of theories of local government, which provide different explanations for the contemporary restructuring of local government in Britain, and therefore situate the changes within a wider discussion of the role and nature of local government.

# 4

## Theories of Local Government

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the principal perspectives on the nature and purpose of British local government. There are a range of competing discourses which attempt to explain the nature of capitalist western democracies, and the role of local government within this. Pluralist perspectives are considered first, as these are the explanations most frequently employed by policy makers of the nature and role of local government. Neo-pluralist approaches are then discussed as a critique of pluralism, in the form of managerialist, and corporatist perspectives, and a combination of these in the dual state thesis. Within the broad pluralist framework, the communitarian or 'New Urban Left' approach of the 1980s is examined as it provides a useful, empirically based analysis of local government, and finally in this section, an analysis of local government as a form of localism is considered. The discussion then focuses on New Right perspectives which were influential in policymaking during the 1980s and early 1990s, and specifically public choice theory relating to local government. The third broad set of perspectives considered are Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses of the local state, including regulationist perspectives, and the restructuring thesis. The concluding section of this chapter questions the extent to which these debates account for the environmental role of the state and, more specifically, the role of local government in responding to the demands of sustainable development.

## 4.2 Pluralism

The pluralist thesis emerged during the 1960s in the United States, and was identified with the work of Dahl (1963) who has been central to its evolution up to the present day. Pluralism in its early stages represented an attempt to explain western liberal democracies, particularly within the context of the 'Cold War' against the then communist USSR (Atkinson & Moon, 1994). According to Gray (1994), pluralism and liberalism share many features in common, for instance the pluralist assumption that decentralised forms of government are good and necessary for society shares a great deal in common with traditional liberal ideas about the appropriate role of the state. The basic premise of the pluralist approach is that there is no concentration of power in liberal democratic societies, with power being widely dispersed. The existence of frequent and regular elections provides a mechanism for participation, and holds governments accountable to the electorate. In this analysis a multiplicity of pressure groups ensures access to express individual views, and the state is neutral, reflecting the preferences of citizens, and enhancing citizen participation and control over politicians. According to Dunleavy & O'Leary (1991), all pluralists are hostile to a centralised state, thus decentralisation is perceived as a virtue because it is seen to help prevent the emergence of 'democratic' despotism, and provide multiple points of access and sites for pressure group activity. Gray notes the pluralist view that decentralised forms make:

... the state more open to pressure from interested groups and individuals both because they are more accessible and because they fragment the power that the state has, making it more difficult for any one group to control the entire system (1994, p156).

However the pluralist perspective does not account for the differential power of groups, for instance in the case of this thesis, local government employees, trade unions, and private companies, and the public. The discussion now turns to consider the pluralist perspective on local government.

### 4.2.1 *Pluralism and local government*

The pluralist perspective advocates a system of elected local government in which specifically local decision-making powers cannot be tampered with by central government (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1987). This is believed to be beneficial as it provides a level of democratic government that reflects local interests and needs. Local government is regarded as being more participatory,

accessible and responsive than central government (Wilson & Game, 1994), and the pluralist argument follows that, if it has some financial and law-making autonomy, local government can better respond to local demands, since it can make and implement policies which respond to the needs of the local population (Leach *et al.*, 1992; Miller & Dixon, 1996). Butcher *et al.* (1990) suggest that a representative role is often seen as a key, defining characteristic of British local government (although this remains a contentious issue, for instance see Stoker, 1988). A further argument is that local government is more administratively efficient because the decentralisation of decision-making leads to greater local initiative and less overload of functions in central government. Thus pluralists criticise the post war trend for local government to lose major functions and tax raising capacities, and propose that local authorities regain these. Furthermore, they recommend that unelected government agencies be reabsorbed into local government as the latter is regarded as more democratic and therefore more accountable to the electorate. These elements are emphasised to differing degrees by contemporary commentators broadly supportive of pluralism (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1991; Leach *et al.*, 1992; Commission for Local Democracy, 1995; Wilson & Game, 1998).

The pluralist account acknowledges that local government exists in the form of a number of individual political systems, which have different characteristics from central government. Yet it is limited in its analysis of groups competing in decision making as it fails to consider the issues of unequal access to resources and power for different groups. This ignores the argument (Butcher *et al.*, 1990) that decisions over service levels or policy involve gains and losses for individuals, groups, and in some cases whole communities, and a wide range of interests are involved, including taxpayers, pressure groups, and political parties. Local government is inevitably political in nature, as it is an elected institution, ostensibly representing a range of different groups in its local area, and also because it makes decisions on the allocation of resources. Neo-pluralists have attempted to address the weaknesses in the pluralist position, and these arguments are considered below.

#### 4.2.2 *Neo-pluralism*

As the weaknesses of pluralism as a description of policymaking processes became apparent, the response within the pluralist camp was the development of a neo-pluralist perspective. Bachrach & Baratz (1970) argued that pluralism

wrongly focused on a single observable 'face' of power and ignored non-decision making and the 'mobilisation of bias' by more powerful groups. Neo-pluralists, such as Dahl (1982), who moved away from his earlier ideas, did not accept the thesis of a single power elite, but argued that power is in the hands of a small number of individuals and groups in competition with each other. The neo-pluralist thesis argues that 'pluralist heaven' no longer exists, and that access to power is limited (see Atkinson & Moon, 1984). Branson (1979), drawing on a Marxist conception of power in her study of local government in the 1920s in Poplar, points to the narrow assumptions about the 'neutral' nature of local government, when there are clearly periods of conflict between central and local government, and within local government itself. Bachrach & Baratz (1970) noted that participation in decision-making processes is usually on single issues rather than multi-issue representative politics, and such participation often relies on knowledge and expertise. Thus the rise of experts and professionals within local government means that it too contains within its institutions a series of competing interests, with differing levels of power. Some of these ideas are enshrined within a corporatist strand of neo-pluralism, discussed below.

#### 4.2.2.1 Corporatism

Corporatism accords a central role to representative government and to group politics, but unlike pluralist approaches, focuses on advanced industrial societies and modernity, and the role of large corporations. Rhodes (1997) suggests corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation, in which the elements are hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated, according to recognition by the state. However, as Self (1985) points out, the issue of 'who wins?' in the co-operation or collusion between government and interest groups is not dealt with. It is not made clear how resources are rationed when interest groups expect more than government is able to supply. Williams (1995) suggests that in this model the state and competing groups are in a different relationship from that found in other pluralist models. In the traditional pluralist perspective, there is a separation between 'private groups' and the 'neutral' public state which is the focus of group pressure, however, with corporatism the public/private distinction between competing groups and the state breaks down. If governments are unable to control the articulation of interests, the only alternative is to incorporate them within government (Self, 1985). Both the interest groups and the state are in a relationship of bi-lateral advantage, whereby each gets benefits from the relationship that develops between them. This approach is relevant to the contemporary position of local

government in Britain, as it acknowledges the increasing importance of the relationship between powerful groups such as large private companies and the state at a local level. Indeed, Cochrane (1991) suggests the new politics of local government could be characterised as 'local corporatism'. He argues that this involves a shift towards corporatist structures, set within a broader framework of a capitalist political economy, with the representation of particular groups, at local level, occurring through a variety of organisations including, but not exclusively, elected local government. In this context elected local government may continue to play an active leading role in mediating between different interests, but will increasingly do so in a framework which acknowledges the role of business, and is likely to share that role with other, non-elected, forms of government. Criticisms of this approach are discussed below, however, first the discussion now turns to a different form of neo-pluralism - the managerialist perspective.

#### 4.2.2.2 Managerialism

It is appropriate at this point to consider the managerialist position on the nature of local government, as this to some extent widens the debate around the issues raised by corporatism about where power lies in the system. The development of a managerialist approach can be traced to the work of Rex & Moore (1967) in their study of housing in inner city districts of Birmingham, in which they aimed to explain the nature of residential differentiation. The approach was developed in a wider context by Pahl (1969) who argued that the interplay of spatial and social constraints determined the opportunities of access to urban resources and facilities, including housing. Furthermore he suggested that the key to understanding the social constraints was in the activities, policies, and ideologies of the managers of the urban system. This 'managerialist thesis' therefore provides a critique of the pluralist position, as it argues that pluralism fails to address the issue of the power of the state bureaucracy, which corresponds to the growth of state intervention through complex economic and social organisation. Pahl (1969) supported the supposed independence of the bureaucratic form of administration from pressure group and class interests. His notion of urban managers, implied that local governments operate as local administrations, in that the managers work to professional norms rather than to local political direction. However, he later reformulated his perspective on managerialism (1975), and moved towards an emphasis on the values, and motives of those working within a local government system, over the pluralist elements, stressing the strong links between managers and elected councillors in the policy process. This

argument is important in explaining changes to the contemporary role of local government, and is drawn on in Chapter Six, which considers the role of officers and councillors in influencing local government decision-making processes. The dual-state thesis, discussed below, is broadly within a neo-pluralist perspective, and develops the argument about the role of local government in a pluralist system.

#### 4.2.2.3 Dual state thesis

So far the discussion has focused on where power lies in local government and the consequences for its role. Cawson & Saunders (1983) shift the terms of the debate, to consider how functions are allocated to local government, and how this relates to the pluralist perspective, in what they term the 'dual state thesis'. The thesis points to the conflictual framework caused by two spheres of state activity - production and consumption - the first being at central state level, and the second being at local level. The latter is argued to be typified by a more competitive and open system of decision-making than exists in central government. Each sphere is regarded as a focus of political conflict but the nature of the conflict between central and local government can differ in several ways: first, according to the interest groups that are mobilised; secondly, according to the mode of mobilisation; thirdly, according to the level of the state system at which mobilisation occurs; and fourthly, according to the ideology that informs state action, for instance managerial professionalism or pragmatic pluralism (see Johnston, 1994).

There have been several criticisms levelled at this thesis, one being that the allocation of functions does not follow a distinction between production at national and regional levels and consumption at local level, for instance, Stoker (1991) argues that elements of the local state apparatus are involved in the politics of production, such as in economic development. In addition, some consumption functions, such as health care, and elements of the education system, have been removed from the control of local authorities. However, the approach is useful as it recognises that local government has a degree of autonomy, and it argues that elected local government is necessary to help generate legitimacy for government, yet makes a distinction between the institutions of local and central government rather than simply situating local government as an arm of the central state (the central/local state debate, is examined further in section 4.5.1). Another criticism is that the dual state thesis undervalues the internal politics within local government, through focusing instead on its functions (Dunleavy, 1984). An approach which was



developed in the 1980s out of neo-pluralism, was a New Urban Left, or communitarian perspective, which provided an empirically-based approach to local government, and this is considered below.

#### *4.2.3 New Urban Left/Communitarian position*

An approach emerging from within the neo-pluralist mode of thought, and relating specifically to local government, has been evident in the rise of the 'New Urban Left' in the 1980s in the form of communitarian politics. During the 1980s activists of the New Urban Left, such as Blunkett & Green (1983) saw popular involvement in local government as an essential precondition for assertions of autonomy from the central state by local government. This approach emerged from the direct experience of local authorities, and as a reaction to the policies of the Thatcher government. The conflict between central and local government is claimed by Blunkett & Jackson (1987) to be about a clash between political democracy and economic democracy. They argue that since Britain became an industrial society, local government has occupied a key place in the developing democratic order, both through initiating and shaping policies, and as an administrative agent for the centre. Johnston (1994) argues that any reduction in local government powers is reducing the scope of the politics of consumption, and therefore reducing the liberal democratic, pluralist element in British society (this point was discussed in Chapter Three). According to Blunkett & Jackson (1987), councillors and officers are part of a political process as well as a legal system, and local democracy has combined local representation with local collective action.

These New Urban Left or communitarian theories have helped generate a neo-pluralist model of democracy through the analysis of decision making in urban local government during the 1980s, although advocates of this approach (Blunkett & Green, 1984; Blunkett & Jackson, 1987) have changed their position over time. More recently the New Urban Left has shifted from a perspective which assumes that local government should provide services directly, towards an emphasis on decentralisation, participation, and consumer choice, the role of local government being to assist consumers in achieving these aims. Thus it calls for local government to be given specific local powers relating to participation, representation, allocative efficiency, and redistribution, but to act as mediator with other agencies in delivering public services (the term often used is 'enabling', although there is a blurring of boundaries in the employment of this between proponents of New Right ideology, and communitarians). New Urban Left ideas, according to Miller &

Dickson (1996) have tended to focus on non-electoral political activity by means of participatory mechanisms through neighbourhood groups and direct involvement in local decision-making processes. This community-based model of local government therefore encompasses both public service ideals, the need for public-private joint initiatives, and the view that responsiveness to the community lies in some form of direct control by citizens. The perspective is important in the debate about the role of local government, as it situates the discussion in the context of a constantly changing and developing political system, which reflects the dominant ideologies of a particular period. Moreover, it questions the traditional electoral system of councillors making decisions on behalf of the community without the latter's involvement, other than in local elections every four years (at which the turn-out is low). The most recent development in this debate is in the form of localism, and the contribution of a localist perspective on local government is discussed below.

#### 4.2.4 *Localism*

Localism is the most recent explanation, from the neo-pluralist position, of the nature and role of local government, and has developed as a response to the changes occurring in local authorities since 1970. Localism is similar in many ways to the communitarian approach, although, unlike communitarianism it has not directly emerged from the experience of local government. Leach *et al.* (1992), as advocates of a localist approach, acknowledge there has been an increased emphasis on the political left on the responsibility of the public sector to the consumer and citizen, (this has also been emphasised by some right-wing commentators for different reasons, discussed in section 4.3), and this has involved the development of radical ideas on appropriate forms of service delivery, responsiveness and quality in local service provision.

The localist case for local government is premised on the view that a major reform of local government is required (for example Commission for Local Democracy, 1995; Walkberg *et al.*, 1995). Stewart (1996) argues that representative democracy has tended to be reduced in British local government, as in national government, to the electoral process, the current system of democracy resting on only modest citizen and user participation, and therefore being regarded as insensitive to the needs of local people, and lacking public support and legitimacy for its actions. The hierarchical, and departmentalised structure of local government is seen as frustrating the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach (Butcher *et al.*, 1990). The localist agenda therefore advocates institutional and structural change and argues for a

new management style within local government which involves a commitment to openness, learning and innovation. These ideas are incorporated into a conception of 'enabling', based on similar premises to that of communitarianism, which stresses the need to invigorate local democracy through greater public consultation and participation, employing mechanisms such as citizens panels and fora, and working in partnership with external organisations in the delivery of services (Wahlberg *et al.*, 1995).

Stewart (1996) suggests that innovation in democratic practice can strengthen participation by citizens and therefore enhance representative democracy, which he argues is the basis on which the authority of local government rests. He emphasises that the type of citizenship advocated by localism is to be distinguished from that defined in the Charters of the Conservative government of the 1980s and early 1990s, which explicitly and implicitly defined the role of the public as a consumer of services rather than as an active participant in the process of government. Connelly & Smith (1999) argue that there is a case for strong local government providing services because it possesses local knowledge and an ability to be flexible in the light of local conditions, and they have usefully related the principles of localism to those of green politics, particularly in terms of decentralisation, and public participation. These arguments are relevant to the analysis in this thesis of the response of local authorities to the requirements of Local Agenda 21. Indeed the localist approach is resonant with one of the elements of ecocentrism in which the 'local' is perceived as a site of environmental action and democratic arrangements.

#### *4.2.5 Conclusions on neo-pluralism*

The broad pluralist approach, particularly in the form of more recently developed strands of neo-pluralism, is helpful in explaining the importance of accessible and responsive local government, as a counterweight to the centre. The justification given for the existence of local government is that some form of elected local representation and service provision is essential, to reflect geographical differences and local wishes, and thus reflect uneven development in social and economic formations. The discourse therefore centres around ways of improving the system to render it more responsive to the needs of a local community. There is some continuity in the concepts underpinning pluralism and neo-pluralism, for instance both agree that local government is made up of a large number of individual political systems which have their own characteristics. However, they disagree in their basic

understanding of where power lies within the system and why it operates in the ways it does, and on the nature of central-local relations (Cawson & Saunders, 1983; Stewart & Stoker, 1989; Chandler, 1993; Rhodes, 1994). Neo-pluralist approaches are important as they acknowledge that conflict within the system of local government is an everyday event that should be accepted as a normal part of how local government operates. Managerialism acknowledges the role of individual managers in the local government system, and the links between managers and elected councillors in the policy process. New Urban Left perspectives expand this argument further, as they attempt to situate contemporary local government within a wider economic, social, and political and time-specific context, factors which are not considered of importance in the more traditional pluralist approaches. The more recent localist position is particularly important for the concerns of this thesis, as it is based on an assumption that local authorities *can* effectively reflect the wishes of local citizens in a collective way through improved participatory mechanisms, and thus has resonance with one of the themes of Local Agenda 21. There are however limitations of this approach, as it fail to engage with the political nature of local government, and its relationship with central government. A further critique comes from the New Right position which regards such mechanisms as inferior to the market in responding to consumer demand, and this is now considered.

### **4.3 New Right ideology**

The following discussion examines the New Right perspective on the role of government, and specifically local government (the influence of New Right thinking on government policy of the 1980s and early 1990s was explored in Chapter Three). New Right ideas developed in Britain during the 1970s in think-tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies, and the Institute for Economic Affairs, and became influential with successive Conservative governments during the 1980s and early 1990s.

New Right thinkers revived and modernised many of the classical ideas of liberal individualism, and of traditional conservative values of authority and legitimacy (Holmes, 1989; Barry, 1990), thus the New Right approach is not a coherent ideology, but has two distinct strands. Neo-liberalism defends a freer, more open, and competitive economy, and neo-conservatism defends the need for state authority in some areas of social and political life. Gamble refers to

this combination as 'the free economy and the strong state', and argues that what the strands share is:

... the rejection of many of the ideas, practices and institutions that had characterised social-democratic regimes in Europe and the New Deal and Great Society programmes in the United States (1994, p34).

New Right thinkers questioned many of the assumptions that had become accepted for the conduct of public policy, and politicians drew on these ideas in the 1970s and 1980s to build policy coalitions that challenged state institutions and public sector policies (as discussed in Chapter Three). The idea of a free economy and a strong state involves what may appear to be a paradox, in that the state is to be "... simultaneously rolled back and rolled forward" (Gamble, 1994, p36). Thus the state is non-interventionist in some areas, but highly interventionist in others, for instance *the legal system, the military and the police* (Hillyard & Percy-Smith, 1988). Gamble makes the point that, if the state makes the protection of the institutions of the free economy its priority, then it creates the basis for its own legitimacy. The New Right belief, according to Gamble's analysis, is that:

(O)nce all illegitimate functions and responsibilities are stripped away, the state is no longer overburdened by ever-widening responsibilities and infested by special interests (1994, p39).

The strand of neo-liberalism is now considered in further detail.

#### *4.3.1 Neo-liberalism*

Many of the themes of neo-liberalism can be traced back to the ideas of classical political economists, particularly Adam Smith, and to earlier ideas in the nineteenth century developed by philosophers such as J S Mill. Neo-liberalism places emphasis on the values of freedom, choice, the free market, a minimal state, and primacy of the individual, thus it incorporates a number of ideas on the economy and the role of government. Hayek (1960) and the Austrian School, whose ideas developed from the 1930s onwards, advocated the importance of individual liberty and personal choice. Liberty was defined in a negative sense as freedom from coercion, and inequality was accepted since it was argued that individual differences are a natural state of affairs that should not be acted against. The Austrian School argued that state intervention, collectivism, and planning would produce a totalitarian society, and therefore capitalism, with minimal state intervention and a deregulated market, was identified as the system most likely to create and encourage

freedom of choice for the individual. Democracy was viewed with scepticism as it presented the opportunity for majorities to oppress minorities, even if the majority had voted in favour of a government.

There is also an assumption that the market is a better allocator of resources than the state, as the former is assumed to respond to the choices of individuals, whereas the state is regarded to work on the basis of the choices of the few (clearly there is a contrast here with the pluralist position). Hayek's argument was that the state should be more like a market, partly as it was believed that the influence of particular groups, for instance professionals, would lead to a tendency to an oversupply of some goods or services, and a reduction in cost-effectiveness. Yet with a reliance on the market for provision of welfare and other public services, marginalised groups have little or no choice, and, moreover, state intervention has not led to a totalitarian regime in Western liberal democracies, as Hayek's analysis would suggest.

The call for the restoration of sound money was central to the New Right's criticism of social democracy, and this was the economic policy issue upon which the New Right first made an impact (Barry, 1990; Gamble, 1994). Milton Friedman, and others such as Hayek in the 1960s advocated the doctrine of 'monetarism' as the appropriate ideology to underpin the operation of the economy. Monetarism was a major theoretical and policy challenge to Keynesianism<sup>1</sup> (Barry, 1990). Monetarists believe that the full employment objective of post-war economic policy was fundamentally misconceived, because trying to achieve full employment led to accelerating inflation and the undermining of the role of money as a medium of exchange and store of value, a role which was seen as essential for markets to function (Gamble, 1994). Thus the control of inflation was a priority for monetarists as the basis of domestic economic policy, regardless of any increase in unemployment that might occur through this. A further element of neo-liberalism is concerned with supply-side policies in creating a successful capitalist economy. These ideas give priority to encouraging enterprise and restoring incentives, and urge major reductions in public expenditure and taxation to underpin economic policy. State intervention in market processes is criticised by neo-liberals on two main grounds: first, administrative and bureaucratic methods are regarded as inherently inferior to markets as a means of allocating resources; and

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<sup>1</sup> Keynesianism was the approach to economic management from the late 1940s which was based on intervention in the demand side of the economy through policies of maintaining high levels of growth and employment.

secondly, state intervention is seen as wrong on moral grounds (Gamble, 1994).

The market is venerated for reasons of both efficiency and personal liberty, and the case for the inherent superiority of markets over all other forms of social organisation was particularly made by Hayek, and the Austrian school, but also by public choice theorists such as Buchanan & Tullock (1965). Public choice theorists applied the ideas of neo-classical economics as advocated by Hayek to explain the behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats. Gamble argues that the public choice approach:

... provided powerful theoretical arguments against any notion that public bodies were disinterested and enlightened, while private individuals and companies were *self-interested and rapacious*. Public choice theorists started with the assumption that politicians and bureaucrats had their own interests, which they pursued with the utmost vigour (1994, p60).

Such ideas were influential in the reform of public services in the United States, and were introduced into the UK via two right-wing 'thinktanks' - the Institute for Economic Affairs, and the Centre for Policy Studies. The public choice approach represents an extension of a utilitarian approach to analysing individual behaviour in the market-place, whereby, through models of utility maximisation, *assumptions are made about collective decision-making*. This is distinguished from 'private choice' which is individual behaviour in an idealised market setting. Public choice theory assumes the existence of a community composed of separate individuals in which all collective decisions are reached by a voting rule of a simple majority with universal suffrage. In an analysis of public choice theory Keating points out that:

... democracy is seen less as a system for taking collective decisions than as a mechanism for allowing individuals maximum scope for choice (1995, p123).

This approach is therefore radically different from pluralism in its conceptualisation of the state (although it is similar in terms of the equality assumed for all participants). Public choice theorists support local government structures which approximate as closely as possible to markets, allowing individuals to make choices about services, taxes and other policies. A competitive framework which allows individuals and communities to shop around for the best services means such theorists support small-scale, fragmented local government, but for different reasons to those of communitarians and localists. However, as Keating points out, this assumption

is problematic in that it assumes mobility in search of a preferred combination of services and goods, and tax regimes, is costless, and furthermore it assumes that individuals have the ability to act on such choices. More recent work by proponents of public choice approaches to local government places less emphasis on personal mobility, but still supports fragmentation and competition among local governments, argued to enhance allocative efficiency and consumer choice (Lister, 1995; Ridley, 1995). Yet this is an extremely narrow view of the role of local government.

The system of local government in the UK therefore warranted particular attention from public choice theorists aiming to influence policymaking, as they perceived that it had three general weaknesses - operational inefficiency, poor management, and weak decision-making. These were argued to arise because many public services are 'natural monopolies', and because local councils employed different management methods to those in the private sector. For example, the Adam Smith Institute suggests that:

... monopolies are inherently inefficient, unresponsive and likely to be expensive, the customer is denied choice and variety and compelled to pay for a service that they might not want, or might not want in the quantity and quality provided. Where individuals provide for themselves they can choose different levels of service. Where a service is provided collectively they must all take the same (1989, p6).

This argument explicitly rejects the necessity for the collective provision of services, which have the ultimate objective of equality of provision to all, regardless of ability to pay, (however, the report contradicts itself a few lines later - see section 4.4). Moreover it does not regard the role of government as providing for those individuals who cannot afford to choose what provision they require. The argument of neo-liberal proponents is that representative democracy as a basis for local government is a weak mechanism for determining choices about collectively organised provision, and that the electoral system is inferior to other alternatives which allow for the market to prevail. For instance Ridley (1995) argues that the free market enables competing choices to be satisfied concurrently, and that the fragmentation of local authorities and the transfer of many of their responsibilities to market, or quasi-market provision or to direct service-user groups, is the only way in which service provision can be made efficient in terms of public expenditure. This position is fundamentally flawed as it has been shown that private provision is inappropriate in many areas of service provision, since it ignores issues of equality and responding to social needs (Ascher, 1987).



Public choice theory has been subjected to a number of serious criticisms. First, the argument that there is a tendency for local authorities to be inefficient overlooks the fact that public provision is intended to meet a criterion of need as much as ability to pay, and therefore that 'efficiency' is not a useful criterion upon which to make a judgement about the quality of service provision. Secondly, the argument that bureaucrats always engage in budget maximisation rather than delivering appropriate services to their local population, has been undermined, for instance by Goodin (1982), who provides evidence that local authority officers are mission-orientated, and motivated by the content of their policies, and a desire to serve the public. Thirdly, although the attack by public choice advocates on the inadequacies of political representative processes in allocating resources has some merit (as it acknowledges that the current electoral system is not representative of all groups, particularly minorities), this attack is based on an uncritical view of the market, and fails to acknowledge the failure of markets to allocate resources equitably. Hodge (1991), arguing from a communitarian perspective, emphasises the role of the public sector, including local government, as being primarily to meet collective, rather than individual need. This point is important, as it needs to be recognised that in reality, a great deal of social and political behaviour does appear to follow a collective rather than an individual logic. An emphasis on individual need does not allow for redistributive policies and the structuring of preferences by needs, rather than simply according to individual tastes. Furthermore, citizens have a legitimate interest in, and obligations towards, services even if they do not personally use them, for instance the Armed Forces and the Police, which must be provided collectively if they are to be effective, and other local services such as street cleansing, refuse collection, and sewerage. Hodge (1991) points to the importance of empowering people as citizens with equal rights, as opposed to individual customers with a right to exit from service provision.

In conclusion, it is clear that the different elements, in the form of monetarism, supply-side economics, the belief in the primacy of the market, and public choice theory provide some explanation for the thinking behind the contemporary restructuring of local government (as discussed in Chapter Three) in conjunction with the influence of neo-classical economics. However, they do not adequately explain the changes themselves, as Conservative policies were also underpinned by a belief in the need for a strong state in some areas (Hillyard & Percy-Smith, 1988) based on neo-conservative

principles. The following section evaluates the second major New Right approach, neo-conservatism.

#### *4.3.2 Neo-conservatism*

As a doctrine, conservatism is characterised by its emphasis upon the conditions required for the establishment and maintenance of social order, and these included the need for authority and hierarchy (Barry, 1990). Gamble (1994) argues that neo-conservatism has also focused on the 'enemies within' which it believes aim to destroy this order. The perceived decadence of democracy is a major theme, with 'enemies' of a free society penetrating education, the media, unions and other areas of public life. As Gamble (1994) notes, the neo-conservative argument is that under the promptings of the 'new class' of public sector professional employees who staffed the agencies of the public sector, the state has expanded into areas which should be left to other institutions, and has undermined the family on which the state depends for its own support. Social democracy is therefore argued to destroy the balance between state and society, threatening the domain of private life, and the establishment of a mass society. Neo-conservatives have also tended to be critical of liberal ideas of individualism that justify the removal of all restraints in the path of individual freedom, as these ideas are perceived potentially to lead to the erosion of social order. According to neo-conservatism, the problems of post war societies are due to too much freedom given to individuals, and to human imperfection. Solutions to such problems are framed in a collective approach to law and order, thus it is regarded as appropriate for the state to intervene in some areas of public life. There is also an emphasis on the espousal of traditional values such as the sanctity of the family and the duties of the individual towards the collective, although this is not extended to other areas of society.

Gamble (1994) suggests that neo-conservatives are united with neo-liberals in their perception of the destructive impact of social democracy ('the enemy within') upon the institutions of capitalism, although they expressed it differently from neo-liberals, in terms of the erosion of authority. There is an emphasis on the need for tough government, and a call for the coercive power of the state to be used against those creating chaos and disorder, with public order and essential services being maintained at all costs. Those seen to be involved in 'disorder' included strikers and demonstrators, and anyone who was prepared to disrupt the provision of essential public services. There was no direct attack on local government from the neo-conservative strand of the New

Right, but the general opposition to the welfare state clearly included local authorities, as they were central to providing welfare services at local level. Neo-conservatives, as neo-liberals, believe the state's role and expenditure should be reduced in the area of welfare, with the ultimate aim being that individuals become more self-reliant. There are a number of criticisms to be made of the neo-conservative approach: first, the emphasis on maintaining public order is anti-democratic, as it ignores the rights of people to strike, or demonstrate against poor working conditions; secondly it is based on the belief that it is morally appropriate for individuals to not rely on the state for welfare, yet it contradicts itself by an emphasis on a coercive state in a number of areas of public life. The following section describes how the neo-liberal and neo-conservative strands combined in the form of New Right policy under the Thatcher Governments.

#### *4.3.3 The New Right and Thatcherism*

The New Right ideology became influential in the Conservative Party in the late 1970s, and underpinned policies implemented from 1979 onwards. Ridley (1988), a key proponent of New Right ideology and a cabinet minister during the 1980s, stresses that the market place is the most efficient mechanism for providing goods and services where demand exists, and his arguments closely resemble those of public choice theorists, emphasising the 'choice' of individuals, and privatisation of many areas of local provision. Ridley argues that the functions and responsibilities of local government should be reduced, but that limits should be determined by the local population, rather than by central government. However, he is not clear about whether local authorities should be allowed to raise their own revenue. More recently, Lister, leader of the radical Conservative London Borough of Wandsworth (one of the case studies of this thesis), suggests that local government's only task should be to "... enable people to have the best services, at the best cost to the taxpayer" (1995, p5). Thus he argues for greater local flexibility as local government accepts the role of 'enabler', employed in this context to describe a form of local government which loses services to external agencies. Despite overlaps with localist and communitarian approaches, the New Right emphasis is different as it prefers only a minimal role for local government, as its democratic function not regarded as important. Lister argues that:

(C)ouncils must give up their obsession with providing services direct and compete for a variety of tasks such as health purchasing, training, regeneration and partnership with the police in community safety (1995, p5).

His concept of local government is therefore one where it plays a minimal role in service provision, and has a reduced representative function. Such a conception reflects an ideology that places the market, individual choice and self-reliance at its centre. It fails to address the inequalities inherent in such an approach, and ignores the important role of local government in the collective provision of services. There are therefore fundamental weaknesses in the New Right concept of local government, as advocated by Lister and Ridley, in that local accountability through democratic means such as elections and public consultation procedures is not regarded as necessary, and there is a denial of the importance of any values and ideologies within the system which run counter to the New Right belief in the efficiency of the market. However, it is acknowledged, even by the Adam Smith Institute (ASI, 1989) that the market is not always the most appropriate provider of services. The ASI admits that a service might benefit everyone although its particular benefit to any individual would be difficult to identify and charge for, and includes what could be termed civic or amenity services - street cleansing, collecting litter, or maintaining public open spaces as some examples. In a wider context it argues that:

(W)here individual responsibility is possible, the decisions of one individual may have unacceptable consequences for others. Thus, while it would be possible to leave people to maintain a healthy environment, the consequences for everyone else from one person's failure to do so could be serious (ASI, 1989, p6).

In such cases the ASI argues that a service should be provided collectively rather than left to individuals to provide for themselves as they choose. This is an important point, which illustrates the unresolved conflicts in the New Right arguments for individual choice.

As discussed above, the New Right perspective combines distinct strands which emphasise the importance of individual choice and a free (unregulated) economy, combined with a strong and coercive state in some areas of public life. These ideas have been influential in policymaking during the 1980s and early 1990s, implemented in legislation which expanded central control of local government, and introduced privatisation to some aspects of public service provision (see Chapter Three). The discussion now turns to the literature which forms a response to pluralist and New Right theories of local government from a broadly Marxist perspective.

#### 4.4 Marxist theories of local government

The discussion so far has focused on pluralist, neo-pluralist, and New Right theories of local government. These approaches have not attempted to explain the nature of local government as part of the state apparatus, and the capitalist economic system, and the necessity for such a perspective is now discussed through an exploration of contemporary Marxist approaches. Marxism, as an analytical tool, starts from a completely different perspective from pluralism, sharing no ideological ground with concepts of liberal democracy. The state is regarded as having two main functions: first to ensure capitalism survives, and secondly to regulate the class conflict inherent in capitalist societies. The broad Marxist perspective contains a number of different approaches, but what is considered important in all of these is the *form* that the state takes, in terms of the organisations involved, and the ways in which they operate. The contribution of local state theories in work by Cockburn (1977); Hirsch (1977); Miliband (1982); Clark & Dear (1984); Duncan & Goodwin (1988). Poulantzas (1973) is explored first, as these form the earliest studies of local government from this perspective. The discussion then considers Marxist explanations of local government, which place emphasis on the political processes operating in the local state. Thirdly regulation theories, and the restructuring thesis are each considered.

##### 4.4.1 Local state theories

A number of commentators cite the local level of government as important in their explanations of the mechanisms that the state provides to reinforce and support the capitalist mode of production and reproduction, and have developed theories on the nature of the local state, based largely on analyses of urban politics (Cockburn, 1977; Hirsch, 1981). Cockburn argues that local government plays an important role within a capitalist state by helping to provide the conditions necessary for the maintenance of a workforce sufficiently healthy and educated to keep the wheels of industry in motion. Local governments are seen as largely creations of the state, and sustained by it, although Duncan & Goodwin (1988) argue that they also, in turn, have some influence on central decision-making processes.

The term 'local state' is used by Cockburn (1977) in her analysis of local government services in Lambeth, London. She draws conclusions about the role of the local state from her conceptualisation of the central state, and argues that the local state contributes to capitalist reproduction in three ways: first, it is a point of collective reproduction in that people are the direct clients of state

services; secondly, it is a point of economic reproduction, in that it employs its own workforce; and thirdly, it is a point of privatised production, or family life. Cockburn argues that a key issue for the state is the repression of the working class, yet simultaneously the local state's role involves helping the working class through providing for their needs, and representing them through the electoral process. She therefore suggests that the function of the local state is to institutionalise class conflict. Her conceptualisation of local government's role is particularly useful as it discusses how the state uses local government to take responsibility for state crises. Clark & Dear (1984) point out that Cockburn has referred to the constant reallocation of state functions among various state tiers as efforts to unload 'knotty problems' to adjacent state tiers, and they cite Hirsch (1981) who argues that this represents a purposeful 'conflict-diversification' strategy which shifts the effects of structural crises at national level to community and local levels. The local state often lacks the authority and jurisdiction to solve local crises, however, once these 'knotty problems' have been offloaded to local government, it is then deemed as responsible for dealing with them, permitting central government to evade responsibility. Local government is not completely controlled by the central state, but structural constraints exist in terms of regulation, persuasion, and statutory intervention to ensure state policies are carried out.

Clark & Dear (1984) discuss how the issue of local autonomy is crucial in a Marxist approach to local government, first, because with a large degree of autonomy the potential exists for local political change that could threaten the whole state structure, and secondly, the possibility of local autonomy raises the issue of the local state as an independent entity. Thus their analysis provides a useful description of local government's relationship with the central state. The local state is both an instrument of the state and a democratic institution in its own right, and this creates a tension between its functions and its basis in democratic politics. However, Clark & Dear also recognise that it is only through the local state system that social and ideological control of a spatially extensive and heterogeneous national political system becomes possible.

Focusing on the importance of local politics, Branson (1979) uses the example of Poplar in London in the 1920s to argue that socialist local authorities are the natural result of working class political activity. In a similar vein, Duncan & Goodwin (1988) argue that Poplar, and Clay Cross in the 1970s are not isolated incidents, suggesting there has been constant tension beneath the surface since the beginnings of elected local government.

However, Rose (1996) notes that Poplar was one of only a handful of local authorities challenging the status quo during the 1920s, and argues that the picture of local politics is more complex than that portrayed by local state theories, noting that, in the 1920s, class loyalty, but also community morality, and religiosity all coalesced to encourage a participatory form of politics, with many of Poplar's ordinary people becoming involved in the local authority's battle against the Poor Law. The notion of being accountable to local needs and not to central government wishes was crucial to the ideology of the Poplar Labour Party at that time.

Dunleavy & O'Leary (1991) develop the arguments proposed by Branson. By drawing on ideas of Arbiter theory, they argue that the successes of the subordinate classes in capturing state organisations are met by reorganisations which benefit the long-run interests of capital. Moreover they argue that the reorganisation of the state apparatus conveniently diverts the class struggle to multiple fronts, and decentralisation fragments the scope for radical change and raises the thresholds required for it to be achieved.

Harvey (1976), following Poulantzas (1973), considers local government from a different position to that advocated by Cockburn (1977), and Hirsch (1981), as he places particular emphasis on political processes, in attempting to explain how a capitalist state could make concessions to the working class in terms of welfare provision, working conditions, and material progress, *and* protect the dominant capitalist interest. Poulantzas (1973) argues the reason lies in the fact that the advanced capitalist state is 'relatively autonomous' from the interests of the dominant class. However, Miliband (1982), in a direct challenge to pluralist theory, argues that state institutions serve capitalist interests more than working class interests. According to Miliband (1982), local government in Britain has always been part of the system of class power, with different interest groups concerned to use it to their advantage. Local government historically has been involved in ensuring that property, the power of 'gentlemen' and the upper class is retained. Reform, progress, and the 'democratisation' of local government are argued by Miliband to be part of the response to working class pressures, but also part of the way in which the needs of a local population are addressed. Thus even those who believe they are guided by 'professional' concerns in making or administering policy are still class bound, and this raises similar issues to those discussed by a managerialist perspective. According to Miliband (1982), class differentiation in local authorities has a bearing on what services they provide, and to which group or

class, and he cites Labour as generally being interventionist, high spending, and concentrating on collective welfare services, whereas Conservative councils attempt to limit public enterprise, evident for example in their opposition to the municipalisation of public utilities, and in their support (in the 1980s) for the contracting-out of service provision. Miliband however argues in a similar way to Dunleavy & O'Leary (1991), that radical left-wing activists in local government are at the mercy of central government dictates and financing, evident in the government's response to radical Left councils in the 1980s, through the abolition of Labour metropolitan councils, the transfer of functions to the regional level, and increasingly stringent financial controls on local government (discussed in Chapter Three).

In the debate over the autonomy of the local state, there is some agreement by local state theorists that local state structures are entrusted with responsibility for providing a range of social services. Dunleavy & O'Leary (1991) suggest that policy making in this area gives an appearance of being pluralist, sustaining a needs-orientated ideology which seems to indicate the neutrality of state policy. Yet in practice local government is constrained by the centre to prevent it adopting policies thought to be hostile to capital's interests, and local authorities' spending is extensively determined by prior central state commitments of resources. Local government's attempts to decentralise local services, as an opportunity to create a positive force for the development of alternative strategies to those pursued by the centre, has been constrained by the power of central government (Gray, 1994). An advantage of the local state concept is that it theorises local government as part of the capitalist order generally and insists on a linkage between the central and local state. It conceptualises the local state as being necessary in responding to uneven development, but also cites its existence as being due to the need for local penetration of state ideology and policies, and at times to take responsibility for government mistakes. By situating local government within the context of political challenges, the pluralist assumption of local government as neutral and autonomous is therefore called into question.

However, the theories of the local state do not attempt to explain why local government has particular functions. Moreover, Dearlove & Saunders (1994) argue for the need to consider the complex and contradictory reality of local government in its relations to class and the state. The focus on class relations in local state approaches, means that other social inequalities are not adequately acknowledged, and this is a key issue for some feminist writers on



the state (see Lovenduski & Randall, 1993; Walby, 1990). The discussion now turns to a consideration of regulation theory and its contribution to the local state debate, particularly in responding to the issues raised above.

#### *4.4.2 Regulation theory as applied to local government*

Work which draws on regulation theory is one of the most developed and the most contemporary of the neo-Marxist positions with respect to local government in Britain. Before considering its contribution to conceptualising local government, it is helpful to outline regulation theory itself. It was developed in France in the 1970s by Aglietta (1979) and aims to explain how capitalist social relations are reproduced through time and across space despite the fact that they contain inherent contradictions which threaten that reproduction. Aglietta suggests that the reproduction of capitalism is not inevitable, but that to occur, the contradictions of capitalism have to be regulated. He uses the concept of 'Fordism' (a system of production largely characterised by assembly-line mass production and associated social and economic forms) to describe the 'regime of accumulation'<sup>2</sup> occurring during the period from the Second World War through to the 1970s. Lipietz (1988) and Jessop (1988) developed these ideas further in relation to the state, focusing on the state as the most important element in the regime of accumulation. The regulationist approach regards the state as the product of social conflict in an unstable society. The tensions within capitalism are such that:

... the emergence of a relatively stable system of institutions and social relations (a mode of social regulation) to manage and sustain the conditions for sustained economic growth is problematic. Any mode of social regulation is prone to break down and collapse (Stoker & Mossberger, 1995, p211).

The transformation of local government has been the subject of much interest from academics seeking to apply insights from regulation theory to explain the changing nature of local government and intergovernmental relations (eg Stoker, 1988; 1989; Hoggett 1990, 1994; Cochrane, 1993; Goodwin & Painter, 1993; Goodwin *et al.*, 1995; Stoker & Mossberger, 1995), who have drawn on regulation theory in order to explain the emergence of neo-Fordist forms of local government in Britain, and the contemporary restructuring that has occurred. The local state played a significant role in providing welfare and

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<sup>2</sup> A regime of accumulation refers to an interrelated set of production processes, wage regulation, consumption patterns, and state activities. In Fordism the state plays a distinctive role in this regime, through managing and sustaining the demand for, and providing the infrastructure necessary to, mass production.

social services, and this role became increasingly significant after the Second World War, with the establishment of the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS). The introduction of a national education service, and a national health service were key aspects of the welfare state, and many of these services were delivered at local level. Hoggett (1990) makes an analogy between what is occurring in the sphere of economic production, and what has happened in the welfare state and local government as a part of this, based on the notion that 'professionals' operate as people processors in the Fordist 'assembly line' through which the KWS produces and delivers its services. However, this argument is limited as it ignores the values and motivations of professionals, for example teachers, in providing services.

Jessop (1991), in discussing the shift from mass production and a KWS, to a system of flexible production as a feature of 'post-Fordism' argues that the nature of local governance in the 1980s is explained by the gradual collapse of Fordism, and he argues that the KWS is being replaced by a new form of the state which he terms a 'Schumpeterian Workfare State' (SWS)<sup>3</sup>. Different versions of this argument stress to varying degrees the implications for local government. Stoker & Mossberger (1995) suggest some versions argue that the shift away from a welfare state model may mean a reduced role for local government in the emerging post-Fordist system. Cochrane (1993) argues that local government is essentially the local welfare state, but also acts as a political representative, and (as discussed in Chapter Three), Cochrane suggests the contemporary restructuring of local government has occurred along two axes: first a redefinition of welfare, and secondly the development of alternative forms of political representation. Others identify a new role for post-Fordist local government. According to Stoker & Mossberger this latter role is:

... a product of a Thatcher-initiated attempt to change the role and functions of local government to make its activities, organisation and orientation compatible with the flexible economic structures, two-tier welfare system and enterprise culture which in the Thatcher vision constitute the key to a successful future for the UK (1995, p213).

Jessop (1994) suggests that local government in the UK has faced particular problems as an institutional expression of the KWS. The form taken by the

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<sup>3</sup> The Schumpeterian Workfare State operates within the context of an open and globalised economy and aims to intervene on the supply side to promote the competitiveness of the economy and to relegate social policy beneath the requirements of labour market flexibility.

local welfare state with its basis in elected local authorities, has made the tensions particularly sharp since they give the institutions of the welfare state a relatively autonomous expression, yet democratic control is limited in practice. However, Patterson & Pinch (1995) suggest that the best description of the current form of regulation in the UK is that of 'Keynes without Beveridge', as originally suggested by Miller (1978). From this perspective, economic crises are managed not through the contraction of the state as a whole - which continues to intervene on behalf of capital - but through a reduction in social expenses. Their argument focuses on the contraction of the public sector and the expansion of private sector provision of public services, and is therefore particularly relevant to the concerns of this thesis.

There are a number of problems with the application of regulation theory to local government. One problem is that local political processes are relegated to secondary status, therefore it is not explained why there are variations in policies between different local authorities. However, Duncan *et al.* (1993), in an analysis of policies and practices of the local state, have addressed this issue, in relation to the tensions that arise when local authorities oppose central government policies. They question why local government exists at all, and one of the main reasons they give for this is geographically uneven development, which they see as central to the processes of capitalist production and reproduction (also see Harvey, 1982). Thus, according to earlier work by Duncan & Goodwin, "... to be effective, state institutions need to be established at local, sub-national levels" (1988, p62). Local intervention requires the autonomy to respond to uneven development, and this creates a role for local government both as *an agent of, and a potential obstacle to, the state*. Conflict is inevitable as the local state implies alternative political bases to the central organisation of the capitalist state. Duncan & Goodwin (1988) suggest that there is local variation in 'social relations' which is not just a product of the economic base. Therefore local government can fall into the hands of groups who could reject the 'rules of the game' set by central government (such as the New Urban Left in the 1980s). Duncan & Goodwin argue that local state institutions have a key role to play in representing local interests but also in interpreting the decisions of central government, and it is this duality of role that causes tensions between central and local government.

A second weakness (as noted above) is the analogy of local government to a production line (Hoggett, 1990) since in reality professionals such as teachers and other professional groups are expected to make decisions based on

individual discretion. One of the central problems with arguments which start from the identification of a wider shift from Fordism to post-Fordism is that it is possible to acknowledge the existence of many of the changes identified without being convinced they have taken place as part of that shift. However Painter usefully draws on the notion of Fordism to explain why local government restructuring occurs. He argues that the local state is first:

... a part of the mode of regulation, and the site of the development of and struggle over new structural forms, and secondly it is implicated in the development in the 1970s of the crisis of the regime of intensive accumulation (Fordism) (1991a, p28).

Painter argues that local government has for many years provided a range of services such as public health measures, welfare benefits, mass education, and environmental improvements. He suggests local government was given responsibility for these, because in order to provide such measures the state had to penetrate society more intensively. This required additional resources, staff, institutions and knowledge, and local government was able to provide these. Furthermore, as Painter suggests:

... the representative functions of local government meant that the relatively consensual social democratic politics characteristic of Fordism could find partial expression at the local level, but also provided one channel for political conflict which might in turn lead to the development of new structural forms once Fordism went into crisis (1991, p28).

Painter (1991) situates the conflict between central and local government in the context of a crisis of Fordism due to the politics of local government, labour processes and collectivised labour relations. However he suggests that while there are many aspects of the changing role of local government which have been labelled 'post-Fordist' it is by no means clear that they act with other emergent structural forms to stabilise a new regime of accumulation. His analysis is useful as it attempts to explain the importance of local politics in the way individual local authorities operate (as discussed in Chapter Three).

Regulation theory is important to the concerns of this thesis, particularly since it has also been drawn on by writers such as Gandy (1992; 1996), Hay (1994), O'Brien & Penna (1995), Gibbs (1996; 1998), to argue for the need to incorporate environmental protection into the interpretation of contemporary economic and political change. According to Hay (1994), advanced liberal democratic states, dependent on societal legitimation for their continuity, have failed to respond to environmental degradation in other than a token fashion.

For Hay, the environmental movement requires not only a theory of environmental crisis, but also needs a theory of local government, and its role in responding to environmental problems. Hay accepts that the state needs to intervene within the national economy to secure the conditions for continued capitalist accumulation, but argues that such intervention is complicated by the continual need of the state to secure its legitimacy within civil society. Hay suggests it is not difficult to see how this framework might be extended to include the state's responsibility for environmental regulation, but recognises that this may present problems, as the state attempts to reconcile the conflicting short-term interests of capitalist accumulation with longer-term considerations of environmental preservation. However, protection of the environment is *not* simply a legitimisation issue, rather it is linked to the core purpose of government, in terms of protecting and improving public health and well-being.

Both Gandy (1992; 1996) and Gibbs (1996; 1998) have attempted to consider the implications of these changes for local authority environmental policies and on the role for regulation theory in integrating sustainable development and economic restructuring. Gandy (1992) relates the state response to economic crises in the 1970s to the individualised forms of political expression, as promoted in New Right theories and underpinning Conservative Government policies. Gibbs (1998) stresses that a central question to be addressed is how local environmental policymaking interacts with the governance and regulation of local economies, suggesting that the two processes cannot be analysed separately (and this reflects the tensions between the resolution of environmental problems, and economic development). Their analyses provide an important contribution at theoretical and policy levels to the integration of the environmental debate with the debates on the role of local government. However, the experience of local government as a provider of environmental services in specific localities is not considered in depth (see section 4.5).

Regulation theory therefore provides an important account of the role and purpose of local government, and it highlights the impact on local government of a shift away from a KWS. The main weakness of this approach is that it regards the political relationship in local government, and the relationship between the central and local state as secondary to economic changes. However, of specific relevance to this thesis is the regulationist concept of a shift to post-Fordism, particularly a shift to flexible forms of employment,

which can be applied to the provision of local government services. This idea is drawn upon and developed in the 'restructuring thesis', as directly applied to the public sector, and this is considered below.

#### *4.4.3 The restructuring thesis*

An important development in the conceptualisation of changes in the structure of public services and more specifically local government, is the application of what is termed the 'restructuring thesis' (Pinch, 1989; 1994) to the public sector. The restructuring thesis is an attempt to align Marxist economic theory with an expanding knowledge of spatial differentiation in the world economy (Warde, 1988), and although it dominated industrial geography until the late 1980s, it had been largely ignored in studies of public services and collective consumption (Pinch, 1989).

Pinch (1989) attempts to integrate restructuring ideas (which have tended to focus on private manufacturing concerns), with a study of the public sector. He makes the points that the goals of public services differ from the concerns of private companies which respond to variations in profitability, and display greater variations in employment between regions. Pinch suggests the application of restructuring ideas to the public sector has been related to efforts to 'privatise' services and to the introduction of efficiency measures to those services remaining in the public arena. He argues that the model of the flexible firm, proposed by Atkinson (1985) is similar to a model of the public sector that many on the political Right would like to see put into practice. In this model:

... managers would be responsible for sub-contracting out public services to a set of flexible firms at minimum cost to the public purse (Pinch, 1989, p909).

Drawing on a number of categories developed by Urry (1987), who attempted to adapt the restructuring thesis to private sector services, Pinch (1989) applies these (including intensification in labour productivity, the increasing marginalisation of the workforce, and sub-contracting) to the public sector; also see Mohan (1989). Pinch develops these ideas in relation to changes in the private and public sector in Southampton, and concludes that a major weakness of the original concept of restructuring from industrial geography, is that it emphasises outcomes rather than pressures for change. Pinch stresses that the pressures on public sector organisations are very different:

... because of the political and fiscal constraints upon local authorities they have less capacity for closing plant, shifting product lines, and making redundancies, or investing in new equipment (1994, p924).

This is an important issue as it acknowledges the restrictions placed on local government in terms of its powers, resources, and flexibility to respond to changes in local conditions. The restructuring thesis draws on elements of regulation theory in order to make an empirically-based evaluation of the nature of public service provision, and this strengthens the theoretically-based conception of local government given by regulationists. The issues raised by Pinch (1989; 1994) and Mohan (1989) help to explain the restrictive nature of CCT and its negative impact on employment practices (see Chapter Six).

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

A number of competing perspectives on the role and nature of local government have been explored in this chapter, and elements from these different conceptualisations are important in explaining contemporary changes to local government. It is necessary to distinguish between the dominance of some of these ideas at the theoretical level, and the influence of particular ideologies on policymaking. The New Right approach to local government underpinned the reforms of the 1980s to early 1990s, and these were discussed in Chapter Three. At the theoretical level, however, there are fundamental limitations to New Right perspectives as an *explanation* of local government. Key weaknesses include the preference for the market to provide public services, which does not address the need for the collective provision of services to respond to the requirements of all groups in society, and the downgrading of the democratic basis of local government. The democratic role of local government has been rightly emphasised by literature within the localist school of thought, which calls for a strengthening of the democratic basis of local government, based on the premise that local government is, and should continue to be, an important element of a democratic society.

The limitations of a pluralist framework are addressed to some extent by the regulationist notion of local authorities' democratic legitimacy based on the response of the state to economic crises. This approach builds on the earlier Marxist conceptualisation of local government as part of the central state apparatus and it considers the political dimension of relations between the state and local government. Commentators such as Cochrane (1993) and Duncan & Goodwin (1988) show the complexity of this relationship through a discussion

of the relative autonomy of the local state, and its capacity to resist state intervention. The restructuring thesis, as typified in the work of Pinch (1989; 1994) and Mohan (1995) is particularly pertinent in the conceptualisation of changes in public service provision, and the shift towards contracting-out, flexible forms of production, and intensification of work. Their ideas make an important contribution to the debate, and are particularly relevant to this thesis as they are empirically grounded, (this point is developed further in Chapter Five).

One significant omission of the majority of perspectives on local government is a consideration of its role in intervening to address environmental issues and to protect the local environment. This gap in the literature reflects a number of assumptions about the nature and role of local government, particularly prevalent in pluralist perspectives. The issue of the imbalance of power and resources between different groups is addressed to some extent in neo-pluralist approaches, in the form of managerialism and corporatism. Marxist approaches acknowledge that there are inequalities in society, but do not consider the implications of the nature of local government for its ability to meet the demands of sustainable development. The restructuring thesis does not address the tensions between the form of restructuring taking place and the environmental functions and responsibilities of local government. Important research, specifically in the work of Gandy (1992; 1996) and Gibbs (1996; 1998), has been conducted, drawing on regulation theory to explain the wider impact of socio-economic restructuring from the 1970s onwards on the development of local environmental policymaking. However, what is also required is an analysis of local environmental practices. The remedying of this omission is a key contribution of this thesis, as it provides empirically-based evidence of the tensions between sustainable development at local level, and local government restructuring. First, Chapter Five sets out the methodological philosophies underpinning the empirical research, and explains the appropriateness of the methods employed in addressing the research aims, as outlined in Chapter One.



# 5

## Research Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of the empirical research in this thesis is to draw out the experiences and views of a range of individuals on the impact of the changing nature of local government upon environmental services, and the response of local authorities to the requirements of sustainable development. It is intended that the findings will contribute to the currently disparate debates on the environment, and on local government. The researcher acknowledges the continuously developing political processes underpinning the area of study, and therefore the continuously evolving theoretical work that tries to understand these processes. The methodology employed is therefore based on a critical realist philosophy which argues that real objects exist to be studied, but that knowledge of these objects is subject to change. This is applied to social research through an approach in which research is regarded as a continuous process of building and refining theory by an iterative process of empirical and theoretical work. A feminist approach to social research is also employed since, methodologically, it emphasises the importance of recognising the subjective nature of the researcher, and the issue of positionality in conducting research.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how and why the research is underpinned by both realist and feminist perspectives, and to explore the

implications of combining these in one research methodology. First, the main tenets of critical realism and its implications for research methodology are drawn out, in particular in the form of grounded theory. A feminist approach to social research is then examined, in particular relating to subjectivity, and positionality. An explanation is then provided of how the tensions between realist and feminist approaches are resolved, in undertaking this research. Within this methodological framework, the use of intensive research, through case studies is employed, in order to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the impact of local government restructuring on local environmental policy and practices. Semi-structured interviews are used for the primary research, and the advantages and disadvantages of this technique are examined. The use of secondary, extensive data as a resource to support the primary research, is then discussed. Having situated the research in a theoretical and methodological context, a detailed account of the research process is given, from the initial contact with potential respondents for a pilot study, through to the stage of the analysis of the primary and secondary data, and the dissemination of the findings. The following section provides an analysis of critical realist philosophy and its application to social research.

## **5.2 Critical realism and social research**

Critical realism is a version of realist philosophy, as applied to social science, originally proposed by Bhaskar (1979; 1989) and adopted by writers such as Sayer & Morgan (1985), Sayer (1992), Layder (1993), and Pratt (1994), in the development of a realist research methodology. Bhaskar (1979) argues for an anti-positivist stance in the philosophy of science, based on an essentially realist view of science. Positivism is underpinned by the notion that laws depend on conjunctions of atomistic events or states of affairs, interpreted as the objects of actual experiences, and the conception is therefore of humans as passive in their experiences, and of a world as made up of objective, observable and recordable facts and events. Critical realism is in opposition to this, and is based on an explanation of social reality, in which, although reality is not subjective, human knowledge of reality is itself subjective. The philosophy therefore emphasises the existence of reality independent of human consciousness, but also ascribes causal powers to human reasons and social structures, and rejects relativism in social and scientific discourses (Yeung, 1997). Social structures are perceived as already existing, independent of human cognition, and, according to Pratt (1994), humans only know the world through discursive interpretations of it. Pratt emphasises that, in the pursuit of

knowledge, it is important to attempt to represent objects independently of the discursive practices in which they are known. Thus knowledge is constructed in the shape of theories and concepts, and through this, social structures are transformed and reproduced by social actors. Human agency has intentions, with the knowledge people have of their social world affecting their behaviour (although there may also be unintended consequences of these), and there is a continuous process of transformation between structures and human beings (May, 1997).

Critical realism has much to say of value to the social sciences, however, according to Yeung (1997), many realist philosophers are almost exclusively concerned with refining their philosophical positions, at the expense of ways in which it can be practised. However, this has been redressed to some extent, in particular through the work of Sayer & Morgan, (1985), Sayer (1992), Pratt (1994), and Patterson (1996). The development of a critical realist research methodology is examined below.

### *5.2.1 Methodological implications of critical realism*

A realist approach to social research works within the principles that real structures exist in the world and therefore real objects exist to be studied, as opposed to an idealist approach, in which the world is conceptualised purely according to what humans believe exists. As noted above, according to critical realist philosophy, the world exists independently of human knowledge of it (Sayer, 1992). Linked to this, a second important element of a realist approach to research is based on a recognition that, despite the existence of real objects to be studied, human knowledge of the world is theory laden, and subject to change, since knowledge develops neither as the steady accumulation of facts within a stable conceptual framework, nor through simultaneous and universal changes in concepts (Sayer, 1992). This thesis involves a consideration of the changing nature of two disparate debates on local government restructuring, and the environment, and the way in which this reflects the developing knowledge of real events and processes. Although the state and local state are perceived in a number of different ways (as indicated in Chapter Four), local government is made up of real objects to be studied.

Sayer (1992) argues that knowledge of the world is primarily gained through human activity both in attempting to change one's environment, and through interaction with others, and this involves using shared resources, such as a common language. Because of this, individuals cannot develop

knowledge independently of the society in which they learn to think and act. When humans reflect upon their beliefs and the concepts they use, they often alter them in the process, trying to resolve inconsistencies and thus come to understand the world in a new way. In a similar vein, Williams & May (1996) propose that social structures only exist by virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be identified independently of them - people occupy social roles that are 'produced' by the structures and in turn they reproduce structures or 'transform' them. This has been illustrated in the changing conceptualisation of the environment and of local government (discussed respectively in Chapters Two and Four), and helps to explain how theoretical discourses are constructed, and how humans adapt to new discourses, framed in a continuously developing knowledge of the world. Sayer (1992) argues that it is necessary to consider the *production* of knowledge as a *social activity*, and that, to develop knowledge, humans need raw materials and tools on which they can work. The task of social research is therefore not simply to collect observations on the social world (as positivism advocates) but to explain these within theoretical frameworks which examine the mechanisms that structure human action (May, 1997). Sayer (1992) reflects on the relationship between the subject and object in the production of knowledge, and suggests that the meaning of 'subject' is as a creative agent that brings about change. Thus he proposes that "... social science must stand in a critical as well as an explanatory and interpretive relationship to its object" (1992, p41).

Grounded theory, developed in the 1960s by Glaser & Strauss (1965) and more recently by Layder (1993), is particularly relevant to the practice of critical realism. Layder's argument is for open-ended forms of theory rather than ones that narrowly specify relationships between measurable variables. In his approach, interpretations and data collection are guided by successively evolving interpretations of the world. Theory must be grounded in empirical evidence so that the researcher is not dealing only with abstractions. According to Punch (1998), grounded theory is best defined as a research strategy, in which there is a continuous process of theory generation, with data being collected which either supports or revises a theory. The important point here is that data may itself be theory-dependent.

Grounded theory strongly underlines the human dimension in society, and the importance of meaning in peoples' lives. Thus it concentrates on the subjective aspects of social life, through observing individuals close-up. There are ways in which individuals construct knowledge of their social environment,

and Layder (1993) makes a distinction between the macro (large-scale or collective) level, and the micro (small-scale, face to face) level at which research investigates this. According to Layder, the macro level tends to favour quantitative survey methods to concentrate on the large-scale phenomena of social structures and institutions (advocated by Blau & Duncan, 1967; Goldthorpe, 1980; Wright, 1980). Grounded theory focuses more on the micro level, and therefore employs qualitative techniques. There are different levels and dimensions of social reality (expressed in the distinction between the macro and micro level of study), and Layder attempts to bring the macro and micro analyses together by offering the conception of a layered society. This allows the researcher to take account of both the units and timescales involved in social processes and social change (Layder, 1993). This conceptual framework underpins the West London research, as it provides a framework in which to consider the connections between individual experience at local authority level, and the wider policy structures. Furthermore, it reflects the layered nature of social reality, in terms of the different levels and timescales, and geographical variations in which social change occurs (see Massey & Meegan, 1985).

As noted above, in a realist approach to research, there is an emphasis on using intensive, qualitative methods in data and theory generation (Sayer, 1992; Layder, 1993; Pratt, 1994), although the approach acknowledges that there is a role for quantitative methods:

... quantitative components can be understood as satellites around the central axis of qualitative fieldwork, filling out and suggesting concepts and theoretical ideas as they emerge from the research (Layder 1993, p112).

In the West London research, an intensive approach was used, in order to develop an in-depth analysis of individuals' views within wider institutional structures, and secondary, extensive data was also drawn on to provide a context for the research, and a broad description of the issues to be considered.

Realist methodology considers the issue of subjectivity to be important in the collection of data and the building of theories, and this aspect of research has been developed further in feminist approaches to social research, in terms of the relationship between the researcher and researched in the production of knowledge. The importance of subjectivity and the extension of this concept to the idea of positionality of the researcher is now considered.

### 5.3 Feminism and social research

The ideas underpinning the plurality of feminist approaches to social research grew out of the criticism of positivism as the dominant social science theory and its accompanying methodology. Moreover, it developed out of an explicit desire to consider gender issues in research. Thus the main guidelines of feminist research are the conscious identification with research subjects, versus research which claims to be value-free, indifferent and neutral; the influence of subjectivity on the collection of data, and on the generation of theory; and the perception of research subjects as part of a bigger social whole, with the researcher being part of this social structure. Instead of regarding people in the research process as simply sources of data, this perspective acknowledges that the relationship between the researcher and the researched is a complex one, and as England suggests:

(T)he researcher explicitly acknowledges his/her reliance on the research subject to provide nuances of meaning that structure and shape everyday lives (1994, p82).

The important issue here is that whilst striving to minimise bias, it is necessary to be explicit about my subjectivity as a researcher, and therefore about my influence on the research process. From a feminist perspective, research is an interpretative activity, and objectivity is a falsehood, since, as Stanley & Wise (1993) note, research is an interpretation of reality through the eyes of one person. This perspective also emphasises that conceptual frameworks are always those of a particular historical moment, and place, thus there is resonance here with realist arguments, as both emphasise the potentially transitory nature of theories.

Mies (1993) argues that a *feminist approach goes further than focusing on* subjectivity, through connecting the distortion of perceptions on the part of the researcher, and this is defined as positionality. Thus the characteristics of researchers are important determinants in the way they see and interpret reality (Punch, 1998), and it is necessary to take account of the researcher's own interest in the problems being studied. Research (as in a realist approach) is regarded as a developing process, but also as one within which the positionality of the researcher needs to be made explicit (Mies, 1993). This was deemed important in undertaking the West London research, in terms of my values and political views (as discussed in Chapter One). Part of this process involves the scrutiny of the 'self' as researcher (England, 1994), in order to be honest about the influence of the researcher on the research process.

Indeed, Olesen (1998) argues that, if the researcher is sufficiently reflexive about his or her project, it is possible to use this insight to guide data gathering, and to understand the ways in which their own interpretations and behaviour affect the research.

Both realism and feminism are based on a view that theories are not static, rather that they develop during the research process, as knowledge is constructed and changed through empirical study. Both regard the issue of subjectivity in the generation of data and theory as important to a research process, in that there are real objects to be studied, but knowledge of these is subjective. The West London research necessitates the employment of both methodological perspectives, as it aims to explore the relationship between the disparate discourses on the environment and on local government, through evaluating local environmental practices at the micro level. This requires an intensive form of research, as advocated by realists, and within this, the relationship between the researcher and individual respondents is recognised to influence the nature and quality of the data. The chapter now turns to an evaluation of the use of intensive methods for the West London research.

#### **5.4 Intensive research**

Sayer & Morgan (1985), and Sayer (1992) make an important distinction between extensive and intensive research. Extensive research relies on aggregate statistics and surveys, but with intensive research, there is a heavy dependence on non-standardised and qualitative analytical techniques, as the emphasis is on abstraction rather than on empirical generalisations. Sayer & Morgan (1985) stress that it is a mistake to view different methods as applicable at different levels of analysis, i.e. extensive for macro scale, and intensive for the micro level. Rather the differences lie in their explanatory frameworks, and not in their analytical scope, and as discussed earlier, grounded theory illustrates that there can be a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches within research, depending on the aims of the study. Intensive research asks different sorts of questions, uses different techniques and methods, and defines objects and boundaries differently to extensive, large-scale research, and is also concerned with how causal processes work out in specific cases (for instance Sayer & Morgan consider how industry is restructured in a particular place or time period). Intensive research tends to use interactive interviews (discussed in section 5.5), and there is a focus on groups whose members relate to one another causally. This is particularly

pertinent in a consideration of individuals and groups within local authorities, which operate as part of a wider structure of local government.

Sayer & Morgan (1985) stress that both intensive and extensive research are important (although they argue that intensive is of greater value), but fulfill different functions, in that the former is explanatory and the latter descriptive. In principle they can be complementary, since extensive research provides widespread information on how representative a particular process is, yet on its own it fails to indicate what processes have produced the patterns it reveals. The relations it discovers are formal (for example, similarities, and correlation), rather than substantial causal relations, which intensive research provides. Sayer (1992) acknowledges the perceived disadvantages of an intensive method, in that the results are not 'representative' of the whole population. He suggests that proponents of extensive methods often regard intensive research as failing to produce 'objective' results because of a lack of representativeness, but he argues that there is no reason why an intensive study should be less 'objective' about its particular subject matter than extensive studies. In some cases "... the unusual, unrepresentative conjuncture may reveal more about general processes and structures than the normal one" (1992, p249).

The West London research is of an intensive nature, as its focus is to gather qualitative information on the views of respondents both as individuals and as part of an institution, and reflect on these findings in the light of relevant qualitative or quantitative research conducted elsewhere. Having explored the reasons for undertaking intensive research, the discussion now examines the reasons for using interviews as a qualitative technique in intensive studies, as advocated by both realists and feminists.

## **5.5 Interviewing as a research technique**

Underpinning realist research is a recognition of the structural and institutional constraints and pressures that individual respondents operate within. Sayer & Morgan (1985), in work on industrial restructuring in the UK, argue that in any interview there is an element of 'impression management', both by the interviewee and interviewer. They stress the importance of carrying out a number of interviews within a small-scale case study, because this allows corroboration of one interview by others, and thus enriches the information gathered about a particular event cited by one interviewee. This view is



supported by a feminist approach, for example McDowell argues that qualitative work allows the development of a less exploitative and more egalitarian relationship between a researcher and her participants than is possible in other methodological frameworks:

... the interconnections and the relationships that might develop between an interviewer and her subjects are seen as a valid part of the research process, rather than something to be guarded against. Intersubjectivity rather than 'objectivity' characterises the ideal relationship between a feminist researcher and her 'subjects' (1997, p107).

Holstein & Gubrium (1997) argue that interviewing is the most widely applied technique for conducting systematic social inquiry, and provide a critique of what they describe as a conventional view on the role of interviews, where the conversation is seen as a 'pipeline for transmitting knowledge'. According to Holstein & Gubrium the interview should rather be treated as a "... social encounter in which knowledge is constructed" (1997, p14), thus it is not a neutral exercise but is instead a site of producing knowledge.

There are a number of different types of interviews that can be used in collecting data for research of a qualitative nature, with a range of typologies employed to describe these. The main dimensions of the variation are the degree of structure in an interview and the degree to which the interview is standardised across different interviews and contexts (Punch, 1998). At one end of the continuum interviews are highly structured, and tend to follow a standard format, with pre-coded categories for responses. At the other end, interviews are informal and unstructured, with general questions to start the interview, and the issues to be discussed emerging as the interview progresses. Between these is what is often termed as the 'semi-structured interview' or interactive interview (Sayer & Morgan, 1985) which has some element of standardisation, in terms of the areas to be discussed, but allows flexibility in the way in which the interview develops, and permits issues to be discussed in depth (Punch, 1998; Robson, 1993). According to Sayer & Morgan (1985), interviews are inevitably interactive, therefore this needs to be incorporated into the research, and used to maximise the flow of information. However, they stress that this does not involve trying to influence the respondent, but means changing questions and emphases during an interview, in the light of what the interviewee can talk about. This approach also raises the issue of subjectivity, and meaning-construction, since:

... the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from and transforms the facts and details (Holstein & Gubrium 1997, p117).

Thus the interview process is constantly developing as knowledge expands. Punch (1998) points out that the type of interview selected needs to be aligned with the research questions, and in the West London research, interactive or semi-structured interviews were used since the researcher was attempting to explain the impact of local government on the provision of environmental services, and on local government's role in responding to the requirements of sustainable development. This required an analysis of the views of managers working within local government, or of those contracted to deliver its services. It was appropriate to employ semi-structured interviews as this draws on both a realist, and feminist approach to intensive research. The advantages and limitations of using semi-structured interviews as a research tool are now considered.

#### *5.5.1 Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews*

There are a number of advantages to using semi-structured interviews. According to Layder they are one of several "... efficient means of obtaining qualitative information on the fabric and dynamics of situated activity, either as it happens, or shortly after" (1993, p116). (Other methods proposed by Layder are observation and diaries). Furthermore, the technique allows interviewees to construct their own accounts of their experiences, and permits a more wide-ranging discussion than a method such as questionnaires (Valentine, 1997). The use of semi-structured interviews allows value assumptions to be acknowledged as a part of the research process, due to the recognition of the subjectivity of the researcher in that process (Layder, 1993).

Semi-structured interviews are useful in that they produce both quantity and quality of information. They can be flexible in the approach used by the interviewer to discuss the issues, and they allow relevant subjects to be discussed in greater depth if this is felt by the interviewer, or interviewee, to be appropriate. Robson notes that such a technique offers the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, and investigating the respondent's underlying motives, thus interviews have the "... potential of providing rich and highly illuminating material" (1993 p229). A further reason for using semi-structured interviews is that they can combine straightforward, factual questions with open-ended questions. Cohen & Manion (1989) suggest the latter are flexible

as they allow the interviewer to probe in order to go into more depth if required, or clear up any misunderstandings. They also enable the interviewer to test the limits of a respondent's knowledge, a technique employed in the West London research, particularly in relation to questions about Local Agenda 21 (LA21). Moreover they encourage co-operation and rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes. Open-ended situations can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers, which may suggest hitherto unthought-of relationships or hypotheses and this is important as it permits theories to develop through the period of the research process.

There are, however, limitations to using semi-structured interviews. There is a potential danger of the researcher influencing what the interviewee has to say or the way in which he or she responds. This can be exacerbated if questions are unscripted or devised as an interview develops, thus it is necessary to construct questions in such a way to minimise this occurring. Additionally there is potentially a problem with questions referring to the past, as respondents may have memory lapses, and recollections change over time. Robson (1993) therefore argues that the best responses are obtained to specific questions about important events in the present or recent past. In the West London interviews questions are asked relating to *current* local government policy, but which also require an assessment of developments in policy over a time period of seven years (1989-1996). The researcher has taken this into account in the analysis of the data collected in the interviews, and has used triangulation of the data through supplementing it with appropriate secondary, often extensive research data, published throughout the period of the study.

According to Marshall & Rossman (1995), an in-depth approach involves personal interaction, and co-operation is therefore essential, however there is a danger that interviewees may be unwilling to share *all* that the interviewer hopes to explore, or may be unaware of why they behave in a certain way - this is a point at which conceptualisation of the structures within which individuals operate is useful (Sayer & Morgan, 1985). There is a related issue of the *unintended* consequences of an individual's actions, or of a particular policy, and in the case of the West London research, one unintended consequence of the policy of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) is its impact on the local environment (see Chapter Six). Furthermore, at times interviewees may have reasons not to be truthful, and this will not always be apparent in the interview, although this is an issue in any social research, as an individual may

choose for a number of reasons to conceal the truth, or their perception of events may differ from the perceptions of others. This limitation is recognised as being part of the subjective nature of the researcher/researched relationship.

As discussed earlier, realist methodology is based on a belief that intensive research is the most important in attempting to explain causal relations, however, it is recognised that quantitative, usually extensive, data has a role to play in generalising the findings of intensive research. The following section explains how the intensive research was supplemented with appropriate secondary data of a quantitative nature.

## **5.6 The use of secondary data**

The analysis of documents and other papers and surveys is important in yielding valuable quantitative as well as qualitative information, and such data, in addition to theoretical texts, are useful in developing an understanding of wider structures or institutions (Sayer & Morgan, 1985; Layder, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1997). Clark (1997) argues that secondary data provides five types of context for the primary data which the researcher collects - political, geographical, historical, social, and economic, and also allows comparison of case-study material with other areas at the same scale or with larger areas. In the West London research a wide range of sources were utilised in constructing a picture of the political process of local government restructuring and related changes, and of the development of Local Agenda 21 in Britain. Surveys of local authority responses to Local Agenda 21, and surveys of CCT in local government have, and continue to be, conducted on a regular basis by national organisations, in particular the Local Government Management Board (LGMB). A bi-annual Contracts Handbook is produced by a private organisation (Davis-Coleman), which provides data, based on surveys of local authorities, on CCT contracts in local authorities across the UK. In addition, research related to the impact of CCT on working practices, terms and conditions, and quality of service provision, has been conducted by central government, the Local Government Management Board (LGMB), the Public Services Privatisation Unit (PSPRU), The Association of Direct Labour Organisations (ADLO), the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) and more recently the Local Government Association (LGA). Little research has been conducted into the consequences of CCT for local environmental practices, two exceptions being the AMA (1995) guidance on incorporating environmental criteria into

contracts, and a report by ADLO (1997), which considers the impact of CCT on the provision of the grounds maintenance service. The West London research aims to address the lack of work in this area, through case study research in three local authorities (discussed in Chapters Six and Seven; and see Patterson & Theobald, 1995; 1996). An evaluation of the documentary material assisted in developing the interview schedules and expanding the researcher's background knowledge of the issues involved. A description and explanation of the three case studies selected is now provided, focusing first on the pilot study conducted, and secondly on the main body of the primary research.

## **5.7 The West London case studies**

The selection of case studies in which to conduct intensive research, through interviews and the analysis of documentary evidence, provides an opportunity to focus on a particular institution, group, and individuals within these, and to reveal complex relationships operating in these contexts (Sayer, 1992). Comparative case studies, as in the West London research, allow an analysis of research findings from different localities and potentially enable greater understanding of the variations between organisations and individuals being studied (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993). This section explains the reasons for carrying out a pilot study prior to the main body of empirical research, and describes the process of the pilot stage.

### *5.7.1 The pilot study*

Robson argues in favour of piloting any empirical research, as he suggests there is no substitute for involvement with the 'real' situation, "... when the feasibility of what is proposed in terms of time, effort and resources can be assessed" (1993, p164). A pilot study helps to identify the problems of converting research questions into reality, and with case studies, there is sufficient flexibility to incorporate piloting within the study of the case itself (Robson, 1993). Robson refers to the importance of pilot studies in their own right with an essentially exploratory function, where some of the research questions are methodological. This approach was adopted in the West London case studies, whereby a pilot study was used for three reasons: first, to assess whether the research was feasible; secondly, to evaluate whether the three local authorities selected were appropriate to the aims of the research; and thirdly, to assist in developing the interview schedules.

For the pilot research an informed decision was made to concentrate on three local authorities in West London, and for the purposes of the pilot study these were Hounslow, Richmond, and Harrow. Two important reasons for selecting these were pragmatic ones, in that the local authorities are in close vicinity to the researcher's work and home, and therefore the areas are familiar, and secondly the researcher was previously employed in both Hounslow and Richmond local authorities, and therefore has an understanding of the ways in which these local authorities operate. There were a number of other, methodologically-based reasons for the selection: first, studying three local authorities in West London could hold steady some of the geographical factors (see Figure 5.1, which shows the location of the three Boroughs).

**Figure 5.1 The London Boroughs**



Source: London Research Centre, 1991 p2

Secondly they are urban local authorities in the most affluent area of London; thirdly, the three local authorities have different political complexions: Hounslow has a strong Labour majority, Richmond is predominantly Liberal Democrat, and Harrow was Conservative but became a hung council in 1994, thus the political differences were important in that they

would potentially be reflected in the response of individuals to CCT; fourthly, by focusing on three case study areas, in close proximity to each other, the aim was to provide both scope for comparative analysis between local authorities, and opportunities for in-depth research within each local authority, through a series of semi-structured interviews; and finally, all three local authorities had begun to develop a Local Agenda 21 strategy. The next section describes how three environmental services were selected for study.

#### 5.7.1.1 Selection of services for study

Three of the seven services subject to CCT under the Local Government Act 1988 were selected for in-depth study within the three case study local authorities. The services are refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance. A brief description of the activities involved in each service is given below, and the similarities between them are highlighted.

Refuse collection is a statutory service, and is subject to nationally set environmental standards. The service involves the regular collection of rubbish from residential, industrial, and commercial premises. The refuse collection service is one which local residents are particularly aware of, since it affects them directly, and is regularly provided, usually on a weekly basis. Increasingly the service incorporates the collection of waste to be recycled as an alternative to waste for incineration or landfill, partly due to the scarcity of landfill sites, and the landfill tax on local authorities, and also because of the damage to the environment from landfill sites. Local authorities have set targets in line with central government requirements for 25% of waste to be recycled by the year 2000. Alternatives to recycling, such as composting are also being developed, as a further way in which some local authorities are seeking to lessen dependence on landfill, and to reduce the level of waste. Clearly, waste management is an important component of the environmental aspect of sustainable development.

Street cleansing, as with refuse collection, is a high profile, publicly visible service with public health implications. It involves a range of activities, including the clearing of fly tips, drains, leaf clearance, cleansing residential and retail areas, and the removal of litter, and of graffiti. The service is statutory, and since 1990 it has been subject to regulation through the Litter Code of Practice, part of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, intended to lead to cleaner streets. The street cleansing service also provides a contribution to sustainable development, since the quality of the street

environment, in terms of its cleanliness, state of repair, and general appearance is important to people both living in and working in a local area.

The grounds maintenance service involves the upkeep and management of parks and open spaces, as areas of leisure and amenity for the public. The service differs from the other two in that it is non-statutory, however, the existence of open areas particularly in urban areas is a vital asset for local residents for social, environmental and health reasons (Welch, 1995). The provision of the service offers scope for the adoption of sustainable ways of operating - in terms of products used, the types of open space provided, and the ways in which areas are maintained.

The three services also have particular characteristics in common:

- 1) They are traditional environmental services, having been provided by local authorities for many years as part of their municipal role in keeping their local area clean, and attractive for the local population. Refuse collection and street cleansing in particular provide an important service in terms of public health, and grounds maintenance also plays an important role in promoting public health and well-being.
- 2) They have a major impact on the visual quality of the urban environment. The services are therefore publicly visible and high profile, with a direct impact on all residents in the borough. These characteristics are not attributable to other manual services subject to CCT - building cleaning, vehicle maintenance, welfare catering, and other catering, as these do not have such a high profile, and tend to affect particular groups of people.
- 3) Local people are regularly consulted on their perceptions of the delivery of these services either through national surveys, surveys carried out by local authorities, or the establishment of complaints systems (MORI polls, Tidy Britain Group Surveys, and internal complaints systems).
- 4) The three services (as with other services subject to CCT), involve activities, equipment, and products which could incorporate more environmentally sustainable methods and practices, either through national legislation, or local discretion.



5) The services are labour intensive, and there is a considerable impact of CCT on the level of employment, and on working practices.

Having made a decision to study these three services, the next stage was contacting relevant individuals within local authorities.

#### 5.7.1.2 Individuals contacted for the pilot study

A decision was made at an early stage of the research that it was not appropriate to contact manual workers in the three services, as the emphasis of this thesis is on the policy process and practices operating in relation to CCT and LA21, rather than a consideration of the specific experiences of manual employees. It was appropriate to aim the empirical research at the level where policy is made, and therefore to focus on those in the position to make decisions related to the areas being studied. People within the three local authorities were contacted by letter, to explain the nature of the research being undertaken, and to request an interview. Valentine (1997) points out that, in making decisions on whom to interview it is important to be self-reflexive, and to consider how one's own identity will shape interactions with others. She suggests it may be easier to build a rapport with research participants if a project is linked to a researcher's own interests or if a researcher has something in common with interviewees. In the context of the West London research, the researcher does not have experiences in common with respondents in the personal way implied in Valentine's work, however, there is an understanding of the political and organisational processes involved in local government, since, as mentioned above, the researcher has experience of working within two of the local authorities selected. This understanding was useful in developing the research questions, in approaching an analysis of the theoretical literature, and in the building of theory and data.

Through an analysis of the literature on environmental practices, and on the consequences of CCT for local government (these issues were explored in Chapters Two and Three) the researcher identified that the relevant 'actors' were councillors, particularly those linked to CCT and environmental issues; client and contract managers for the three services; corporate policy managers, and relevant trade union officers. However, at the pilot stage of the research the number of interviews needed to be limited to a small selection of these people, due to it being a short, exploratory study. It was appropriate to use purposive sampling for the research as a selection of people to interview was being made according to a known characteristic (May, 1997). For the pilot

study a decision was made to contact client managers and contract managers for each of the three services in the three Boroughs, and managers involved in corporate policymaking, and to postpone contacting trades unions and councillors until the main body of the research. The justification for this was the importance of assessing at an early stage how the three services were operating in each of the Boroughs, the impact of CCT on corporate policymaking, and the consequences for environmental and wider sustainable development practices. The individual's names and addresses were found by consulting a number of published sources, in particular the *Contracts Handbook* (1996).

Fifteen individuals were contacted, to request an interview. Five people in each of the three boroughs were contacted, covering the client and contract side for each service (some officers had joint responsibility for more than one service), and corporate policy. Eleven out of these fifteen agreed to discuss the implementation of CCT and the potential impact on environmental practices. The final balance of those interviewed was as follows:

- 1) In Harrow, a contract manager for refuse collection and street cleansing, and a client manager for grounds maintenance.
- 2) In Hounslow a client officer for grounds maintenance, street cleansing and refuse collection, contract officers for the three services, and one corporate policy officer.
- 3) In Richmond, a performance monitoring manger, the contract manager and client manager for refuse and street cleansing, and a senior officer on the client side for grounds maintenance (see Appendix A for list of those interviewed and the dates).

These interviews were conducted in Autumn 1994. They were semi-structured, and each lasted for one to three hours.

A set of questions was developed, incorporating the key issues identified in the literature. The areas for discussion were grouped into sections, commencing with fairly straightforward questions relating to a person's post and work responsibilities, and progressing into more complex, thought-provoking areas (Jones, 1993). Initially, one interview schedule was devised, to be used for all interviews, but as discussed below (section 5.8), this was later revised for the main body of empirical research to account for the different

questions that applied to different groups of respondents. The experience of conducting the pilot interviews, in conjunction with the methodological literature on conducting interviews (for example, Valentine, 1997; Punch, 1998) assisted in the refining of the interview schedule for the main case study interviews, particularly in terms of deciding relevant areas for discussion and specific questions that needed to be included.

A number of issues, identified in the literature, were of particular importance to this research. First, Valentine (1997) points out that the interview is a social encounter, and the response of the interviewee will depend on what the researcher and researched feel about each other (she refers in particular to the presentation, and appearance of the interviewer). Furthermore, the spontaneity and unpredictability of the interview exchange means that the researcher must think and talk 'on her feet'. Such an approach has implications for planning of the research, and thus requires a considerable understanding of the policy issues, and of the institutional context in which individuals are responding. Secondly, there are variations in the time taken to conduct interviews, depending on the length and depth of individual's responses to questions, and this necessitates appropriate planning of when interviews are held. Thirdly, it was important to rephrase some questions to reduce potential ambiguity, in order to avoid confusion on the part of the interviewees as to what they were being asked. Fourthly, it was necessary to construct three separate interview schedules, since not all questions applied to all interviewees. Fifthly, eliciting responses on issues where interviewees have little or no knowledge, such as the inclusion of environmental criteria in contracts, was relevant to the findings of the research, as a lack of awareness on such issues could be revealing in itself. Finally, in several cases, respondents originally contacted for interviews suggested others whom they felt would be able to assist in the research, thus a 'snowballing' effect occurred whereby the researcher begins with one person, and ascertains whether there are other relevant respondents who could be contacted (Mason, 1996; May, 1997). In the West London case studies some further interviews were arranged in this way for the main body of the empirical work.

The pilot stage was conducted in a relatively short time period, as the findings were used to develop the research questions, and the interview schedules. The pilot stage was a vital developmental process, since it highlighted issues on the scope for study within the three local authorities in question, and in the services selected; and assisted in refining the interview

schedule for the main body of the empirical research. The three services to be studied in the main body of the research remained the same, but Harrow was replaced by the London Borough of Wandsworth for five specific reasons. It forms a tighter geographical cluster than Harrow does with Hounslow and Richmond in West London (see Figure 5.1 above); it is an inner London borough, whereas Hounslow and Richmond are outer London boroughs, and this provides an interesting comparison; it is a more politically stable Conservative council than Harrow; it had a high profile as a radical Conservative Borough during the 1980s and early 1990s; and it maintained a proactive approach to the contracting out of service provision. It has also developed an LA21 strategy, thus allowing comparison with Richmond and Hounslow. The following section examines the research process in the main body of the study.

## **5.8 The main body of the empirical research**

The main body of empirical data was collected through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews, with individuals in the three case study Boroughs of Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth. This section first provides some information on each of these Boroughs in turn, to provide a context to the research. It then discusses how interviews were set up in each local authority, and the measures taken to gain access to potential respondents.

### *5.8.1 Brief profiles of the three Boroughs*

The London Borough of Hounslow has a diverse population, of 208,000 (WLTEC, 1996), with a quarter of residents from an ethnic minority, and demographic trends suggesting this proportion will increase (LBH, 1996). The unemployment rate in 1995/96 (the time of the empirical research) was 4.2% (CIPFA, 1996). Politically Hounslow has a strong Labour majority. The Borough encompasses an area affected by major trunk roads and motorways, and by Heathrow Airport. Its main sectors of employment are 'high-tech', multinational companies, and light industry. Over 21% of the Borough's land is designated Green Belt, with a further 13% categorised as Metropolitan Open Land.

Richmond-upon-Thames has a population of 173,000 (WLTEC, 1996), with 6.5% of its residents being from an ethnic minority. The unemployment rate in 1995/96 was 2.6% (CIPFA, 1996). Politically, Richmond has a Liberal Democrat majority. Over a third of its land is open space, and the Borough has

20 miles of riverside, and 63 Designated Conservation Areas. It is situated close to the main arterial routes into and around London. Its main employment sectors are light industry, 'high tech' companies, and publishing.

In Wandsworth, the population was 266,000 in 1996 (LBW, 1999), and ethnic minorities form approximately 20% of the total population. The unemployment rate in 1995/96 was higher than both Hounslow, and Richmond, at 5.6%. Politically, Wandsworth is a radical Conservative authority. As with Hounslow and Richmond, the Borough is well served by a network of road and rail, being situated close to the M3, M25, and M4. The Borough borders five miles of the River Thames, and 19% of its land is made up of open spaces. The main employment sectors are banking, finance and insurance; retail and hotel distribution; and health.

### *5.8.2 Setting up the interviews*

For the primary research, as with the pilot stage, people were contacted by letter, which described the research area, and requested an interview. Thirty people were contacted: these comprised individuals on the client and contract side for each of the three service areas, the latter being either from the council's Direct Service Organisation or from a private contractor; local government officers involved in corporate policy making, and elected councillors with responsibility for either the client or contractor side of CCT, or responsibility for environmental policies or LA21 in the council. The majority of those initially contacted agreed to be interviewed. (Appendix B provides a list of the names and posts of all those interviewed in the main body of the research, with dates of the interviews). A copy of the interview schedule, which varied according to whether the person was a councillor or local authority officer; a trade union officer; or a contractor - DSO or private (see Appendices C, D & E) was sent to all respondents, prior to the interview taking place. This provided an opportunity for respondents to consider in advance the issues for discussion, and to contact the researcher with any queries prior to the interview, and gave them time to collect any secondary data which they regarded as relevant to the research.

In most cases the interviews were conducted in the respondent's workplace, and the majority were carried out during office hours. However, four interviews took place in external settings (a cafe, a respondent's home, a public house and a shop). This was to accommodate the hours worked by local authority councillors, and the work schedule of individuals such as trades

union officers. The purpose of interviews was to obtain information on each respondent's knowledge and opinions of particular issues relating to CCT and to Local Agenda 21, thus it was seen as important that the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis to achieve this (although as described below, in three instances two respondents were interviewed together). The next section discusses the process of gaining access to individuals, in order to conduct the interviews.

### *5.8.3 Gaining access to interviewees*

Mason (1996) discusses the issue of gaining access to those who have been identified as important in the collection of data. She points out that there may need to be negotiation with gatekeepers, or committees, and the researcher will not always know at the beginning of the study whether access will be granted. In order to conduct the primary research, there was a reliance on the willingness of individuals to be interviewed and to provide useful data, and thus it was necessary to take into account potential problems of access. Fortunately few obstacles were experienced in gaining access to the majority of respondents contacted initially. This may be due to several factors: first, the contemporary nature of the research being conducted, which was therefore of direct relevance to those involved; secondly, the adoption of a semi-structured interview approach, rather than a quantitative survey carried out through questionnaires; thirdly, access at the pilot stage of the research had already been gained in two of the local authorities; and fourthly, potential interviewees were informed that their name and organisation would remain confidential in any published work outside of the PhD thesis.

The main problems in gaining access were encountered in attempting to arrange interviews with councillors. In Wandsworth, the lead councillor on Local Agenda 21 would only agree to be interviewed if a senior officer (who had also been contacted separately) was present. It was explained to this officer that it was preferable that the interviews were to be conducted with one person at a time, partly because it would be more difficult to talk to two respondents at once, but mainly due to the researcher preferring to find out any differences in response between senior managers and elected councillors. It became clear that the councillor was not comfortable with this situation, and, despite contacting her on a number of occasions, the interview did not take place. In general, however, councillors in the three local authorities were happy to be interviewed, although in two cases, despite numerous attempts to contact them, there was no response, and the researcher was therefore unable to

conduct interviews with them. This may have been due to the councillors' time being limited, since they are part-time and often available only in the evenings when they attend committee meetings, although the researcher was prepared to meet respondents outside office hours. In three cases interviews were conducted with two respondents at the same time. This was not as had been initially intended, but was incorporated into the research process, since the second person volunteered on the day to take part in the interview, as the issues were of interest to them.

According to Powell & Lovelock, "... agencies vary in their openness to change and more particularly in their willingness to look critically at their own activities" (1993, p128), and this is considered in the context of interviewee responses and the subsequent findings from an analysis of the interviews. It was also important to consider the responses from respondents in terms of their position within an organisation. Responses from local government officers could have been based on a personal view, a professional position, or a political perspective, and could show evidence of a departmental view, a corporate view, a difference between the contractor and client views, or a combination of these, depending on the interviewee, and Borough. Elected councillors in Richmond and Hounslow, all of whom were from the leading party on each council (a deliberate decision, as the leading party has the final decision-making power) showed concern about the policies adopted by their local authority, and were prepared to explain in some depth why they believed certain policies had not been successful.

Discussions with trade union representatives provided a useful insight into how the relationship between trade unions, the local authorities, and private contractors affected the role that the unions had to play in issues relating to CCT, and the development of LA21. Managers of privately operated contracts, and in some cases contractor-side DSOs, were particularly concerned about confidentiality in the interviews, these concerns relating to their relationship with the local authority as the client for the service the company was providing and to the particular relationship operating between the individual client and contract manager. Once anonymity of individuals, and of the particular company in work published outside of the PhD was assured, contract managers responded in depth to the issues being raised, and in some cases made their concerns clear, particularly in terms of the financial restrictions on their operations due to the price at which contracts were being won. The interviewer therefore needed to take into account the complexities of the

relationships between local authority political processes and the day to day service provision, and between local authorities and private service providers. It is important that the interview techniques employed reflect this complexity, and this is now discussed.

## **5.9 The interview process**

Underpinning the series of semi-structured interviews is a recognition of the research being an ongoing and developmental process, with each interview contributing to the whole study, rather than as an individual piece. Clearly the interview structure therefore has a bearing on the responses received. Punch (1998) suggests that the more unstructured the interview, the more communication skills, in particular, listening, are important. Consideration needs to be given to the way questions are delivered, the wording that is used, and the sequence and type of questions that can be asked. According to Allen & Skinner:

... the art of good interviewing lies in being able to keep most of the interview conversational while following various digressions, remembering which questions the flow of information has answered and yet being prepared to question more deeply and precisely when necessary (1993, p62).

The use of a semi-structured interview method, whereby there was an interview schedule to prompt the interviewer of any areas that had been missed during the discussion aimed to achieve this, and it was also helpful to take notes during the interviews and highlight particular points which could then be raised at an appropriate point in the interview. As mentioned earlier, a key aspect of the semi-structured approach to interviewing is the ability to adapt to an individual respondent's comments. The interview questions in the research addressed this issue, as the questions were set out in sections, each covering a range of related issues, yet the format was flexible in order to allow the order of the questions to be adapted to each interview. In several cases it was necessary to explain the concept of LA21 and sustainable development at both a theoretical and policy level. This not only involved a rephrasing of questions to adapt to the situation, but also the researcher's subjective understanding of the particular issues was introduced into the interview, and this may have affected interviewees' responses. This was dealt with in the triangulation of the findings, through corroboration with other interviews, and with extensive survey material. The interviewer also gave respondents the space to talk about particular areas of interest, or topics where they clearly had expertise. This



allowed relevant and important issues to be raised, and contributed to the overall depth of the research, however it also involved considerable time, both for the interviewees, and the researcher in transcribing and analysing the interviews.

Jones (1993) argues it is essential to explain not only the background to the research, but in addition to make clear the purposes for which the research will be used. This provides participants with the knowledge that they can discuss sensitive matters of relevance to the study, without any repercussions from their organisation. In the West London research, confidentiality was particularly important as an element of the reciprocal approach to interviewing. In the interviews conducted, the background to, and perceived outcomes of, the research were explained, and, as touched on earlier, confidentiality of individuals and the organisations was assured for any work published outside of the PhD thesis. The aim was therefore to enhance the quality of information gathered from the interviews, since respondents would in theory be able to express their views more openly. It is recognised, however, that ensuring confidentiality must be balanced with plausible results (Rees, 1993), particularly since the researcher needed to be explicit about the variations between the three Boroughs, and individuals within these, in terms of the policies, and individual views on CCT and Local Agenda 21.

The way in which recording of interviews is carried out is clearly an important part of the interview process. Marshall & Rossman (1995) stress that plans to use tape recorders and other mechanical devices should be set out in the methodology, showing that the researcher will use data recording strategies that fit the setting and the respondents' sensitivities, and to record interviews only with participants' consent. Valentine (1997) suggests there are two particular advantages to using tape recorders rather than taking notes: first, the interviewer can concentrate on the interview, and engage in a proper conversation, and secondly, s(he) can listen to the interview repeatedly to pick up on ideas and references. However she notes it is important to be sensitive to the interviewee's wishes and always carry a notebook in case taping is refused.

In the West London case studies, the length of interviews varied from one hour to three hours, and the depth and quality of information varied considerably. Clearly there were time constraints, as interviews needed to be conducted within certain hours of the day, at a time and place that was convenient for each respondent. Most interviews were taped - this was

requested by the researcher before the interview was conducted - and most respondents agreed to this. Subsequent to conducting the interviews, the next stage of the research process was to make transcriptions from the tape recordings. However, the researcher took the issues raised by Marshall & Rossman (1995) and Valentine (1997) into account, and in four cases a tape recorder was not used, in accordance with the wishes of the respondent. Copious note-taking was therefore used in these instances, and the notes were written up soon after the interview, in order to represent as accurately as possible the discussion that had occurred. However it is acknowledged that these would not contain the same amount of detail as in the transcripts from tape recordings, and as Marshall & Rossman (1995) suggest, note taking itself can have an influence on the proceedings.

Having explained the interview process, it is important at this stage to reflect on this process, as self-analysis is a key aspect of feminist social research.

### **5.10 Reflecting on the interview process**

According to feminist researchers, research is an ongoing, intersubjective and dialogic activity (England, 1994). England comments that "...the dialogical nature of research increases the probability that the research may be transformed by the input of the researched" (1994, p 84). Furthermore, part of the research process involves "... reflecting on, and learning from past experiences, being able to re-evaluate our research critically" (England, 1994, p82). Other feminist researchers (for example McDowell 1992; Nast, 1994) also point to the need for greater self-reflexivity in the social construction of knowledges and discourses, and in considering the power relations embedded in these. This introspection (England, 1994) requires the analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher, and of the consequences of interactions with those being researched. As England argues: "We do not parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or tape recorders in our pockets ready to record the 'facts'" (England, 1994, p84). In the West London interview process, I have constantly been aware of the need to reflect on the nature of the interviews and of my role in these. The actual process of doing the interviews was fluid, since each encounter with interviewees was different, influenced by the location in which the interview took place, the personality of the individual, and the way in which each person responded to my presence, and to the questions which were raised. As a lone, academic researcher, I felt that I had to

'perform' in terms of making explicit my knowledge and understanding of the subject area, and show that I felt confident in my role as researcher. This was felt more acutely when interviewing those in the most senior positions, and in the more formal setting of the respondent's office. However, when the interview took place in a less formal location, for instance a female councillor's home (I would not have agreed to interview a male respondent in their own home, due to safety reasons), I felt more relaxed, particularly in the presence of her dog, who insisted on rolling onto the tape recorder.

Feminists such as Stanley & Wise (1993), and England (1994) have emphasised the need for reciprocity in carrying out research. In the interviews, I attempted to allow a reciprocal exchange which would permit the process to be a dialogic activity. This provided more of an opportunity to discuss around the topic areas, and for interviewees to question me about my views, and my reasons for asking particular questions. I recognise that my own particular style of questioning will have had an influence on the dialogue, although my questions have not been included in the final text). This was not an issue which I considered during the course of the research, however, on reflection, it would have been appropriate to do so, since clearly the way in which I asked questions impacted on the responses. Through conducting the interviews, I gained a greater understanding of the processes of local government in addressing the complexities of Local Agenda 21, both in terms of the views of individuals, and through engaging with the broader political issues. The interviews also raised different questions from those on the interview schedule, and these were incorporated into the overall research remit. The evaluation and development of the interview schedule during the pilot stage was part of this process. However, these questions also led me to reflect on my ability, as an academic researcher, to impact on the development of policy in local government.

England argues that the biography of the researcher affects the fieldwork, through different personal characteristics, and the response of the researched to his or her presence: "... the researcher cannot conveniently tuck away the personal behind the professional, because fieldwork is personal" (1994, p85). I was aware that, by my very presence, I was influencing the direction of the interviews, and the nature of the research process. Moreover, Kobayashi suggests that:

“... the political is not only personal, it is a commitment to deconstruct the barrier between the academy and the lives of the people it professes to represent” (1994, p73).

Some of the feminist literature (for example Rose 1986; Smith, 1990) suggests that women are ‘naturally’ competent at conducting interviews, since they have typically been nurturers, trained in the art of listening and empowerment of others. I feel that, although there may be some justification for this argument, my confidence in conducting interviews came both from my former experience as an interviewer for my undergraduate dissertation, and subsequent local government interviews, my knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the area being discussed, and my generally outgoing personality. The vast majority of those interviewed were men. This was not a deliberate decision, rather the individuals whom I selected to interview were in senior positions, which were occupied by men. Therefore I need to recognise, that my position, as a female academic, may have had a bearing on the interview process.

According to Nast (1994), as researchers we are in a state of ‘betweenness’ in terms of negotiating various degrees and kinds of differences. In some cases the researcher has to deal with an ‘insider/outsider’ dichotomy (Kobayashi, 1994). I believe this has applied to my research, due to my background in local government, and in local environmental pressure groups. I therefore had a particular understanding of LA21, both from the perspective of an academic researcher, and from the perspective of my involvement, as a member of Friends of the Earth, in the development of LA21 in Richmond. My experience in local government affected the way in which I approached the research, in particular my awareness of potentially sensitive issues. Thus my ‘insider’ knowledge may have helped in gaining the trust of interviewees, and it is fair to say that I used this possible advantage, both in constructing the interview schedule, and being explicit about my background. On reflection, I feel that it was my position between an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ that allowed me to frame questions of substantial and theoretical interest, as well as of practical significance to those with whom I worked.

Feminist writers such as Lather (1995) talk of the need to connect how we do research to our theoretical and political commitments, and to reflect on how our commitments insert themselves into empirical work. I have strong views on the importance of a democratic, properly resourced system of local government, reinforced through my experience of working in local government. I also believe that services should be provided by a directly

employed workforce, in order to meet local needs, to retain a public service ethos, and to retain local knowledge. It was therefore appropriate that my views be made explicit, and I am aware of the possibility that, although I attempted to minimise any bias, my positionality influenced the ways in which I approached interviews with private contractors, as opposed to trade unions or local government managers. The research was not aiming to simply record events or views, rather it aimed to extend understanding and knowledge of local environmental policymaking, both on the part of myself as researcher, and those interviewed.

McDowell (1992) discusses the implications of one's position on the research, and the consequential power relations. The balance of power relates to 'who' does the research, and whether one is 'speaking for' or 'speaking with' (this specific issue is considered further in Section 5.12 on writing the text). Furthermore, as researchers we have the power to define and legitimate 'the field', and this imposes the researcher on the time and space of others (Katz, 1994). Clearly, my research took up the time of respondents, and, although there was negotiation about when, and where interviews could be conducted (several were conducted at venues outside of the workplace, as requested by respondents), I had a fairly structured agenda to adhere to, in terms of completing the interviews, and I was therefore aware that it was difficult not to dictate how the interview process developed.

It is important to be explicit about the context of the research, and the differences in the power and resources between the interviewer and interviewees. According to Nast: "We need to listen, contextualise and admit to the power we bring as multiply-positioned authors of research projects" (1994, p59). However, McDowell (1992) argues that in reality non-exploitative research is a utopian ideal, since knowledge is always situated within a discourse. In a similar vein, England (1994) asks how, in allowing a range of voices to speak, it is possible to incorporate these voices into the research. I have attempted to allow different voices to speak, through identifying areas where there are clear differences of opinion, both between individuals within the same local authority, between local authorities, and between respondents in different positions. Thus I felt that I had tried to treat the researched: "... not as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of facts" (England, 1994 p82). However, I accept, as McDowell (1992), argues, that, despite my belief in the need to strive for a reciprocal, and non-hierarchical relationship, and one of mutual

respect, it is myself, as the researcher, who ultimately controls the text. The following section discusses my experience of analysing the interview data.

### **5.11 Transcription and analysis of data**

Perakyla (1997) argues that the technical quality of recordings is an important issue, since if a conversation remains inaudible in the tapes, there is no way of recovering it. She points to the importance of minimising this occurrence through paying adequate attention to the quality of equipment and arrangements of recording, and stresses the need to have adequate transcripts, since even though analysis of data requires listening to tapes, the final selection of what is analysed in detail is usually made on the basis of the transcripts alone. This potentially raises the limitations of the data, due to the quality of transcripts of conversations. The taping of interviews in the West London research raised several problems, despite attempts to ensure the equipment was working properly. In a minority of cases, the tape recorder did not pick up the respondent's voice very clearly, which made the process of transcribing difficult. This was resolved by listening a number of times to the recordings. All the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim, a process which was undertaken by a person external to the research as the researcher was unable at the time, through injury, to spend the long hours required, transcribing the interviews. This situation was unavoidable, however, it is recognised that this had an impact on the research process. The person involved did not have particular knowledge of the research questions and of the subject area, and had not been present at the interviews, so was unable to rely on memory if tapes were unclear. However, on receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher was able to correct them and fill in any gaps, initially by listening carefully to each tape and making notes, and secondly by utilising notes made during the interviews.

According to Marshall & Rossman, qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data, which build on grounded theory. They suggest that:

(I)n qualitative studies, data collection and analysis go hand in hand to promote the emergence of substantive theory grounded in empirical data (1995, p112).

Thus theory becomes more concrete as major modifications occur less often and concepts fall into established categories, and the analysis is complete when the categories are defined, the relationships between them set out, and they are

integrated into a grounded theory. More specifically in relation to interview data, Holstein & Gubrium point out that active interview data can be analysed to indicate the "dynamic interrelatedness of the *whats* and the *hows*" (1997, p127) of the interview process. The objective is not simply to describe the situated production of conversation, but to show how what is being said relates to the experiences being studied. Mishler however suggests that:

... topics, definitions of events, categories for response and evaluation are all introduced, framed, and specified by interviewers, who determine the adequacy and appropriateness of responses. Finally, researchers, through their analysis and reports define the 'meaning' of responses and findings, whereas respondents have no opportunity to comment upon interpretations of their words and intentions (1991, p122).

It is acknowledged that these issues will have been replicated to some extent in the West London research. In the analysis of the findings, I was handling a large amount of data, gathered through the interviews, and transcribed verbatim. At this stage I was solely responsible for sifting through the material and determining how it related to the research question, and subsequent aims and objectives of the empirical research. Thus I possessed the power to make decisions on which conversations/parts of conversations were relevant or irrelevant. I attempted to allow the structure of the analysis to be guided by the comments of the respondents, thus permitting the development of knowledge, rather than merely reinforcing my own views. However, the final decision of what arguments, and quotations to include, was with myself. Thus, as Orme & Forbes (1993) suggest, analytical practices will reflect key assumptions either by omission or commission, and it would therefore be misleading for me to suggest that the final thesis could accurately represent all the views that respondents might hold. Nevertheless, the material gathered from the interviews was crucial in developing an understanding of the particular area of study, as it drew out the different views, and values of respondents, and provided rich, qualitative material on which to build and develop theory.

The process of analysis lasted for approximately six months, and consisted of three elements: first, having read through the transcriptions in detail, a list of relevant sections and sub-sections was drawn up, in relation to the appropriate interview schedule. Specific points made by individuals, which were deemed to be important to the research questions were noted, and allocated to relevant sections. Responses were organised into categories, according to the role of the interviewee and the different local authorities and service areas. This

categorisation permitted comparative analysis between services, respondents, and local authorities. Secondly, comments which emphasised a particular point were extracted verbatim for use as illustrative quotations in the final text. Jarantyne & Stewart (1995) argue for the use of both qualitative and quantitative research findings to reinforce the validity of the research, through counter-balancing the strengths of each technique. In the West London research, the findings were triangulated, through comparison with comments from a range of respondents on a similar topic, and through analysis of extensive data on CCT, and on Local Agenda 21, particularly from the three case study local authorities, in the form of reports, surveys, council minutes, and other policy documents. This was felt to be appropriate, both as a realist and feminist approach to doing social research, and to help highlight the complexity of implementing environmental policies within a local government structure.

#### *5.11.1 Writing up and disseminating the findings*

Following on from the analysis stage of the research process is the writing up and dissemination of the findings. Feminist literature emphasises that the relationship between the researcher and researched should be reciprocal, in that the respondent is not merely providing data, but is informed of how the data is used, and disseminated. It is important to consider that the sharing of knowledge should not be limited by the use of exclusionary language - as Stanley & Wise argue:

(W)e don't want the act of reading to be an intellectual assault course which only the especially athletic can get through (1993, p17).

Nast has considered the ways in which researchers "... read, author, and represent 'space' (as a text) in order to communicate, move and interact effectively" (1994 p 60). She also talks of how we choose and give meaning to our 'spaces', words and contexts. In this process the audience(s) affect the form and content of writing. Giving voice to the researched, in order to accurately re-present their views, as opposed to representing my interpretation of their comments, is a complex and highly debated issue for feminist researchers, and is an issue which I do not feel can always be resolved. England suggests that re-presentation can be achieved to some extent through using lengthy quotations, thus potentially minimising appropriation by avoiding misrepresentation. This also extends the idea of a reciprocal research alliance between the researcher and researched. I therefore chose to incorporate a number of lengthy quotes within the text, which I believe to re-



present the interviewees' views. However, as England (1994) notes, there is a problem of quotes being responses to unsolicited questions, that have occurred through the disrupting of the interviewee's life. I have attempted to accurately reflect the arguments as they were made by interviewees, yet I recognise that the final text is constructed by the researcher, and I have made decisions on *whose* voices to include, and on the context in which these are heard.

According to Nast (1994), we can never have completely non-hierarchical relations, due to the politics and particularities of an audience (she refers to the academy and the community). Clearly, my research aimed to draw out the complexities and tensions within local authorities in relation to environmental policymaking and practices, and to debate these in academic circles, but an equally important objective was to provide material of use to the policy community (local government politicians and managers, trade unions, and private contractors) in meeting the demands of Local Agenda 21. It is therefore hoped that the style of writing adopted for this thesis permits it to be inclusionary in the sharing of knowledge, through being accessible to both academics, and to policy practitioners, in particular those who participated in the process. Some early findings of the research were published in academic and practitioner journals (Patterson & Theobald 1995a; 1995b ; 1996; Theobald 1996), and a summary of the findings has been sent to all those who participated in the interviews. All those researched have the opportunity to respond to the findings, however, I acknowledge that the agenda which I, as researcher, have set, may not coincide with, or represent the current concerns of those whom I interviewed. Thus the relationship between researcher and researched changes according to time, and political developments.

## **5.12 Conclusions**

This chapter has evaluated two different approaches on which the empirical research in West London is based. Critical realism is fundamentally a philosophy of social science, which rejects positivism and relativism in the production of knowledge. However important attempts have been made to conceptualise the implications of critical realism for research methods, particularly by Sayer & Morgan (1984), Sayer (1992), Pratt (1995), Patterson (1996) and Williams & May (1996). The second approach is a feminist methodology for social research, which places emphasis on subjectivity and positionality underpins this thesis, whereby the collection of data is guided by the evolving interpretations of the world, and is grounded in empirical data.

An intensive approach, which values qualitative research, (but which can be supported by extensive, quantitative data) was adopted, as it acknowledges the subjective nature of social research, and is an approach used in realist methodology. Interactive, or semi-structured interviews were the technique adopted to gather the primary data, and these were supplemented by secondary, mainly extensive research, from a wide range of sources, in particular surveys and government data. The discussion in this chapter has involved an evaluation of the research process, from the pilot study, through to the main body of the research. Valid reasons have been given for the selection of three Boroughs, three environmental services, and the individuals who were interviewed. An issue of key importance to this thesis is the necessity to understand the nature of local government, and therefore to be aware of the impact of individuals on policy and practice, but also to consider the policy structures, and socio-economic structures in which individuals operate. This is reflected in the form of interviews used, and in the analysis of the findings in Chapters Six and Seven. Chapter Six now considers the evidence from the primary research, on the impact of CCT and associated forms of restructuring on the implementation of three traditional environmental services.

# 6

## **Impact of Compulsory Competitive Tendering on Local Environmental Practices**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the impact of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), in conjunction with financial changes and other forms of local government restructuring, on local environmental practices. It focuses specifically on three environmental services subject to CCT: refuse collection, grounds maintenance, and street cleansing, in the London Boroughs of Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth. First there is a discussion of local government's response to CCT, of the variations within this, and of the level of Direct Service Organisation (DSO) and private sector success in winning contracts, nationally; in London; and in the case study Boroughs and services. Secondly, the often conflicting issues of price and quality are considered, and related to this, the costs and benefits of the CCT process. Thirdly, the nature of the client-contractor split is examined in terms of its impact on service provision. The client-contractor split is where the local authority becomes the client, and sets the level of services, but 'contracts-out' the service provision either to its own workforce, or to a private company. Fourthly, there is an evaluation of the consequences of changes to employment practices, terms and conditions for the manual workforce, on the delivery of environmental

services. Fifthly, the issue of incorporating environmental criteria into contracts is examined, in terms of the opportunities and constraints brought about by CCT. Sixthly, linked to the previous section, the flexibility of both the contracts and the workforce in delivering environmental services, and the issue of monitoring of contracts, is considered. Finally there is a discussion of the impact of CCT on local government accountability, and an evaluation of the implications of CCT for the public service ethos, and for the wider socio-economic role of local authorities.

## **6.2 Local approaches to CCT**

This section discusses the response of the West London Boroughs to CCT, and situates this within the context of more extensive studies on different approaches to CCT. The approach varied between the three West London case studies, reflecting the different political complexion of each local authority. The London Borough of Hounslow's (LBH) approach was similar to Painter's (1991) model of commitment to in-house provision, with no changes to pay and conditions, in the early years of CCT, and nearest to Shaw *et al.*'s (1994) 'hostile' response (see Chapter Three, section 3.5). However, its stance changed during the mid-1990s in the second round of contracts, with the acceptance of some changes to conditions, but mainly to working practices, i.e. a more 'pragmatic' approach (Shaw *et al.*, 1994). The CCT Resource Pack (LBH, 1994) stated the Borough's policy on CCT was that it would not simply award contracts on basis of price, but that contracts should maintain, and where possible improve the delivery of existing services. Also it stated that the Borough should protect existing jobs and conditions of service for staff, and that it should try to win all contracts in-house. This, however, could not be maintained due to the pressure through the CCT process to accept the lowest price on tenders (discussed further in section 6.5). Two years later, in 1996 the Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow described the local authority's approach as follows:

(T)he key policy is we actually try to do our best to actually win all contracts in-house. The only time we would consider out-sourcing is when we feel that there is not an opportunity to win a contract in house and that the best way to protect the interests of the staff and service is by contracting out. In the first round of CCT we won everything. We never lost anything but quite clearly the competition was going to be much more effective second-time around so we actually had to review the strategy (interview, 21/2/96).

The Borough, in considering a change to its strategy, had explored other options such as externalisation, which were mainly budget-driven. This approach was perceived by the Lead Councillor for CCT as a change in Hounslow's commitment to Direct Service Organisations (DSOs), although he pointed out that personally, he believed services should be kept in-house, as DSOs were more responsive to the local population than a private company would be. He suggested that the level of commitment varied according to the type of service: for instance street cleansing would be more likely to be lost to a private contractor because it was always regarded by councillors as being less strongly associated with the local authority than the refuse collection service, and the Borough did indeed lose street cleansing to a private company in 1996. In 1998 it externalised its Leisure Services Department (which includes the grounds maintenance service) to a charitable trust - the 'Community Initiative Partnership'. This was apparently partly due to resource problems, but possibly also due to a desire to protect its workforce, and to have the restrictive mechanisms of CCT removed. This move illustrates how a local authority's response to CCT can change considerably over a short period of time.

The response to CCT in Richmond was similar to Painter's (1991) third model, whereby there was a commitment to DSOs, but also an acceptance of cuts to pay and conditions. According to the Chair of the Contracts Services Committee in Richmond (interview, 27/3/96), the Borough's approach, whilst being overtly supportive of DSOs, had become more open to employing private contractors. In practice this has meant that a number of services have been won by private companies. As in Hounslow, this councillor pointed out there were some services with which the Borough believed it was particularly identified, and thus wished to retain, such as refuse collection.

Wandsworth's approach differed significantly from the other two case studies, in that the Borough welcomed the introduction of CCT, and thus responded with 'enthusiasm' (Shaw *et al.*, 1994). Painter's (1991) model of a New Right approach, where officers simply award and monitor contracts which are delivered by the private sector is the most appropriate to Wandsworth. However, in practice, some of Wandsworth's objectives in terms of making savings, were not radically different to the more recent approaches of Hounslow and Richmond, although ostensibly the latter two Boroughs have been more supportive of DSOs. Wandsworth was used as a test bed for the early principles of CCT, and was the first to put major services such as refuse

collection and street cleansing out to contract voluntarily, thus CCT did not involve major changes in its approach to contracting out services.

In concluding this section, there has been considerable variation in the three Boroughs' approaches to CCT. Both Hounslow and Richmond had an initial policy of retaining services in-house, although this was restricted due to the pressures of CCT and associated budget cuts. In Wandsworth there was enthusiasm for contracting-out services to the private sector, in line with the Borough's philosophy that the market was an efficient provider of services. The following section examines the issue of DSO and private sector success in winning local authority contracts in the three environmental services and situates the experience of Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth within a national and London-wide context.

### 6.3 DSO and private-sector success in winning CCT contracts

Much has been written about the response of the private sector to CCT (Painter, 1991; Patterson & Pinch, 1994; Tooke, 1998), and a number of sources of data are available which show how this varies between services, and geographically. The Local Government Management Board (LGMB) surveys provide the most comprehensive picture of the development of CCT, revealing that in all three services the DSO success rates were reduced between 1991 and 1996, with private companies increasingly winning more contracts (see Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1 DSO success in England and Wales in refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance (% of contracts won)**

Year	Refuse collection	Street cleansing	Grounds maintenance
April 1991	72.8	75.2	68.6
November 1992	72.1	71.1	67.3
December 1993	69.6	70.4	66.2
December 1994	64.4	63.7	57.8
June 1995	61.8	62.4	56.6
December 1996	62.2	62.6	53.3

Note: The surveys are not produced at the same time each year

Source: derived from LGMB (1991-1996)

In all three services a majority of contracts were still won in-house in 1996, although, as Table 6.2 shows, the situation in London differs from the national picture, with private-sector success being greater in all three services, than nationally. There are a number of reasons for the variation between private sector success in these services, and between different geographical areas. In relation to private sector success, McGuirk (1992) notes that refuse collection and street cleansing are both labour-intensive, and require high capital expenditure. For instance refuse collection requires the deployment of expensive specialist plant and machinery. However refuse collection in particular is viewed by the private sector as a potentially profitable source of income, whereas there are few possibilities to increase productivity in street cleansing through capital investment. In grounds maintenance, McGuirk (1992) suggests profit margins tend to be low, and the CCT exercise can be costly and time consuming, due to the often detailed nature of the specifications, thus small companies are less likely to bid for such contracts. McGuirk also points out that the private sector welcomed CCT in this service as it was perceived as an ideal opportunity for the industry to expand. In outer London the contracts are of high value and lend themselves well to highly mechanised and less labour-intensive horticultural work, such as grass cutting (Patterson & Pinch, 1995). As can be seen in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, the success of DSOs nationally and in London in the grounds maintenance service decreased, as private sector success steadily rose during the 1990s.

**Table 6.2 DSO success in London (% of contracts won)**

Year	Refuse collection	Street cleansing	Grounds maintenance
April 1991	57.7	50.0	68.5
November 1992	54.3	64.0	66.7
December 1993	51.4	66.7	62.1
December 1994	51.4	58.1	52.4
June 1995	50.0	55.9	50.3
December 1996	53.1	58.1	47.7

Source: derived from LGMB (1991-1996)

The second factor, which has an important bearing on private contractors' interest in service provision, is the individual geographies of local authorities, as well as their geographical relationships with neighbouring councils (Patterson & Pinch, 1995). In urban local authorities, the potential for greater economies of scale through the rationalisation and concentration of depot

facilities is more likely, as the local authorities are smaller in area, and therefore work is more geographically concentrated. Patterson & Pinch (1995) point out that, once established, such facilities can provide a base from which to enter into contracts for similar work in nearby local authorities. This is particularly true for Greater London, which has witnessed one of the highest success rates for private companies bidding for refuse collection and street cleansing, and with considerable interest shown by multi-national companies. In all three services considered in this thesis, London has been the least successful in terms of DSO wins by percentage and by value (LGMB, 1991-96).

In the West London case studies there was private interest, and some success, in grounds maintenance, refuse collection, and street cleansing (see Table 6.3). Currently (1999) the grounds maintenance contracts are being operated by private contractors in Richmond, and Wandsworth. In Hounslow, as mentioned earlier, the situation changed radically in 1998, with the whole grounds maintenance service being externalised, to the Community Initiatives Partnership. The former workforce has been taken on, and is subject to National Joint Council (NJC) pay and conditions (these are nationally agreed rates of pay and conditions of service for all local authority employees). Refuse collection has remained in-house in Hounslow and Richmond, and has been operated during the period of this study (1989-99) initially by AAH, and then ServiceTeam, which took over AAH in 1995. In street cleansing, Hounslow's contract was won by Sita in 1996, but the Borough has since terminated the contract, and the service returned to the DSO in 1998. Wandsworth's street cleansing contract is privately operated, initially by AAH, and by Onyx since 1995. Richmond has retained the street cleansing service in-house.

All three local Boroughs have good transport links within and outside their borough boundaries, which as Patterson & Pinch (1995) note, has implications for the relatively high level of interest by private contractors. The experience of the West London case studies also reflects the findings of Patterson & Pinch (1995), whereby private contractors are mainly large national, and in some cases multinational, companies. The dominance of the bids by large companies in the case studies has meant small businesses are at a disadvantage, as the majority of these do not have the resources to put a tender document together without a guarantee of winning the contract. The main reason cited by private contract managers for their company's interest in the particular



contracts, were the importance of success in any London Borough, since this provided an important base from which to bid for other contracts in neighbouring Boroughs, both in terms of prestige, and economies of scale. For example, in 1996 Glendales had grounds maintenance contracts in Hounslow, Wandsworth, and the Royal Parks in London.

**Table 6.3 DSO/private success in the Three West London Boroughs**

Service	Hounslow 1989 to 1999	Richmond 1989 to 1999	Wandsworth 1989 to 1999
Grounds Maintenance	1989-1995 4 contracts all DSO. 1996-1998 3 DSO contracts, 1 Glendales. 1998: all externalised to CIP	1989-94:DSO 1994-1998: 5 - ServiceTeam 1 Gristwood & Toms 1 BTCV	1989-1999: 5 contracts. 1 Glendales 3 AAH 1 Brophys
Street Cleansing	1989-96: DSO 1996-98: Sita 1998-1999: DSO	1989-1999: DSO	1989-1995: AAH 1995-date: Onyx
Refuse Collection	1989-1999: DSO	1989-1999: DSO	1989-1994: AAH. 1994-1999: Service- Team

Source: derived from Davis-Coleman, 1996

In concluding this section, clearly there is a high level of interest in London contracts by private companies, particularly by multi-national companies, and local authority approaches to CCT have a bearing on the level of private sector success, as shown in the West London case studies. However, the restrictions on local authorities in the tendering process have meant that private companies in a number of cases have submitted extremely low bids (see section 6.5), which local authorities have to accept, often with subsequent problems, and in some cases the termination of contracts due to poor quality of service. The

next section considers the nature of the client-contractor split, and the effect of this split on the delivery of services.

#### **6.4 Nature of the client-contractor split**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the implementation of CCT has involved a number of changes in internal organisation and structure, particularly due to devolved budgets, with the decentralised control of resources and the development of cost centres in a number of authorities (Walsh, 1989), and the split between client and contractor, whereby the local authority becomes the client and the contractor is either the DSO or an external agency, usually a private company (Shaw *et al.*, 1994; Patterson & Pinch, 1995). According to Hislop (1994), the client and contractor separation in itself offers nothing to the delivery of properly-managed, democratically-controlled public services. In fact, the client-contractor model creates a number of problems for local authorities: it reduces the control of elected councillors; it restricts the control of services to contractual mechanisms, and therefore limits flexibility; and it limits financial decision-making (Graham, 1994; ADLO, 1997). According to Stevens (1994), as the distinction between client and contractor becomes more explicit, there is a danger that the two sides may lose sight of the fact that they both serve the same community and thus should have the same objectives. The split between client and contractor was meant, according to government rhetoric, to lead to greater efficiency and accountability, but it has had a detrimental impact upon the provision of services, and evidence from the West London research has highlighted this.

In the West London case studies it was generally observed that a clear demarcation of roles can be an advantage of the split between client and contractor, however the perceived disadvantage, according to the Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow (interview, 2/2/96), was that it creates a 'them' and 'us' situation, whereby the client and the contractor start moving in different directions rather than working as one team, and potentially the service provided to the community suffers as a result. In Richmond it was noted that it was difficult to find the correct balance between the role of the client and the role of the contractor when the service remains in-house, since these two sides may have been working together for a long time (Policy Analyst, interview, 4/3/96). A further issue raised by some officers on the client side was that, once the split had occurred, they felt that their power was taken away if the DSO won the contract, because they then still had the internal politics to deal

with instead of the straight contractor-client type relationship. In Wandsworth, however, the Chair of the Technical Services Committee was clear about what he regarded as the benefits of having a client-contractor split, suggesting that:

We were always a bit confused as to whether or not we were trying to make sure our service was delivered or whether we were trying to protect the staff who were delivering the service (interview, 29/4/96).

Of course, the role of local government should be both provision of services *and* protecting its employees who provide these services, yet the view in Wandsworth reflects the underlying ideology of the radical Conservative Borough, with the Chair of the Technical Services Committee, responsible for CCT not considering it a problem that the Borough should no longer directly be responsible for those employed in delivering services. This approach, however, has potentially negative consequences for local employment, and for the quality of service provided. The client-contractor split has clearly had a significant impact on the internal structure of local authorities, and has fragmented service provision, although Wandsworth saw this as beneficial, as it was argued that it clarified the Borough's role.

The findings of the West London research are supported by an extensive study of the impact of CCT on grounds maintenance by the Association of Direct Labour Organisation (ADLO, 1997), which found that the separation between client and contractor has had a negative impact on the provision of an integrated parks service, through the fragmentation and dilution of management. The study found that, where local authorities had been successful in retaining an integrated service, this had only been achieved by developing less formal relationships with the contractors.

In concluding this section, the split between the client and contractor has fragmented the internal structure of local government; it has reduced the control of councillors in terms of policy decisions on services, with control being devolved to individual DSO business units, or to private contractors; and in some cases the split has created a situation in which the client and contractor are moving in different directions, rather than operating as a 'team' in delivering services. The next issue to be discussed is that of the conflict between low prices and the quality of service, and the use of loss-leader bids by private contractors.

## 6.5 Conflicts between low prices and quality services

As discussed in Chapter Three, there are a range of restrictions within which local government has to operate when awarding CCT contracts. One significant constraint is that local authorities are not allowed to operate in a manner which could be regarded as 'anti-competitive' (enshrined in the 1998 legislation). The Secretary of State has the powers, under Section 13 and 14 of the 1988 Act, to accuse local authorities of anti-competitive behaviour in the tendering process. He or she may serve a notice requiring an explanation for this, and, if not satisfied, may serve a Direction requiring either the re-tendering for the contract or, in extreme circumstances, the closure of the DSO and the privatisation of the service. The consequences of this are that local authorities generally have to accept the lowest price, if they cannot prove that the private contractor would not be able to meet the specification. Thus, according to the Centre for Public Services (CPS, 1993), CCT has generally resulted in establishing a minimum quality standard rather than quality improvements. Up until 1995, local authorities were in a position where they were not able to give quality the same weighting as price in awarding contracts, although since 1995, the government has been more vague about this, rather emphasising the importance of 'value-for-money' in providing services. LGMB (1995) guidance to local authorities has explained the implications of this change, noting that the Secretary of State had accepted it is for local authorities to decide on the appropriate balance between price and quality in evaluating tenders for blue collar front-line services, in line with the principles agreed for white collar services. The Government view was that local authorities should ensure service providers meet the quality standards they specify, and this could mean that a tender, other than the lowest, is accepted. However, in practice, local authorities find it difficult *not* to award on price alone.

The requirement to subject services to contracting-out could be argued to offer some potential advantages, because it forces public sector organisations to rethink the ways in which they provide services, and to address often long-held assumptions about the best form of delivering a service. This may or may not lead to a reduction in costs but could result in an improved service for local people. However, when linked to a requirement to cut costs, and to a reliance on price-based tendering, this tends to become a negative process, as local authorities use CCT as a means of reducing standards, through accepting low price bids, which result in a poorer quality service. CCT has been implemented primarily as a mechanism to reduce costs through competition

(see Patterson & Pinch, 1995), and this process is on-going, with managers being required to seek cost reductions each time a contract is relet. It is argued by Patterson & Pinch (1995) that the requirement to take the lowest bid reduces the power of the local state to act in support of the local economy by purchasing goods and services from local firms with local purchasing arrangements, which could provide a contribution to environmentally sustainable local economic development (a point developed further in Chapter Seven).

In all three case studies, the criteria of the Boroughs for awarding contracts for all services was meant to be service delivery, quality and price. Richmond had, until 1996, operated purely on a price definition in awarding contracts, but since 1996 has operated a 40% price, 60% quality split, intended to emphasise the standard of service over the cost of providing it, although this does not always occur in practice, with the specification often being reduced. Clearly the percentage split between price and quality is extremely difficult to measure, and is arguably meaningless in practice. In 1996, Richmond was testing a different method of refuse collection with a view to cutting the cost and the level of service for the subsequent reletting of the contract in 1997. The DSO has since won this contract for a much lower price than the previous contract, and the specification has been reduced, for example twice-weekly collections have been changed to once per week. Thus, it is impossible in practice to award contracts based on a split between quality and price, and in practice contracts continue to be let at the lowest price.

Grounds maintenance is in a particularly vulnerable position in the letting of contracts, as the provision and maintenance of open spaces is a discretionary service, whilst refuse collection and street cleansing are statutory. In Hounslow, each time a grounds maintenance contract has been retendered, the price has been reduced. As bids are lowered, less money is available to carry out the work to an acceptable standard, and this applies to both in-house and private contractors. This process is therefore leading to a lowering of standards, due to a lower level of specification, but also due to the quality of the work being carried out. Arguably, having a well written specification could lead to an increase in quality because contractors are having to work to clearly defined procedures. The consensus of opinion across the three West London case studies was that, to ensure quality in the contract, the local authority must ensure the specification is as tight as possible, but client managers found it difficult to write contracts that specified quality and

standards so precisely that the contractor could not cut corners. Moreover, they were concerned that they could be accused of being anti-competitive or including non-commercial issues if they incorporated certain criteria (for example on purchasing, or other environmental criteria - discussed in section 6.8). Also, contracts must be monitored to ensure compliance with the specification (see section 6.10)

One approach cited as being a way of ensuring quality has been the adoption of output contracts, in which it is specified what the end result of each task will be (for example: the grass will be no more than 5cm high all year), as opposed to frequency, or input contracts, in which the contract specifies how often a task should be carried out (for example the grass will be cut once per month in the summer, and once every two months in winter). Both Hounslow and Richmond have adopted the system of output contracts, and there was a view by some managers that, provided the client side insisted that the correct quality control procedures were in place, the contractor would deliver the quality of service specified. However, if the method of delivering the service is not specified, this potentially allows contractors to use environmentally damaging methods to achieve the output in the cheapest way possible (considered further in section 6.8).

The discussion now turns to one particular aspect of the tendering process - the implications of private companies submitting 'loss-leader' bids in order to win contracts. Loss-leader bids are used as a means by which (predominantly large) companies winning contracts, often in a geographical cluster, cross-subsidise contracts with low profit margins through other, more lucrative, contracts. They occur when parent companies of subsidiaries are prepared to make losses in the short and medium terms, and to submit low bids for contracts if they can see a longer-term advantage, such as becoming established as the main providers of a service with less competition. This can have consequences for the quality of the service (for a more general analysis of the restrictions of the tendering process see Patterson & Pinch, 1994). Loss-leader bids are being submitted, according to the Public Services Privatisation Research Unit (PSPRU, 1992), in services such as refuse collection and street cleaning. Local authorities in this position have to prove that the service will not be operated in line with the specification, or that the company is unable to deliver the service, rather than the company having to demonstrate its ability to meet the specification. It is relatively easy for a contractor to undercut a DSO by accepting that it will make a loss for the first year or two of a contract, the

outcome being that this puts the DSO out of business, and in theory makes it easier for companies to win future contracts, with less competition.

There was some concern in the three case study local authorities about the implications of companies submitting loss-leader bids. In Hounslow, the Borough-wide street cleansing contract had been won by the company Sita at a very low price, and there was suspicion in the Borough that this was a loss-leader, as it was not believed to be possible to operate the contract for the accepted price. It is also possible that the low bid was related to the fact that Richmond's street cleansing operation was coming up for re-tendering. The Borough accepted this bid, as it was the lowest by approximately £250,000, and it was not possible to prove that Sita would not be able to meet the required standard. As noted above, Hounslow had to terminate the contract, as the company was failing to meet the specification, and the contract was subsequently won by the DSO at a higher price. The same problem was evident in the street cleansing and grounds maintenance contracts in Wandsworth. The successful bid from Glendales for one of the grounds maintenance contracts was half the price of that at which the previous company, AAH Environmental Services was operating it, and the manager of the current contract explained that he was experiencing extreme difficulties in meeting the specification. AAH also won the refuse collection contract in Wandsworth for £1.1million (the previous contract, also operated by AAH, was priced at £3 million), but could not operate it at the lower price, and the new contractor, ServiceTeam, is facing the same problems, with a consequent reduction in the standard of service provided (GMB, 1996)

In concluding this section, local government is restricted in a number of ways in the tendering process, in particular due to the government restrictions on 'anti-competitive' behaviour in the tendering process, linked with the requirement to cut costs, and there are negative implications for the quality of services. Both frequency and output contracts have limitations in addressing this issue, if the methods by which work is carried out are not specified, and if the specification is reduced, due to budget cuts. Loss-leader bids from private contractors are putting further pressure on local authority DSOs to accept low-price bids, with a potentially detrimental impact on the quality of service provision. Related to the issue of price and quality in CCT contracts are the costs and savings of the CCT process, and these are now considered.

## **6.6 Costs and savings attributed to CCT**

The previous Government argued that CCT would reduce costs through competition and greater efficiency (DoE, 1991). However it is necessary to consider how costs may be transferred elsewhere, to employees or to the local environment. In the three West London Boroughs there had been cost-cutting, which occurred when contracts were re-let, but these savings were counterbalanced by increasing costs elsewhere, such as monitoring, and the CCT process itself. In Hounslow, savings through CCT were estimated to be approximately £5 million (interview, lead councillor on CCT, 21/2/96). However, the costs of preparation for CCT had been high, in terms of having to set up the client organisation and to fund the tendering process. The view of the lead councillor on CCT in Hounslow was that:

... we can't go on making huge amounts of savings without getting very close to not being able to provide the service we want (interview, 21/2/96).

This view was concurred with in Richmond:

Certainly over all the contracts that we have let, both through VCT (voluntary competitive tendering) and CCT there has not, other than initially, been any financial gain. What we have found is that the CCT exercise can be horrendously expensive for very little financial gain. The fat's been cut off years ago, so what you're doing each time you relet a contract is cutting to the bare bone and that is the dilemma we're finding this year in the budget process (interview, Chair of Client Services Sub-Committee, 23/2/96).

In Hounslow, the policy on grounds maintenance had been that, if changes had to occur through CCT, the council would reinvest the money in developing a service more appropriate to the needs of the community. However, according to the Principal Performance Monitoring Manager (on the client side):

... the shame of it is that, although we have become more efficient and effective, any potential to reinvest that has now been lost because of the budget reduction process (interview, 18/10/94).

The DSO was withdrawing the machinery maintenance programmes to save money although it was argued by the Principal Performance Monitoring Manager that it would actually cost more in the long terms due to costs incurred when the machinery broke down. Therefore, any gains in productivity could be lost through this wasted time. This was an issue for other DSOs which had insufficient funds to invest in the maintenance of capital equipment, or to renew machinery when it became dilapidated, and this put



them in a weaker position when tendering for future contracts. A Policy Analyst in Richmond (interview, 4/3/96) suggested there is minimal scope for savings when contracts are relet, but this depended on how much quality was required, and on the pay and conditions for employees. His concern related to the conflict between the Borough wanting to keep pay rates in the DSOs in line with similar posts in other departments, and the CCT process which put pressure on the Borough to accept low price bids, which would involve making reductions in the pay and conditions of the workforce. In Wandsworth, a similar level of savings was made to those in the other two Boroughs, but here the main concern was to reduce the level of taxation, therefore a reduction in employee pay and conditions was readily accepted as a part of the competition process.

The experience of the three West London Boroughs is confirmed on a national scale by several sources. According to an estimate by the CPS (1993), the first round of CCT resulted in average 'savings' across all services, worth 6.6% of the total contract value, and this took into account the costs of tendering. The CPS also found that in several different Boroughs, on retendering contracts, costs rose, a point reinforced by its 1995 report on the gender impact of CCT (CPS, 1995). The 1995 report found that for four services: building cleaning, education catering, refuse collection, and sports and leisure management, (in 39 case study authorities in England, Wales and Scotland), the savings of £16.4 million were outweighed by costs of £41.2 million. Savings were not always the result of CCT, but were linked to reduced council budgets and were often at the expense of poorer quality services. A DoE (1997) survey revealed that for the second round of competitive tendering, over 80% of its sample authorities said they had made savings for blue-collar services. Average savings were 9% (8.4% in London) compared with 6.6% in 1991, however, one third of contracts showed an increase in costs. The majority of savings were made through reducing number of employees, increasing productivity, introducing new working methods, and making changes to pay and conditions (discussed in section 6.7).

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) annual survey of local authority budgets (CIPFA, 1997) indicates that parks and recreation was one of the areas of council spending that had suffered particularly significant annual reductions in spending. Whilst local authorities were planning to increase spending on environmental issues (mainly in response to statutory responsibilities arising from legislation such as the 1990

Environmental Protection Act (EPA) and the landfill tax), they were planning to spend £15 million less on parks and recreation (ADLO, 1997). The ADLO (1997) survey shows that whilst savings had been made as a result of CCT exercises, there was a great deal of evidence to suggest that many of the savings were due to reduced service standards and specifications. There was little reinvestment in parks, and this confirmed the findings of the Audit Commission survey of parks and open spaces in England and Wales (1994), which showed that the vast majority of expenditure was maintenance-related, rather than for investment in new aspects of provision. In ADLO's four case studies, the budgets for development and promotion of parks and public open spaces were modest and insufficient to fund significant projects and initiatives. In relation to refuse collection, Szymanski (1994 ) argues that the fact that costs had fallen over the five year period following the introduction of CCT in refuse collection did not prove that the cost reductions were attributable to CCT - these reductions could have been due to the introduction of new technology, or changes in working practices not simply associated with CCT, and with cuts in local authority budgets.

In concluding this section, all three case study Boroughs have made considerable savings, but there have been negative implications for employees, and the quality of service. Moreover, the costs of the tendering process and of monitoring contracts have increased. As briefly mentioned above, the acceptance of low-price bids, and the pressure on local government to make savings, has been at the expense of employment conditions, and the following section considers in more depth the different ways in which CCT has impacted on the workforce, and argues that changes to working practices have had a negative impact on the environment.

## **6.7 Employment changes and environmental impacts**

The introduction of CCT into local government, and elsewhere in the public sector, has had a significant impact on the numbers employed in service provision, on working practices, and on terms and conditions. Much of the competitive advantage of private companies has been due to their ability to impose worse terms and conditions upon their workforce (Patterson & Pinch, 1994), nevertheless it has been the case that the majority of contracts have been retained by DSOs, (although as noted earlier, there are geographical variations and differences in DSO success according to the particular service and type of authority), and this raises the question of the consequences not only for

employees transferred from DSOs to a private company, but also for workers in DSOs.

In Richmond, Hounslow, and Wandsworth there had been job losses in all three services, particularly from the second round of tendering. In one of the four grounds maintenance contracts in Hounslow, won by Glendales, there were 30 names on the original transfer list, however that had been reduced to 24 staff due to a lowering of the tender price, and those who left were not being replaced. Overall, the workforce in grounds maintenance had reduced from over 200 to fewer than 80 since CCT was introduced. In refuse collection there had been a 30% cut in the workforce in Hounslow, for the first round, and significant cuts in the street cleansing service, including the loss of disabled employees. In Richmond significant cuts had been made in the first round of tendering. In refuse collection the numbers employed had fallen from 91 to 76 in the first round, and from 76 to 63 in the second round. In street cleansing the numbers had fallen from 66 to 57 in the second round, the number of teams being reduced from eight to five. None of these losses involved compulsory redundancy, but were achieved through 'natural wastage, i.e. early retirement, and people seeking employment elsewhere. Wandsworth had reduced the number of refuse collection employees by 50% following contracting-out in the early 1980s, and had reduced its vehicle fleet by half. Subsequent contracts have involved making further reductions in staffing, with contract prices being reduced from over £3 million, to just over £1 million.

The findings of the West London case studies have been confirmed by other research. According to both Patterson & Pinch (1994) and Shaw *et al.* (1994) the high level of local authority success has been accompanied by a significant reduction in employment levels, considerable changes to working practices, investment in labour-saving machinery, increasing workloads, the growing use of part-time labour, and changes to terms and conditions. A DoE (1991) panel survey of 40 local authorities study found that competition had major implications for the pay, conditions and staffing levels of DSOs, yet it concluded that, if local authorities were to compete, they needed to be able to reduce their costs below that of private contractors, as the private sector would generally offer lower levels of pay, and poorer conditions such as shorter holiday entitlement, sickness pay and other benefits.

A number of studies of employment losses in the public sector have been conducted, for instance the PSPRU (1992) estimated that at the aggregate

level, within the public sector 19.7% full time manual jobs and 5.5% of part time manual jobs were lost between 1988 and 1991. As Patterson & Pinch (1994) note, many of these can be accounted for through the transfer of workers to the private sector, and through other legislation not related to CCT, however it provides an indication of significant job losses. Joint Staffing Watch figures (LGMB, 1994b) showed that in 1993/4 job losses in services subject to CCT were the greatest of all local government services, with refuse collection services showing over 1500 losses, and leisure and parks maintenance showing cuts of 2,600. Two years later, the CPS (1995) found that in their 39 case studies there had been a reduction of 23% in the number of workers employed in refuse collection. A DoE (1997) survey reveals that 58% of DSOs had experienced a reduction in their workforce since the first round of competition, either through the loss of contracts or general budgetary pressures, and over 80% of DSOs had reduced the numbers of managers.

In relation to grounds maintenance, an ADLO (1997) survey found that the numbers of staff employed in the parks service have been dramatically reduced since the introduction of CCT, with 70% of respondent local authorities reporting significant losses in full-time staff. In two of the case study district councils used for the ADLO study, there were reported job cuts of over 50% between 1989 and 1996. There has also been a reduction in site-based staff in parks since the introduction of CCT, with 64% of respondent authorities reporting their workforce was organised on the basis of separate mobile maintenance teams, and this was argued by ADLO to lead to a deterioration in the overall service. The evidence therefore shows that there has been a notable decrease in the workforce in all three West London Boroughs, and in all three services, and the loss of good quality staff and intensification of work has resulted in poorer quality work (discussed further in section 6.8). A further way in which CCT has impacted on the quality of work being carried out is through changes to the composition of the workforce, and this is discussed next.

### *6.7.1 Recomposition of the workforce*

One of the major changes brought about by CCT has been a recomposition of the workforce employed to deliver services. CCT has led to a large increase in temporary employment, both female and male disabled workers are poorly represented in all services (CPS, 1995), and increased productivity and intensification of work have reduced the scope for the employment of disabled people (Public Service Action, 1995). The following discussion considers first

the impact on those who are less able to meet the levels of productivity required, whether due to a physical disability, or learning difficulty. Secondly, it considers the change in the age structure of the workforce in the three services, and the consequences for the de-skilling of the workforce.

In all three West London Boroughs it was noted that there are a number of people who rely on the local authority for employment, since local authorities operate equal opportunities and other policies which provide greater potential for employment for some groups than in the private sector. These are particularly manual workers with limited skills or who are registered disabled. However, if a local authority loses contracts, or cuts costs to retain a service in-house, there is often no provision made for these employees. This was recognised to be a problem in the three West London Boroughs (Assistant Director, Leisure Amenities Services, LBW, 12/2/96; Chair of Client Services Sub-Committee, LBR, 23/2/96; Lead Councillor on CCT, LBH, 2/2/96), and also by trade unions representing manual employees, for example it was noted that:

(W)e had quite a large number of staff working in grounds maintenance - people with disabilities of one sort or another who were very difficult to include in the DSO trying to put together a bid against a private contractor. Quite clearly some of those people, over the years, have lost their jobs and these are people who, to a large extent, that's the only employment opportunity they're ever going to get (interview, Branch Secretary for Unison, 3/4/96).

Thus there are consequences for equal opportunities, as the pressures of the CCT process restrict a local authority from employing local people whose productivity is below average. This has been replicated in other research, for instance ADLO (1997) shows that progressive equal opportunity employment practices have been abandoned by some local authorities in favour of greater competitiveness.

A recomposition of the workforce has also occurred through the move to a younger, and often less skilled workforce. In the West London case studies this was occurring particularly in grounds maintenance and refuse collection because, given the increasingly intensive workload that is demanded in these services, employees are required to be physically strong and fit, and also tend to be younger. In Wandsworth, the manager of a grounds maintenance contract, won by Glendales, noted that the workforce was relatively young, mainly because the older staff had left, and saw negative implications of this for the quality of service due to a lack of experience. In street cleansing,

however the age structure tended to differ from that in grounds maintenance and refuse collection, with a higher proportion of older employees. Some aspects of this work are less intensive, so there was scope to employ older and less mobile employees. In Hounslow the majority of the workforce were over 35 years old, and it was argued by the Sita manager of the street cleansing contract that the best age group for the industry was 45-60, as they were regarded as being more reliable than younger employees. Thus in street cleansing, unlike the other two services, there appeared to be some potential for employing a range of ages, although as there is increasing demand for greater productivity, this may change. It is worth noting that in all the three services in the three Boroughs, there had been no change in terms of the gender composition of the workforce. These have been, and remain male-dominated areas of employment, and no women were employed as manual workers, either prior to, or since CCT.

Agyeman & Evans (1994) have argued that some forms of expertise in local authorities are increasing, in terms of writing contract specifications and other managerial techniques, however the empirical research in West London reveals that local authorities are at the same time suffering a loss of skills and experienced linked to the recomposition of the workforce, in part due to the replacement of older, more experienced workers by younger, often less skilled workers. This is confirmed by other studies, for instance, Welch comments on the loss of local knowledge in grounds maintenance in terms of the move away from site-based teams in parks due to CCT: He notes that these staff:

... provided a salutation, a word of welcome and a smile for the lonely. They gave information about the park, its history and its contents, and found out what people thought about their visit. They knew the regular visitors, many of them by name and circumstance (1995, p96).

Research by ADLO (1997) shows that, in general, skill levels had been retained within the DSOs it studied, due to lower staff turnover than in the past. However, job losses, and a move towards more menial and routine work had meant there was less work requiring high level skills and a broad knowledge of the environment.

According to a trade union officer representing manual employees in Hounslow (interview, 3/4/96), there was still a great deal of local knowledge in the workforce, but the Borough would not be able to take this into account when allocating a contract under the CCT legislation. It was argued that one of the reasons for local knowledge being retained in grounds maintenance in

Hounslow, was that three of the four contracts were still held by the DSO at that time, however in-depth expertise about the areas was being reduced due to inadequate training, (discussed below) in addition to the loss of older staff. In Richmond it was suggested (interview, Chair of Client Services Sub-Committee, 23/2/96) that a great number of the people who worked for the local authority lived within the local area, and this made them keenly aware that the local environment was important. It was argued, however, by the Principal Performance Monitoring Manager for Hounslow (interview, 18/10/94) that, due to a reduction in the numbers of staff with specific qualifications, in particular in relation to horticulture, an understanding of the impact of the service on the environment was lacking in many staff, even in those living locally. The loss of older staff, particularly in grounds maintenance, was regarded as having a negative impact on the environment because new employees were not trained in the broader field of horticulture. The same respondent suggested that, if workers lack in-depth knowledge of the grounds maintenance service, they would not understand *why* they were doing a job, and therefore standards may be lower. The Assistant Director for Leisure Services in Richmond (whose department covers grounds maintenance) raised concerns that local authorities can no longer directly provide the services which they had been able to in the past, for instance the more creative and innovative aspects of horticulture, once the service had been subject to CCT, whereas prior to CCT, if the Borough had wanted to try a new project, they could ask the workforce for assistance (see also Welch, 1995; ADLO, 1997).

A further issue is that a decrease in training, or a change in the type of training provided, has a potential impact on skills and expertise, and a negative impact on the environment. Evidence from the West London case studies showed that there was less money for training due to cuts in expenditure, and the training budget was devolved to individual departments, therefore, if money was tight, training was a low priority. Training was more tightly focused than prior to CCT, and increasingly took the form of a number of one day courses (for example, on spraying pesticides) rather than a more structured training programme (for example a formal certificated day-release course taking one or two years). Despite the introduction of qualifications such as NVQs, the Boroughs were still facing problems in recruiting qualified landscape staff, either because of the lack of skills locally, or because the conditions of service were poor. In the Glendales grounds maintenance contract in Wandsworth, the staff which had transferred from AAH, the

previous contractor, had received no training over the five years of that contract. The workforce was instead expected to be competent in a number of basic skills, such as cutting grass and picking up litter. According to the manager (interview, 16/4/96), Glendales could not afford to have employees highly skilled in specific areas (or chose not to), and he recognised that standards were not as high as they should be, partly due to a lack of time to explain environmental and related issues to the staff. A pertinent comment on this point came from the client side in Hounslow:

(If (the workforce) understand their subject well they tend to be able to do it much more efficiently, and more safely, and the end product will be better. People can cut grass and push a mower, but if you were to ask them to manage a meadow or to lay a hedge, they may not understand what you are talking about (Principal Performance Monitoring Manager, Hounslow, interview, 18/10/94).

Maintaining skills levels requires not only training, but also adequate tools and machinery, however, there was concern from a trade union officer for Unison that the reduction in capital spending in local authorities had an impact on this, for instance in grounds maintenance he suggested that skilled groundspeople were being let down by their tools (interview, 3/4/96). A related problem was that individual departments or units now had to purchase new machinery from within their own budgets, yet capital expenditure was being reduced, as part of central government reductions in grants to local authorities.

In its study of CCT in grounds maintenance, ADLO (1997) found similar problems in terms of the level of skills level and training. The de-skilling of the workforce was reflected in the training provided, which was 'on the job' and of short duration, related only to competence in specific tasks. DSOs were reluctant to spend money on training provision because of the perceived impact on the competitiveness of the DSO in a tendering situation, and private contractors in the ADLO survey appeared to provide little training to frontline manual workers (the subsequent environmental impacts of this are discussed below in section 6.8).

A further way in which a recomposition of the workforce is occurring is through the increased use of casual and seasonal staff by DSOs and private contractors. In the West London case studies, the main area of increasing casual and agency staff was in grounds maintenance, due to contractors using the fact that the nature of the work was seasonal, to employ casual rather than permanent staff, and in all three services, due to and the pressure to raise



productivity. In Hounslow, flexible working arrangements had been established, which entailed more hours in summer, and fewer in winter. The manager of the Glendales contract in Hounslow stated that he had replaced some of the former permanent DSO staff with four new temporary staff. As soon as the workload reduced the company would terminate their contracts. These seasonal workers had a start date with an open end, therefore if the company had the work during the winter months, it would keep them on. In street cleansing in the three Boroughs there was also an increased use of casual workers, such as the use of agency staff for shortfalls in human resources, particularly in heavy periods like the leafing season from October to December. Clearly the main conclusions from this discussion on the recomposition of the workforce, are that the issues differ to some extent between services, for instance grounds maintenance is most affected by the casualisation of employment, and a lack of skills and training in staff, however in all services the CCT process has had a negative impact on the level of local knowledge, and the composition of the workforce, with an increasing proportion of younger, fitter employees, due to the increasing intensification of work (discussed below in section 6.7.3).

A Unison (1994) survey of trade union members in the London region produced similar findings to those of the West London case studies. The numbers of part time and temporary staff were increasing as they were replacing full time posts which had become vacant. The CPS survey (1995) revealed similar trends, with a 9% increase in the use of temporary workers in refuse collection. In relation to grounds maintenance ADLO (1997), found evidence that local authorities were using proportionately greater numbers of agency staff, and private contractors were supplementing a core workforce with casual and agency labour with a much lower skills base than that of retained (usually former DSO) employees. A trade union report on refuse collection in Wandsworth (GMB, 1996) emphasises that casualisation has occurred particularly with private contractors. Thus CCT has led to the casualisation of labour with people regularly drifting in and out of the job or simply doing work on a daily employed basis. These changes have had negative consequences in some cases for the quality of service provided, and therefore have had a detrimental impact on the environment. The following section considers the impact of CCT on terms and conditions of employment.

### *6.7.2 Changes to employment terms and conditions*

Since the start of CCT, reductions in costs have been achieved both through cuts in the number of jobs by both DSOs and private contractors, and reductions in pay and conditions. However, in later rounds of tendering, the focus has been more on cutting terms and conditions of employment, rather than the number of workers (Patterson & Pinch, 1995), as there is little scope left to reduce the number of employees, if contractors are to meet the required standard of work. In both Hounslow and Richmond, pay levels in the DSOs had remained in line with NJC pay structures. However, in the grounds maintenance contracts operated by private companies in the three Boroughs, the pay rates for new staff (i.e. not those transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, (TUPE, 1981) were less than the Boroughs would have paid. For those staff transferred to private contractors under TUPE regulations, pay rates and other terms and conditions were meant to be retained, however in several cases contractors had not honoured the NJC pay awards, nor had they continued to pay the bonuses previously paid by the Borough, thus employees' pay and conditions worsened. In a Hounslow grounds maintenance contract, operated by Glendales, pay rates for transferred staff had remained the same for a year and a half, to allow the company's pay rates for other employees to catch up with these rates. Those transferred under TUPE were not given overtime, however, those people employed on the company's terms and conditions were given overtime - time and a half on Saturday and for out-of-hours work and double time on Sunday and Bank Holidays. Thus a distinction was made between the two sets of employees.

Wandsworth's approach was to distance itself from issues relating to the terms and conditions of workers in services operated by private contractors. The Chair of the Technical Services Committee (29/4/96) commented that with a DSO it was very difficult to make changes to the service, because of having to negotiate with the workforce, and trade unions, and therefore he saw greater advantages in contracting-out services. One of the reasons for Wandsworth being keen to contract-out services such as refuse collection in the early 1980s was in response to the 'dirty jobs strike' of 1978-79 (Painter, 1991), and by 1980, the Borough had cut 1000 jobs from its workforce. According to the Chair of the Technical Services Committee: "... if the contractor is able to recruit people at very poor terms and conditions that's his business" (interview, 29/4/96). This comment illustrates the perception of the Borough that its priority is to reduce the level of the council tax, rather than to act as direct

service provider or to protect local authority employees. This approach however also has the effect of driving down local wages, with a consequent impact on the local economy, and therefore conflicts with the principles of sustainable development.

A small number of companies are arguing that, through experience of operating local government contracts, or through the way they manage contracts, they have developed an understanding of the particular needs of local government service provision and recognise that employees should have decent terms and conditions. For instance Weston (1997) describes how ServiceTeam, which took over the refuse collection contract in Wandsworth and also has three grounds maintenance contracts in Richmond, was set up by managers previously in a local authority, and that according to its Director, the company operates with a public service ethos. The report found that ServiceTeam's workforce appeared to have become a genuine beneficiary of this ethos, with the company promising job security and training instead of competing for contracts through redundancies and reduced pay and conditions. However, in return the workforce has to abide by certain conditions, for instance it is required to sign a 'no strike' agreement, and, according to a trade union officer for Wandsworth, the company has not kept to its promise on terms and conditions. Thus currently (1999) there is conflict between the refuse workers in Wandsworth and ServiceTeam, over this issue.

A further employment issue is the hours that manual employees are expected to work. The changes to hours that employees are expected to work due to CCT have varied. Hounslow had hoped to implement a 37 hour week for manual staff, to harmonise with white-collar staff, but it had not been able to put this into effect, at the time of this research. Instead it had to come to an agreement with the manual staff not to reduce their working week because the DSOs could not afford it due to the pressure to cut costs in order to retain services in-house. In the grounds maintenance contract operated by Glendales there were differences in the hours worked and other conditions of service, between those transferred from the DSO, and those employed directly by the company. As noted earlier, in Hounslow's street cleansing contract Sita had not honoured national pay awards, nor the bonus system, nor other terms and conditions on which staff from the DSO had been transferred. In Richmond, the new refuse collection contract, let in 1997 did not involve an increase in the hours of employees, but productivity had to increase considerably to meet the specification.

The changes in the West London case studies are replicated on a national scale. McGuirk (1991) points out that job losses, lower rates of pay, reduced sick benefits and a general reduction in conditions frequently followed the award of refuse collection contracts to the private sector. The PSPRU (1992) suggests that the reorganisation of local government into smaller, arms-length units with more local management control, has helped to undermine trade unions and thus pave the way for cutting pay and conditions. The PSPRU report states that typical cuts have been in the hours worked by part-timers, typically to below 16 hours, the level at which employees qualify for employment rights such as redundancy and unfair dismissal; paid holidays, bonus schemes, and pensions. In terms of pay, a CPS survey (1995) found that CCT appeared to have resulted in a two-tier pay structure, with most authorities continuing to pay NJC rates, but with 13% of DSOs introducing a local rate. All nine privatised contracts surveyed paid lower than NJC rates. ADLO (1997) found that DSOs in grounds maintenance generally maintained the NJC negotiated pay rates, hours, and terms and conditions, despite the pressures of CCT. However, whilst part-time hours were being reduced to below the 16 hour threshold, longer hours were worked by full-time employees in 23% of respondent authorities; and overtime working had been reduced in 46% of authorities, as it was incorporated into normal working patterns and paid at single time rates; furthermore, 16% of authorities had reduced leave for holidays and sickness.

The changes to terms and conditions of employment have affected both full-time and part-time employees, and has occurred in all CCT services, with full-time staff having to work longer hours, without overtime, and part-time workers losing hours to below the 16 hour per week threshold, at which certain employment benefits are no longer payable. DSO staff transferred to private contractors have in some cases had their terms and conditions reduced, and those remaining in DSOs are themselves experiencing worsening conditions of service. Due to employment losses in all three services, and the requirement to increase productivity, the work has intensified considerably, and this change is now discussed.

### *6.7.3 Intensification of work*

The intensification of work is one of the more obvious and well reported of the changes attributable to CCT (CPS, 1995; ADLO, 1997; Patterson & Theobald, 1996; DoE, 1997). There is pressure on local authorities to reduce costs, and one way of doing this is to improve productivity rates with the same number

of, or fewer, staff. The situation in Hounslow for grounds maintenance employees was fairly typical of other grounds maintenance contracts: staff were working up to two hours more per day than prior to CCT, with an earlier start, a shorter tea break in the morning, the loss of their afternoon break, and a maximum of half an hour lunch break, (often taken on site or not taken at all). In street cleansing there were a number of changes to working practices, for instance in one of the case studies, a longer working day had been imposed. Previously the hours had been 6am - 3pm, five days per week, but this changed to 6am - 6pm, seven days per week, on a shift system. In Richmond, the hours had remained the same, but the work had intensified, with larger vehicles, and fewer staff, and on average each employee had to collect 25% more by weight of rubbish.

In Hounslow's street cleansing contract, there used to be (prior to the retendering of the service in 1996) three rapid response units based throughout the Borough to respond to events that need to be dealt with immediately such as road traffic accidents. With the new contract the number was cut to two, which have a wider area to cover, yet the response times are expected to remain the same. There is a potentially negative impact of the intensification of work on employees' performance - in relation to Richmond's street cleansing contract, the Area Supervisor's concern was that the productivity of the workforce was at its limit, and that outputs were being achieved, through cutting corners, and therefore providing a poorer quality service. A DoE (1997) report has produced similar evidence to that of the West London case studies. It finds that many DSOs believe CCT has imposed new pressures on staff, due to the need for higher productivity. The survey reveals that, in many cases, the impact of the CCT process on the workforce was fewer breaks, and longer hours (in addition to worsened terms and conditions).

A further, and related way in which working practices have worsened and the work has intensified, is through the management of absenteeism. In general in the case studies there was evidence of higher levels of sickness in both manual employees and officers, and of absenteeism being more strictly monitored, a point illustrated by the Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow:

We've got to manage people's illnesses much more. You've got to be much harder basically. But sometimes officers have been too hard and we've had almost embarrassing situations where (officers) have been dismissing people with terminal cancer and the like. The most common reason attributed to increased sickness levels is stress related

problems brought about because fewer people are being asked to do more (interview, 21/2/96).

There is clearly an irony here in that local authorities are seeking to improve the local environment (see Chapter Two), and thus to improve the health of local people, yet through poor employment practices, they are damaging the health of their own workforce, who are part of the local population.

The uncertainty of the CCT process in terms of employee's job security was impacting on staff morale. According to the DSO manager for a grounds maintenance contract in Hounslow, the role of the workforce was more than simply about meeting the specification, yet they were being undervalued:

(I)n human terms CCT has upset a lot of people. We've had people having nervous breakdowns, people made redundant and can't find other work, and an unhappy workforce which doesn't exactly lead to improved productivity. The workforce has nothing to cling to, it's difficult to instill the quality concept, because on the one hand we can say 'go out and do the work well and we'll be alright' and on the other hand we'll say 'well the council doesn't actually evaluate on quality'. This destroys the motivation (and) I feel that affects quality and it certainly affects the workforce's relationship with the community (interview, 19/10/94).

This point, is reinforced by the ADLO report, which found that DSO workforces were feeling "... undervalued, undertrained and insecure" (1997, p2).

In concluding this section on employment issues, there are a number of locally specific ways in which employment changes impact in a negative way on the environment. First, the pressure to increase productivity, with fewer staff means less time to ensure the work is being done to a high standard; secondly, having fewer skilled staff potentially has a detrimental impact on the environment, particularly in areas such as the management of open spaces and parks, which may require specialist knowledge for example nature conservation, or horticultural practices; thirdly, there is a loss of local knowledge due to the loss of experienced, often older staff; fourthly, terms and conditions of service have worsened, causing both insecurity and loss of morale in both DSO and private contract staff. These changes conflict with the principles of sustainable development, as the concept encompasses not just environmental issues, but also social issues and the well-being of the local population. Thus, the process of CCT, which is resulting in lower wages, a lowering of morale, and health problems, is clearly bad practice in terms of the

demands of sustainable development. The following section considers the nature of the contracts themselves, and the inclusion of environmental criteria in specifications, and then examines the ways in which the restrictive nature of CCT can prevent the incorporation of environmental criteria into service provision.

## **6.8 Environmental Criteria in CCT contracts**

The issue of including environmental criteria into CCT contracts was given little attention by local authorities, or in the literature, until 1995, when 'CCT - The Environmental Agenda' was published by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA, 1995). This uses the framework of CCT regulations, European procurement directives, and local government law to argue that environmental policies can be written into contract documents and specifications. The guidance argues that the question of environmental issues is fundamental to the specification of services, the selection of tenderers, and the award of contracts, and also (in the longer term) to the monitoring of contract performance. CCT is therefore argued to be a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and the guidance states that CCT should not prevent local authorities from achieving their objectives for maintaining or improving the local environment. However, Patterson & Theobald (1996) note that the inclusion of environmental clauses requires a rigorous assessment of the impact of the service at the time of specification of the contract, as once the particular service has been let it may require a costly variation of contract to effect change. Furthermore the cost of less environmentally damaging approaches or products may be perceived as prohibitively high, particularly in the short term, especially since local authorities are having to lower their specifications in order to reduce the cost of service provision.

Agyeman & Tuxworth (1996) cite examples where contracts have included environmental specifications, for example, waste minimisation objectives in waste collection contracts; ecological and nature conservation management objectives in grounds maintenance contracts; and the specification of non-polluting cleaning products in cleaning contracts. However, the scope for including environmental criteria depends on the costs involved. The alternatives to using polluting products or practices may be more costly, at least in the short term, and although some non-polluting practices are cheaper in the *long term*, there are conflicts with the short term nature of CCT contracts (Patterson & Theobald, 1996). Indeed, Hams & Morphet (1993) warn of the

dangers of ignoring environmental issues both when developing specifications, and when awarding contracts. They point out that some authorities may currently perceive that incorporating a greener approach could disadvantage current staff and add to costs, however the potential problems in attempting to retrieve the position in the future could be considerable, and they stress, therefore, the importance of incorporating in the specification the potential and space for changing standards, working procedures and use of materials. However, this would increase costs, and therefore the capacity for local authorities to act on this advice is highly constrained by the current budgetary processes.

Selman (1996) also argues that it is important to ensure that the environmental consequences of service provision are reflected in contracts, and that appropriate contractual clauses can ensure that environmental responsibility is 'chained', in that services providers must also ensure that sub-contractors and suppliers have satisfactory environmental management systems. However, there are potential legal problems involved in requesting such a system, in terms of the restrictions on 'anti-competitive' behaviour by local authorities, embedded in the legislation. The constraints on local authorities in terms of the inclusion of 'non-commercial' issues (explained in Chapter Three) also impact on the ability of local authorities to require certain methods of products. The simple specification of a particular product which meets the authority's environmental policies or standards is not in itself anti-competitive, however the AMA report (1995) notes government guidance which states that authorities should avoid imposing conditions such as a requirement for specific brands of products or equipment. 'Non-commercial' considerations which local authorities are not allowed to take into account are listed in Section 17(5) of the 1988 Act. These include the terms and conditions of employment offered by contractors; the interests of contractors in what the Government regards as irrelevant fields of policy, but which some local authorities may like to take into account; and the country or territory of origin of supplies. According to the AMA (1995) guidance, an 'environmental issue' would be non-commercial in certain instances, for instance, conditions relating to country of origin of supplies, workforce matters, and ethical purchasing policies, clearly of concern for local authorities attempting to implement policies in line with sustainable development principles.

Apart from the CCT legislation, local authorities are subject to further restrictions on their capacity to determine contract conditions, and these also



have environmental implications. Local authority policies must be made with regard to their fiduciary duty, and to the *ultra vires* rule. Fiduciary duty is a local authority's responsibility to council tax payers whereby local authorities must be efficient and effective in the use of resources. *Ultra vires* is where a local authority is acting illegally or beyond its powers. For environmental policies this therefore means clarity in terms of the costs and benefits of particular activities, or conditions in contracts. This may constrain local authorities' ability to include environmental criteria particularly if there is a cost implication, even if only in the short term. The complexities of these conditions are further complicated by European Union (EU) law, for instance under Article 30 of the Treaty of Rome, local authorities cannot take action which limits trade between EU Member States. Thus specification of timber from a 'local source' could conflict with this law, in addition to being non-commercial. The situation is extremely complex for local authorities, as they have to act in accordance with fiduciary duty and *ultra vires* rules, CCT restrictions, and European Union law, in considering the incorporation of environmental criteria into contracts.

In the grounds maintenance contracts of the West London case studies some environmental criteria, for instance the use of alternatives to peat, or alternatives to environmentally damaging fertilisers, were included in the specifications, although the extent to which these were required was restricted by the higher cost of these methods or products, and the lack of understanding by a minority of officers of the importance of environmental criteria. However, overall, CCT was seen as restricting the implementation of environmental friendly practices because, although they might be cheaper in the long-term, they required extra investment in the short term. For instance, the level of pesticides could be reduced by using techniques to replace them such as the extensive use of mulching and membranes as weed suppressants. These less environmentally damaging methods would require less maintenance, and would therefore reduce costs. The conflict between including environmental criteria, and not having the funding to meet these was evident in one of the grounds maintenance contracts in Wandsworth, where according to the manager:

(T)he environmental criteria in the contract are completely unachievable. The budget is too small. If everything was done 100% to the specification then only half the work would get done. The contract specification has increased, and yet costs are driven down. CCT has not led to an improved quality of service, because of costs being driven down (Manager, Glendales, interview 16/4/96).

These problems were replicated in Richmond, where lack of revenue expenditure meant some aspects of the grounds maintenance service were neglected. However, it was suggested by the Chair of Technical Services for Wandsworth (interview, 29/4/96) that it is not competitive tendering itself which leads to environmental damage, but any process which tries to increase cost effectiveness and which does not have a clear method of evaluating the long term cost of environmental damage. Clearly, however, this *is* the effect of the CCT process, through forcing local authorities to seek tenders to meet their objectives, and therefore to reduce the level of the specification, or to increase productivity.

A useful illustration of how price took priority over environmental considerations, and with a consequent detrimental impact on the environment, was the contract for maintaining street trees in Richmond during the mid-1990s. The Area Supervisor for refuse collection and street cleansing (who was previously the DSO manager for grounds maintenance) explained that a bid was put together for clearing the weeds from the bases of the trees:

There were 10,000 trees and it was going to cost the contractors something like £15,000 to do it (weed clearance by hand). The Borough went for an option that was half that price but was using chemicals, and basically killed them. And it's still having it's effect now. The effect of that must have cost them tenfold. But in terms of the loss to the environment of those trees, I mean you won't get them back, you know, not for the next 50 years. Those trees were a fairly good example but probably are not the only example - it's happening all over the place (interview, 28/2/96).

His view was that the contractor had overdosed the weeds, in order to finish the job quickly, rather than have to return a second time to repeat the proper dosage. The inspection of these trees during the summer of 1994, following this event, revealed that 870 trees were in need of removal, of which 713 were damaged as a direct result of the chemical treatment. A further 847 trees were in need of varying degrees of remedial treatment for the same reason. To finance the treatment, 662 trees were removed from the planned pruning programme. The contractor responsible for the damage was being prosecuted by the Borough at the time of interviews. This was a clear demonstration of the detrimental impact on the environment due to the pressure to cut costs which underpins the CCT process.

In terms of the inclusion of specific environmental criteria into contracts, Hounslow's grounds maintenance specifications had incorporated certain conditions, for example:

(W)e've got a significant section in the management of conservation techniques, under the auspices of our green strategy. So we specify in some detail how they actually go about doing those types of activities, rather than just pure grass cutting (Principal Performance Monitoring Manager, interview, 18/10/94).

However, in relation to this, there is a need to have sufficiently qualified staff on the client side to ensure that appropriate criteria were included, yet there was concern expressed by the Corporate Services Manager for Richmond that some officers were not sufficiently qualified to assess specifications, and no process existed of going through each contract to consider whether it needed to be adapted in the light of Local Agenda 21:

(T)here isn't really in every single department anyone with an environmental qualification or someone who could assess the policy statements. It is clear that some of the specifications currently operating are inadequate in terms of environmental issues (interview 8/5/96).

An important factor in achieving high environmental standards is local authorities' requirements of private contractors in terms of their company's environmental policies. AMA (1995) guidance suggests that authorities should not normally reject a tender solely on the grounds that a company does not have a quality assurance system, however, it also states that CCT contracts can be used to ensure that contractors working on the authority's behalf apply environmental standards equivalent to the authority's own through the careful design of specifications and performance standards. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) (or the broad international quality standard, ISO) is one way in which local authorities can improve their internal operations, to become more environmentally sustainable, and therefore there is the potential to demand this of private contractors. However, LGMB (1994c) advice stresses that EMAS or other quality assurance systems such as ISO cannot be required of a contractor, as this would be considered anti-competitive if the competing DSO had either of these, and would be unreasonable in any tendering exercise as the number of firms who could compete would be too low to bring benefits of competition. The point here is that the local authority is in a no-win situation, as it is unable to demand that private contractors adopt a particular quality assurance system.

Green purchasing is one way in which local authorities can improve their own environmental credentials and those of service providers, whether in-house or private companies. The LGMB (1994c) points out that almost every service or type of good which a local authority purchases has some kind of environmental implication. Its guidance suggests that, despite the restrictions, discussed above, the combined purchasing power of local government could influence suppliers and product development. However a corporate approach to purchasing is being fragmented as private firms take over contracts. Evidence from the West London case studies showed that, despite the local authorities being major purchasers of goods and services, there was limited scope, partly due to CCT, to request that potential contractors had a purchasing policy which was based on buying the least environmentally damaging products. The view of the Policy Analyst in Richmond was that local authorities were not permitted to ask private contractors to adopt their environmental policy. He commented that:

... what we can ask for is an environmental methods statement, we can ask them about their awareness of environmental issues, we can ask them voluntarily to adopt certain standards. What we can't do is to say, here's our environmental policy, now go away and adopt it because that is non-commercial and could result in Section 13 or written 14 notices against the council (interview, 4/3/96).

Sita, which operated the street cleansing contract in Hounslow, did not have an environmental policy, and the manager noted that there were no environmental criteria in the client specification, apart from adherence to the relevant legislation, for example the Litter Code of Practice in the 1990 Environmental Protection Act (interview, 13/4/96). The only one of the three Boroughs to adopt EMAS was Richmond, and this was only being used in the Environmental Services Department.

Some grounds maintenance contracts do contain detailed environmental conditions, for instance where a park was defined as a conservation area and in the management of cemeteries. In Wandsworth it was stated that:

... we have areas that have rare orchids which we have to take account of. So the expertise that we're looking for from the contractor has to be pretty detailed and certainly we're looking for a fairly high grade horticultural expertise to maintain those areas (Assistant Director Leisure Amenities Services, interview, 12/2/96).

However, the incorporation of such detailed criteria into specifications does not appear to be normal practice in Wandsworth. According to the Secretary

for Battersea and Wandsworth Trade Union Council (interview, 10/4/96), local authority officers in Wandsworth have said that including environmental considerations in specifications is anti-competitive, and local councillors argue that market forces are the best way to approach environmental issues, rather than the local authority intervening. Private contractors are not required to show an awareness of the Borough's environmental strategy.

In concluding this discussion of environmental criteria in contracts, and the demands that can be put on contractors in adopting certain approaches, the restrictive nature of CCT in terms of restrictions on anti-competitive behaviour and on the inclusion of 'non-commercial' issues, detracts from the provision of high quality environmental services. They do not permit local authorities to request that companies have environmental management systems, and they limit the ability of local authorities to incorporate adequate environmental criteria. The pressure on local authorities to accept the lowest bid has considerable implications for the environment, as shown in the example of hundreds of trees being killed, due to a cheap bid and poor working practices. The next section discusses whether long-term planning is possible in the services studied, due to the restrictions of CCT. It considers first the issue of flexibility in the operation of contracts, and then assesses the impact of CCT on workforce flexibility.

## **6.9 Long-term planning and contract flexibility**

Walsh (1989) argues that, because contracts can last for up to seven years (or sometimes longer), local authorities need to ensure that specifications will be satisfactory over a long period of time, and this means that policy decisions will have to be made before contracts are tendered, as significant changes in the middle of a contract might lead to high variation costs. Thus there is a need to plan services much further into the future than currently occurs. Yet the CCT process has made it more cumbersome to plan long-term, and this has negative consequences for environmental planning. Moreover, it is difficult to co-ordinate local authority policies, as in many cases there are no long-term strategies for the individual services. Corporate issues are therefore often perceived by those in separate units as not impinging on the way they manage their own workforce, thus policies on equal opportunities, customer care, and environmental protection vary between these units. In Hounslow, the CCT strategy group had responded to the AMA (1995) guidance on inclusion of environmental criteria in CCT contracts by setting out how CCT policy should

be linked to environmental policy in the Borough. The areas covered were service review; service strategy; specifications; tender selection; tenderer evaluation and awarding of contracts; and monitoring of contracts. However, as noted by the Ecology Officer (interview, 23/2/96), difficulties arose in attempting to implement these objectives, particularly as there was no long-term strategy.

The problems of long-term planning have been confirmed in a study of the grounds maintenance service by ADLO (1997), which found that a large majority of respondent local authorities did not have long-term strategies for parks and open spaces. Whilst a number of local authorities had developed overall strategic plans that were linked into wider council initiatives on the environment, they were in some cases at least a year away from implementing individual parks development and management plans.

The fragmentation of local authority responsibilities to individual units was argued by corporate policy officers in Hounslow and Richmond to have a detrimental impact on the flexibility of contracts (interviews, 14/3/96; 4/3/96). If a local authority wants to make changes to a contract and undertake the level of consultation needed due to the devolvement of responsibilities this has been described as a 'logistical nightmare' (Nature and Conservation Ecology Officer, LBR, interview, 29/2/96). There were differing opinions between the client and contractor side as to the consequences of fragmentation, for instance, in Hounslow, DSO managers pointed to a lack of opportunity for making changes, (interviews, 19/11/94; 18/10/94) whereas client officers suggested there was scope, at a cost, to change contract specifications whether the contract was operated by the DSO or private company (interviews 18/10/94; 14/10/94). In Richmond, it was argued that the DSOs operating the refuse and street cleansing contracts were more flexible than a private contractor would be as, if work outside of the contract specification needed doing, it would tend not to be charged for (Area Supervisor, interview, 28/2/96). The relationship between a client and a contractor was also seen to have a potential effect on the flexibility of a contract - the manager of a Glendales contract in Wandsworth commented that the contract:

... is very heavily monitored, and the specification is very tight, therefore the contractor is allowed no flexibility in its operation of the contract. Wandsworth does not view the operation of the contract as a two-way process. It just dictates what it wants done (interview, 23/2/96).

Thus there is little flexibility in contracts, although this depends to some extent on local circumstances. In Richmond the grounds maintenance contract was less flexible on a day to day basis than prior to CCT, even though the client had specifically included clauses in the contract which permitted changes to the contract. In general, in the grounds maintenance services of all three authorities, CCT was regarded as providing less opportunity for horticultural innovation. Prior to CCT, a manager could call on a wide range of employees in the DSO to help in activities such as the development of new planting schemes, or entering the Borough into horticultural competitions for its flower beds, but this was now no longer possible, due to the fragmentation of the workforce into DSOs, bound by contracts, or to the loss of staff when a contract was won externally.

The flexibility permitted within the contract specification appears to vary, depending on whether the contract has been won by the DSO or externally, the relationship between the client and contractor, and the tightness of the specification (Patterson & Theobald, 1996). A further constraint is through the implementation of legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990, which has, for example, restricted the flexibility of street cleansing specifications (see Chapter Two). The CCT provisions do not allow local authorities to require a company to be based in their area or to set up a local base, yet often the ability to respond quickly to situations is crucial. There are potential environmental impacts due to this constraint such as the pollution caused by transporting equipment long distances between contracts. Finally, in general, the ability to change a specification is limited by the potential cost of that change. In the West London case studies, the ability to include environmental criteria, and to operate in accordance with sustainable development principles, depended upon several factors: first, the prescriptiveness of the specification, whereby in some cases the lack of flexibility meant that it was harder, or much more costly to implement new initiatives which could have a positive impact on the environment; secondly, the relationship between individual clients and contractors, which was usually more more flexible when the contract remained in-house; and thirdly, the flexibility and knowledge of the workforce, which is discussed below.

### *6.9.1 Workforce flexibility and scope for initiative*

Patterson & Pinch (1994) argue that, with public service work becoming more formalised as a result of CCT, through increased job codification and contract monitoring, many workers have suffered a loss of autonomy within the labour

process, and work is increasingly regimented by contract conditions. An example they give is of grounds maintenance staff being less able to utilise their own discretion about the timing and appropriateness of maintenance work. This formalisation of patterns of work is particularly inappropriate as a means of dealing with environmental issues. Evidence from the West London case studies shows that, because they have to work to a tight specification, the workforce can become 'function blind', and employees do not use their initiative where work outside, or at the margins of, the specification is required. If the contract is retained by the DSO, the restrictions on trading activities between contracts and between local authorities means the latter cannot have people employed in one contract area doing work in another contract area, whereas prior to CCT, local authorities used to be able to move staff between areas.

Grouping staff into functional teams can also discourage employees from acting under their own initiative as they only have to focus on one particular area, rather than possessing a wide understanding of the area in which they work, therefore this can have a negative impact on environmental quality. There were different opinions between private managers and DSO managers in the West London case studies, as to the initiative of the workforce. For instance, the contract manager for ServiceTeam in Richmond stressed that using initiative is necessary in grounds maintenance as the work situation is constantly changing due to the weather and other issues, and therefore he argued that the workforce *is* flexible and shows initiative:

(T)hey make suggestions, partly because they have the training and knowledge of how the work should be done. Having a skilled person carrying out an operation as opposed to an unskilled person - there is an impact on the environment, for example noticing birds nesting, and being aware that you could damage machinery if you work in wet conditions (interview, 18/4/96).

However, the Area Supervisor for refuse collection and street cleansing in Richmond commented that:

(P)eople are more inclined to say 'I'm not paid to do that' than they would have been. Before CCT we didn't have specifications and so it would have been virtually impossible for anybody to say 'well that's not part of our work' (interview 28/2/96).

The refuse collection service does not require the same level of qualifications as grounds maintenance, however the flexibility of the workforce was still perceived by the DSOs as important. For instance the DSO manager in



Hounslow (prior to the contract being won by Sita in 1996) stated that the DSO encouraged employees to use their initiative, for example to inform the supervisor if a particular street was strewn with litter, as the DSO could be under penalty if it was not dealt with. However, the problem of fragmentation through contracts being let separately meant it was difficult to co-ordinate provision between street cleansing and refuse collection. In concluding the discussion of the flexibility of contracts and of the workforce, it appears that in the grounds maintenance service in particular, considerable flexibility is crucial, both in terms of the specification and the workforce, due to the nature of the work being undertaken, and the seasonal changes. This had been taken into account in the Hounslow and Richmond grounds maintenance contracts, but in Wandsworth flexibility was lacking, partly due to poor specifications; the low price at which the grounds maintenance contract had been won; and also due to the lack of staff training. Working practices have changed, with tasks being increasingly function-based, thus, across all three services, but especially in grounds maintenance, the rigidity of the specification required for CCT means there is less scope for workers to use their own initiative. The following section considers the issue of monitoring contracts to ensure the specified work is carried out.

### **6.10 Monitoring of contracts**

One important aspect of the client-contractor split is the requirement to have a monitoring system to ensure contract compliance. An Audit Commission Report (1995) states that monitoring by clients could be reduced by using the contractor's own quality control information, particularly since many contractors already supervise their own work, however, this has implications for the role of the client, and the level of service provision. Managers on both the client and the contract side in the West London case studies generally agreed that some level of monitoring of the quality of the work carried out by the contractor was required by the client, to ensure work was done to the specified standard. There was, however, widespread concern in the Boroughs about the ongoing need to cut costs which was seen to be resulting in cuts in the numbers of inspectors, and the replacement of specialists with 'generic' inspectors. These changes reduce the availability of the expertise necessary to monitor effectively the contractors' performance:

... so there is concern that the expertise is going - on the client side more staff are becoming generalist as there is less scope to come up from the grass roots. This is a concern, as if there is not the

knowledge base then the contractor can pull the wool over your eyes (interview, Assistant Director, Leisure Services, Richmond, 14/10/94).

The split between the client and the contractor thus poses problems in terms of the monitoring of contracts, but also raises the issue of who takes responsibility when problems arise in the performance of the contractors.

Output contracts have been argued to be easier to manage from the local authority point of view, in that the client needs only to check that the work has been done as required, and needs to be less concerned about the way in which the work has been carried out (Audit Commission, 1995). This however has considerable risks in relation to the environmental acceptability of methods used, particularly since there is no monitoring to check the work is being done in an appropriate manner. In Hounslow the number of inspectors for grounds maintenance had been reduced from six to two, between 1993 and 1996, and there was a move away from random inspections, towards targeting particular areas. This approach was replicated in Richmond, where grounds maintenance contracts were monitored according to the profile of the site. There was a concern, however, on the client side for grounds maintenance in Hounslow and Richmond (interview, 18/10/94; 24/10/94), that if expertise was lost, through reducing the number of skilled inspectors, this would impact on the quality of the service, as there would not be officers with sufficient understanding of a contract to recognise whether environmental criteria in a specification had been met.

With a shift away from a system of inspectors monitoring contractor's work, a number of approaches have been considered, including the introduction of self-monitoring by the contractor, for instance the street cleansing contract in Wandsworth was self-monitored on a daily basis by the supervisors for Onyx. There was an increasing reliance on complaints and Residents Attitude Surveys as a way of monitoring - for example from tenants, caretakers, and housing officers. The problem here is that often the public do not know they *should* be complaining, as they have not seen the contract specification, and in most cases would not have any reason to understand the process of CCT. For street cleansing the Tidy Britain Group Survey is used as a way of measuring quality, and all three local authorities used this approach, however this tends to be reactive rather than proactive monitoring. Moreover, it was pointed out by the Secretary for Battersea and Wandsworth trade union council (interview, 10/4/96) that, although the Tidy Britain Group found that Wandsworth needed to improve its standard of street cleansing, the monitoring

officers still gave a default 'honeymoon' of up to a year to the private contractors.

In concluding, the client-contractor split has resulted in the need to monitor services to ensure the work is being carried out to the specification. Several approaches have been adopted by local authorities, the reliance on complaints from members of the public; self-monitoring by the contractor; and monitoring by the client. The first approach is problematic as it is reactive, and relies on people knowing what they should be complaining about. The second approach relies on the contractor meeting the specification, which can mean that corners are cut in order to get the work done. Thirdly, client monitoring has become increasingly generic, and therefore there is concern that there is less expertise employed in monitoring performance. All three approaches are underpinned by the pressure on local authorities to cut costs. An important consideration in the analysis of the impact of CCT on service provision is the reduction in the accountability of service providers to elected councillors, since, particularly when services are operated by private contractors, councillors have less direct influence on how the service is provided, and this is now considered.

### **6.11 Accountability**

In the three West London Boroughs it was generally felt that CCT had improved local authorities' understanding of how to specify services, yet clearly this was not always being followed up by an improvement in the service being delivered, due to the restrictions of CCT and budget cuts. The view of the Head of the Policy Unit in Wandsworth was that:

CCT has increased the control for local authorities. When you only have to focus on monitoring and service standards, it's an easier job to do. When you've got to actually manage the service you've got all the intricacies of trade union concerns and the workforce. These days they're not our problem anymore. We can concentrate on service quality. It's much easier to control (interview, 21/3/96).

Thus, as discussed earlier, no links were made between service quality and quality of employment (perceived by councillors and officers in Wandsworth as not being an issue of concern for local authorities). However, trade union officers (interviews: 11/4/96; 10/4/96) argued that CCT had made Wandsworth less accountable for its actions and this approach arguably has implications for the policies adopted by Wandsworth on social issues, on local employment,

and on the environment and sustainable development, if the Borough regards its role as merely one of contracting-out services.

Walsh (1989) was particularly concerned that the introduction of CCT was likely to affect the way that councillor's complaints about a service are dealt with. He suggested it would be less easy to take account of complaints because of the client-contractor split and the requirement to work to a prior specification. It is difficult to influence DSOs or contractors to make changes, as they are one step removed from the client, and subject to a set of pressures that may override the interests of the client. According to Hislop (1994), the client and contractor model has had a clear effect on the remit and nature of democratic local government, as it prevents local authorities from pursuing other policies on which they may have been elected through the mechanism of service delivery. He raises other important issues which emerge from this split. These are a weakening of accountability mechanisms; the reduced power of local authorities to act as a local employer; the creation of a system that is largely impervious to political considerations; the enhancement of control by officers rather than elected councillors; and the restriction of the control of services to contractual mechanisms. These concerns were raised within Hounslow and Richmond, but not in Wandsworth (arguably relating to the latter's political enthusiasm for CCT, as part of a more general view that the market should provide). According to the Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow:

... CCT has not made the local authority more responsive to the local community, because local authorities have lost powers and lost the ability to make real decisions (interview, 2/2/96).

This raises the question of whether local authorities have the capacity to implement programmes such as Local Agenda 21, and highlights the wider issue of the democratic role of local government in representing local people (as discussed in Chapter Seven). The next section considers the implications of CCT for a local authority's public service ethos.

## **6.12 Public service ethos and the role of local government**

Changes in the ethos of public service provision, and the nature of services themselves, are some of the more intangible effects of CCT, and these changes have a significant effect both on the workforce and their local environment. CCT has resulted in costs to the local community, and to local employment.

Yet local authorities are increasingly unable to take these issues into consideration, due to a loss of powers and resources. In the West London case studies it was perceived by some councillors and officers that there was a difference between the ethos of a local authority and that of a private contractor operating a council contract, and this research has also shown that some regard the CCT process as leading to insecurity in the workforce, and a loss of public service ethos. This is believed to have occurred both where contracts have been won externally, and when DSOs have been restructured, with worsened pay and conditions, skills downgraded, and training programmes cut back. The perception of a shift away from a public service ethos was noted by a number of those involved in all three services in Hounslow and Richmond. According to a client officer for Hounslow:

... operating in a contracting environment as a private contractor, it may be a council service, the council might be paying the bill at the end of the day but your loyalties are with your company and not with the council. I don't think you can replace that attitude, that feeling of responsibility (interview, Head of Contract and Performance Monitoring Unit, 14/3/96).

However, it was suggested that even when a contract is won in-house, the level of productivity demanded is so high that the employees do not have the luxury to feel they are providing a public service:

(I)t's all about getting the job done because you've got to move down the road and get the next job done and you haven't got time. So, it's sort of removed a community spirit as well. They're just people shifting the bins now, they're not part of the community (interview, Head of Environmental Services, Richmond 12/3/96).

Furthermore, if contracts are being judged on price rather than quality, then the ethos for DSOs may become more like that of a private contractor. The private contractor emphasises profit maximisation, and minimum labour costs, and this was commented on by the manager at Glendales, in the grounds maintenance contract in Hounslow:

... 40-45% of our costs are labour and that's the figure that we have to monitor closely - sickness, days off, absenteeism. Come on chappies you're with a private contractor, we're here to make money, nothing else, we're here to make money (interview, 1/5/96).

In Hounslow the Head of the Contract and Performance Monitoring Unit (interview, 14/3/96) suggested that, in the past local authorities have gone out of their way to shield those who are disadvantaged, but he noted that this ability had diminished as competition got fiercer (as discussed in section 6.7),

and he perceived this as moving away from a public service ethos, since this approach was reducing employment opportunities for those most marginalised in the local economy.

These concerns about the move away from a public service ethos are also supported by the findings of some working papers which focused on the needs of people in cities and the ways in which urban parks and open spaces can contribute to meeting these (Comedia & Demos, 1993; Hoyles, 1994). The Comedia & Demos study suggests that up until the mid-1990s the importance and the potential of parks had been largely ignored, forgotten or undervalued, even though parks are especially relevant in an era concerned with sustainable development. Yet, Hoyles points out:

... compulsory tendering and contracting out have led to less local authority involvement and these amenities are often the first to be cut when financial savings are to be made (1994, p1).

According to Welch (1995), CCT has meant the loss of a regular workforce in parks, and the replacement of these by mobile maintenance teams. Bidders for CCT contracts are unlikely to win contracts if they promise to maintain full-time staffing at every park, as mobile care, with teams of casualised non-union workers moving from park to park, is much cheaper. One impact of this change to parks' management is a reduction in social interaction between the workforce and the public, yet Comedia & Demos (1993) found that priorities for park users included good customer care and consultation with users; provision of safe and secure parks; well maintained and clean park facilities; education, ecological and environmental programmes; and events for park users. The study also found that few women would go to a park unaccompanied, and that vandalism was increasing (also see ADLO, 1997; Hutton, 1995; Kennedy, 1997). Welch (1995) and Selman (1996) have both stressed the importance of parks and open spaces for health reasons. For example, Welch argues that:

(P)arks are for people to use and enjoy but even that purpose has the wider one of improving the general public good. They are places of public resort and entertainment, for beneficial exercise in the open air, but they are intended ultimately to improve peoples lives, extend them through encouraging healthier and more relaxed lifestyles, and give emotional, physical and psychological comfort to those that use them. (1995, p1).

He continues that:

(S)ome surveys have shown that even people who rarely or never use parks believe that they have an improved quality of life because they exist, and would feel urban areas to be claustrophobic and less attractive without them. This effect on the wider community, and the fact that they cost nothing to enter and use, marks out the park from most of the other leisure provisions of local authorities (1995, pp 1-2).

A related issue is the ethos of the employees themselves in providing public services. Kessler & Undy (1996) report on a survey for the Institute of Personnel and Development, which questioned 1000 employees from across Britain, including 200 local government workers. Their interpretation of the survey was that local authority employees had a significantly higher degree of commitment to their organisations and their work than other, private sector, workers. This commitment was 'affective' - based on a moral and emotional attachment to a local authority, and 'continual', which rested on workers' perceptions of the advantages of staying within the local authority, but changes to working practices, growing insecurity, and lowering of morale was an increasing problem, as it is was reducing this attachment.

The evidence has therefore suggested that local authorities and private contractors are pushed by different motivations, the former being driven by their public role in the local community, and the latter by profit, and that the CCT process is putting pressure on local authorities to adopt employment practices which are in conflict with its role as a local employer and service provider. Moreover, the level of service provision is being reduced, with a consequent impact on the local population, and on the workforce, as part of the local community.

### **6.13 Conclusions**

The examination in three local authorities of the experiences and views of the impact of CCT in the provision of three environmental services has provided important evidence to show that, through a number of mechanisms, the CCT process, and the consequent restrictions placed upon local authorities, have had a detrimental impact on the local environment. This is due partly to the pressure to cut costs, and therefore to reduce the service specification, which has a direct impact on the quality of the local environment, whether it is the streets being cleaned less often, or the replacement of flower beds in parks with grass. Secondly, the loss of employment, and changes to working practices, in

terms of the intensification of work, loss of local knowledge, and expertise, and reduced terms and conditions, have not only had a detrimental impact on employees in terms of low morale and insecurity, but by implication this has also had negative consequences for the environment, due to less time being available to spend on tasks, and less knowledge of the issues specific to a local area. Thirdly, the restrictions on local authorities on including environmental criteria, and further restrictions arising from EU regulations are considerable, and make it extremely difficult to incorporate environmentally friendly practices into CCT contracts. Fourthly, local authorities are limited in the scope for flexibility into contracts, due in part to the necessity to have tightly-drawn specifications which provide less possibility of contractors cutting corners, and also due to the nature of the client-contractor split. The move towards function-based work has also acted against the flexibility of the workforce in some cases, as it hampers employees using their initiative in delivering the specification. Fifthly, monitoring is becoming more generic, and increasingly reliant on non-experts, with consequent negative impacts on the level of the service, yet, at the same time, those representing local people are having less opportunity to influence the provision of services. Finally, the less tangible effect of CCT is the move away from a public service ethos, particularly if contracts are won externally, but increasingly even when contracts are retained by the DSO, due to the changes to pay, conditions of service, and working practices. This is also occurring due to the consequent loss of local authorities' capacity to act on behalf of the local community, in terms of providing local employment and socio-economic aspect. The example of the impact of CCT on the parks service illustrates the wider impact of CCT, on the physical environment, but also in relation to the role of local government in responding to social issues. These general concerns are developed in the next chapter, in relation to the implementation of sustainable development at local level through LA21, and the requirements of local government in achieving this.



# 7

## **Implementing Local Agenda 21 in West London**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is a response by local government to the Agenda 21 programme of action, whereby local authorities are expected to produce a local strategy for sustainable development. This chapter focuses on the development of LA21 in the West London Boroughs of Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth. It examines the constraints to implementing a LA21 process, and considers the consequences of local government restructuring for the incorporation of LA21 in policymaking at local level. First, the incremental process of adopting environmental strategies, which began in the late 1980s, and was developed during the 1990s with the production in some local authorities of LA21 documents, is described, and the particular approaches of the West London Boroughs are situated within a London-wide and national context. Secondly, the ways in which the relationship between central and local government in terms of support, and funding for LA21 has impacted on its implementation, are considered. Thirdly, there is a discussion of the implications of LA21 for the internal structure of the three Boroughs, in terms of the staffing of the process, the committee and officer arrangements, and the raising of awareness amongst councillors, officers, trade unions, and private contractors. Fourthly, the mechanisms for incorporating sustainable

development principles into the provision of local services are evaluated (see Chapter Two), and also wider aspects of local government responsibility, in terms of economic development and local employment. Fifthly, the issue of public participation in the LA21 process is considered, since the ability to address the demands of sustainable development at local level requires the involvement of people in making decisions about their local area. Then the conflict between CCT, and other forms of local government restructuring (as discussed in Chapters Three and Six) is examined, as are the demands of sustainable development. In the final section, the progress of the three West London Boroughs in adopting a LA21 strategy is evaluated.

## **7.2 Environmental strategies and Local Agenda 21**

The Local Government Management Board (LGMB) has, since 1994, conducted bi-annual national surveys of the progress of local authorities in developing and implementing LA21 strategies. The most recent LGMB (1998) survey indicates that in Greater London and the South of England, a higher than average proportion of local authorities have prepared a LA21 plan. Buckingham-Hatfield & Riglar (1999), drawing on the findings of this survey, suggest the higher level of activity may be helped by the presence of groups such as the London Ecology Forum, and the London-wide LA21, which assist in developing links between Boroughs. As explained in Chapter Five, one of the reasons for selecting Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth was that they had each started a process of LA21, and this enabled comparisons to be made between their LA21 processes. As discussed in greater detail below, by early 1997, all three Boroughs had prepared a LA21 document, but there was considerable variation in the approach to producing an LA21 document, and this variation is replicated in the findings of the LGMB surveys (1995b; 1996b; 1998). The following discussion provides an account of how environmental strategies, and in particular LA21 have been developed in the three West London Boroughs.

### *7.2.1 Hounslow's Local Agenda 21 process*

The London Borough of Hounslow (LBH) established an Environmental Forum in 1988, and adopted the Friends of the Earth 'Environmental Charter for Local Government' (FoE, 1989) in February 1990. The Borough published its own Environmental Charter in 1991 (LBH, 1991) which set out in general terms existing areas of good practice by the Borough and indicated where further improvements would be made. These areas were to be targeted through

successive environmental action plans arising from departmental work programmes. A follow-up Charter was produced in February 1993 (LBH, 1993), and in the interim period the Environmental Forum had been reconstituted in order to recruit a wider membership, and was relaunched in October 1992. The Forum consists of representatives of the Borough (officers and councillors) and representatives from external organisations, and its role is to monitor and advise on future Charter action plan programmes (LBH, 1993). It has faced obstacles in trying to involve some groups, for instance, according to the Borough's Ecology Officer (LBH, 1999), both the Womens' Environmental Movement, and the Black Environmental Movement have stated that they do not have the resources to send a member to all the Forum meetings. Clearly this is problematic, in terms of the need to include groups who are marginalised from the policy making process.

Hounslow began to develop a LA21 strategy in the autumn of 1994, with the Borough playing a leading role in initiating the process, and nominating an elected councillor to have responsibility for promoting LA21. Hounslow publicised the start of its LA21 process through a number of launch events. The advertising of these events was, however, fairly low-key, through local newspapers and libraries, and the subsequent process has not significantly challenged previous public participation practice (Buckingham-Hatfield, Theobald, & Turner, 1997). An initial LA21 meeting took place in 1995, attended by 60 people from all areas of the Borough (LBH, 1996), and five LA21 working groups were formed: Transport and Pollution; Waste Reduction and Recycling; Green Spaces and Wildlife; Water, Rivers and Water Courses; and Energy, with some of those attending the meeting volunteering to become members of the groups. Notably, all five groups focused on the environmental aspect of sustainable development, rather than social or economic issues. The LA21 groups met regularly between summer 1995 and summer 1997, with Chairs elected by the group members (LBH, 1996). Each group produced a submission for a draft LA21 document, produced in Spring 1996. This went out to consultation during the summer of 1996 whereby 3,500 copies of the draft document were distributed to organisations and individuals who had requested a copy, and the document was accompanied by a questionnaire requesting feedback. The response rate was very low, at 3.5%, partly due to the low-key consultation process. The Borough's LA21 strategy was published at the end of 1996, entitled 'Hounslow's Environmental Challenge: an environmental action plan into the 21st century' (LBH, 1996b) The implementation and monitoring of the LA21 process was led by the LA21

Steering Group, established in 1996, and consisting of the Chairs of the five LA21 groups, individuals from Brunel University, and local authority officers. There was the opportunity for others to join the Steering Group, and Hounslow was particularly keen that representatives of local business became involved, although in practice this had not occurred.

The limitations of the LA21 strategy are noted by the Steering Group, which states that the document:

... does not as yet form a comprehensive local response to Agenda 21 and represents only a part of the response of this Borough. Other work is progressing on social equity and economic development aspects under the banner of a complementary project (1996, p7).

The complementary project is 'Vision 2010' (LBH, 1996c), which focuses on the issues of social equity and economic development in the Borough. The 'Vision 2010' document was produced in 1996, following a consultation process which consisted of holding focus sessions with a range of user groups, and within the business community. Since 'Vision 2010' was published, no progress has been made on implementing the strategy (Ecology Officer, LBH, 1999). Thus the emphasis of LA21 in Hounslow is clearly on environmental aspects, with the social and economic elements being treated separately, and this signals a structural problem in that LA21 is not being perceived as central to other local policies. The LA21 process has not developed any further since the publication of the Strategy in 1996 and the Borough continues to adopt an approach which focuses on individual aspects of the environment (although, as discussed in section 7.7, progress is being made in some areas, for example recycling and composting). The Borough has recently established a 'Greening the Workplace' Steering Group at corporate level (1999), and is planning to combine all the separate environmental projects, in order to develop a corporate environmental policy. A temporary (one year) appointment of an environmental officer has been made in 1999, as part of Hounslow's attempt to reinvigorate the LA21 process. Meanwhile, the LA21 working groups were disbanded in 1997, and the Chairs of each group joined the Environmental Forum. The main task of the Forum is now to develop and implement a Biodiversity Action Plan. The approach in Hounslow has therefore been to develop the environmental aspects of LA21, with social and economic issues being considered in separate strategies. Hounslow does not appear to be involving the community in any meaningful way in the development of LA21 or other strategies. The approach is one of establishing individual environmental projects and strategies, although more recently some attempt is

being made to co-ordinate these in an overarching strategy to protect the environment, and, under the present Government's 'modernisation' programme for local government, Hounslow is going for 'beacon status' as a local authority. The development of Richmond's environmental strategy and its LA21 process is now considered.

### *7.2.2 Richmond's Local Agenda 21 process*

The London Borough of Richmond (LBR) adopted the FoE 'Environmental Charter' in 1989, and this represented the first statement about the Borough's responsibility towards the environment (LBR, 1989). Targets in its Environmental Charter (1989) included a number of areas relating to the three environmental services considered for this thesis: increasing green space and 'green corridors'; protecting and improving open spaces; developing a nature conservation strategy; keeping the Borough free of litter and dog excrement; and recycling of waste materials. In the immediate post-Charter period, each service Committee was expected to produce an annual Environmental Action Plan, against which their performance would be subsequently judged. The 'Annual Environmental Programme' 1995/96 (LBR, 1996), for example, considers issues specific to each department, for instance the Chief Executive's Department states that ultimately it aims to purchase only the most environmentally acceptable items from suppliers with environmental management systems, although, as was discussed in Chapter Six, there are considerable constraints on implementing this. In the Environmental Programme, both the Chief Executive's Department, and Housing, Health and Consumer Services state that they aim to raise awareness in their employees of the environmental impact of policies and practices, although it is not clear how this will occur. Thus the approach is one where individual departments make decisions about adopting environmentally sustainable practices (this issue is developed further in section 7.9). The main forum within the Borough to discuss environmental issues is a working party called the Environmental Strategy Steering Group, consisting of staff from a number of Departments, such as Transport, Planning, Waste and Environmental Services, and Construction and Property.

The LA21 process in Richmond was started in 1994 when the Borough organised a Conference, 'The Best of Both Worlds', from which a community-led steering group was formed to develop the Borough's strategy for sustainable development. Specialist groups, named Strategy Implementation Groups (SIGs) were also formed, consisting of local residents, representatives

of voluntary groups, officers, and councillors, with the Chair of each group attending steering group meetings. The SIGs were responsible for the development of sustainable development initiatives, and each SIG concentrates on one topic: Energy; Transport; Waste and Resources; Building Responsibly; Managing the Natural Environment; Leisure and Tourism; Health and Well-being; Fear of Crime; and Manufacturing and Services. Thus the remit of these groups is wider than that of Hounslow's, incorporating environmental, social, and economic development issues. A draft of the LA21 document was produced by the SIGs in June 1996 for consultation with interested individuals and local community groups and businesses. An LA21 leaflet was also distributed to each home in the Borough, with the annual council tax bill. During 1996 attempts were also being made in the Corporate Policy Unit (CPU) to establish a senior officers working group to consist of the Directors of each Department, which would address the implications of LA21 for policymaking. The Corporate Services Manager was preparing a presentation to the Directors Board in June 1996, which was intended to ensure that each committee would look at the LA21 draft strategy, and the annual environmental programme update. He suggested the aim was to raise awareness of these issues so that this might encourage senior officer to filter information relating to LA21 through their Department to all staff, and help to incorporate sustainable development issues into policymaking (interview, 8/5/96).

Following the consultation process, the Borough produced the 1997 document, 'Quality of Life in Richmond upon Thames - Your Choice' (LBR, 1997) which contains its LA21 strategy for sustainable development, and implementation of the strategy is co-ordinated by the LA21 Steering Group, consisting of SIG representatives, officers, councillors, and business representatives. The Borough has only given limited funding to the process, through part-funding the consultation process, in partnership with other organisations; financing 'sustainability fora', and providing funds for the publication of 'Environmental Partnership' newsletters. The Borough also states that it wants to help the process, but does not want to lead solely or to finance the strategy as it progresses. This is due in part to the lack of resources to fund non-statutory initiatives such as LA21.

The Borough has recently decided to approach sustainable development issues separately, and to focus only on the environmental aspects. According to Tsoukatos (1999), the reason behind this change is that it has been difficult

to involve all departments in the LA21 process, and it is hoped that, by focusing on environmental issues only, this will allow the adoption of some form of environmental strategy by all departments. It has been very difficult to encourage some departments to consider the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development in relation to their particular service areas. It is intended that environmental issues will be dealt with by a 'Green Team' consisting of cross-departmental representatives, which will feed into the Borough's Strategy Committee, and the aim is that each department will be responsible for including sustainable development indicators in their individual Quality of Service Reports each year, as a way of monitoring environmental progress. However, this has not occurred in previous Annual Reports, due to a lack of funds, but also due to a lack of staff awareness of the importance of incorporating sustainable development principles into policy (discussed further in section 7.5), thus it is unclear how this new approach in Richmond will have any greater success than previous initiatives. Wandsworth's environmental strategy and LA21 process is now considered.

### *7.2.3 Wandsworth's Local Agenda 21 process*

The London Borough of Wandsworth (LBW) produced its first Environmental Policy Statement in October 1989 (LBW, 1989a), based on the FoE Environmental Charter (FoE, 1989). The explicit aim of the Statement was to protect and preserve the local environment, and to make the Borough a cleaner, healthier and safer place in which to work. In 1989 the Borough also published 'Wandsworth's Alternative' (LBW, 1989b) in which it placed an emphasis on reducing the use of private transport, and promoting public transport. During 1990/91 the Borough started a process of collecting data for a State of the Environment Report on air and water pollution, which was intended to be the first stage in a comprehensive environmental audit (London Research Centre, 1991), and had completed this by the time of the publication of the LA21 strategy in 1997. Meanwhile, in 1994 the Borough produced a revised Environmental Policy Statement (LBW, 1994b), in accordance with Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) guidelines on good practice. The Statement sets out a number of areas of action: energy consumption; water consumption; waste and recycling; air pollution; noise; land condition; health and safety at work; the built environment, townscape and urban visual amenity, and environmental information and education, thus the focus, as with Hounslow, and now also with Richmond, is on the environmental aspects of sustainable development.

The Environmental Policy Statement (1994) formed the beginning of Wandsworth's LA21 process. During 1995, detailed plans for implementing and monitoring environmental policies were drawn up, the aim being for these plans, following consultation, to form the core of a LA21 strategy in the Borough (LBW, 1995). An elected councillor was nominated as the Borough's contact on LA21, to promote LA21 and move the policy process forward on sustainable development issues. Following the publication of the LA21 Consultation Document (LBW, 1996), the implications of LA21 for Wandsworth were discussed in a number of meetings, reports, and discussions throughout 1996, both internally and with the public. This included inviting public comment and ideas through articles in a local authority magazine 'Brightside', through public meetings, and requesting comments from interested individuals and organisations who had contributed to the previous environmental policy statement. The Borough has not taken the lead role in this process, instead Wandsworth Environmental Forum (consisting of only voluntary groups) is responsible for the subsequent development and implementation of the LA21 strategy. In 1997 the Borough's LA21 document 'Local Agenda 21 for Wandsworth: working together for a better future' was published (LBW, 1997). The document is based on a list of environmental issues contained in the Borough's 1994 Environmental Policy Statement, and therefore concentrates only on these aspects to the exclusion of social and economic aspects. In the strategy, it is stated that the Borough will report annually on both the progress of LA21 initiatives and the health of the local environment, using indicators to identify whether the local environment is improving, and highlighting areas for further action. As with Hounslow (and now Richmond), policies on crime, community safety, health and other social issues continue to be developed and monitored as separate projects, although the Wandsworth LA21 document states that some of these elements will eventually form part of its Local Agenda 21 programme. The separation of economic and social issues from environmental aspects is, according to the Borough's lead councillor on Local Agenda 21, because the Borough felt there was:

... a danger of Agenda 21 becoming a generalised manifesto, covering the whole range of political and economic issues and losing direction as a result (1997, p5).

Yet the principle underpinning LA21 is that the environment, social equity, and economic development need to be integrated within policymaking, in order to attempt to resolve the contradictions between environmental protection and



economic development (see Chapter Two). According to the evidence of the LGMB's nationwide surveys, the situation in the three West London Boroughs is typical of the UK as a whole. In its review of the progress of LA21 since 1992, the LGMB (1997) noted that sustainable development in many cases has entered local authority thinking from an environment focus. This appears to be because it is often seen as purely an extension of local government's environmental role, and traditionally economic development, and other areas of local authority responsibility have not been associated with environmental protection.

Having considered the approaches to LA21 in the three Boroughs, there is clearly some variation in the way they are developing the process, in that while Hounslow's process is Borough-led, Richmond's process is led by an LA21 Steering Group, with considerable input from the Borough, and Wandsworth has placed LA21 at arms-length, to be developed by the voluntary sector. Their approaches to consultation have varied, from using questionnaires in both Hounslow and Richmond, to an emphasis on public fora and meetings in Wandsworth. However, there are also clear similarities, in particular in terms of the focus on environmental issues rather than a strategy for LA21 which incorporates all aspects of policymaking. The following discussion considers the consequences of the contemporary relationship between local and central government, for the implementation of LA21 in the three Boroughs, in terms of both the powers and resources allocated to local authorities. This provides a context in which local authorities are responding to the demands of sustainable development.

### **7.3 Central/local relations and LA21**

In Hounslow and Richmond there was strong concern, expressed by policy officers, councillors, and trade union officers, at the lack of powers possessed by local authorities, due to the *ultra vires* rule governing their actions. This was also highlighted in their LA21 strategy documents (LBH, 1996; LBR, 1997). In Wandsworth, there was less concern shown, possibly because the Borough does not regard a removal of powers and functions from local government to external agencies as ideologically problematic. The Richmond Sustainability Strategy, and the Strategy and Review Sub-Committee's agenda (July, 1997) states that there are matters which must be addressed by central government, for instance the stricter regulation of industry, and the promotion of better industrial practices, but that local government should be provided

with greater regulatory powers, and that there should be greater partnership between central and local government in delivering policies underpinned by the principles of sustainable development. The DSO manager for refuse collection and street cleansing in Hounslow (before the latter was won in 1996 by a private contractor) agreed:

(I)f you want to be serious about green issues, then you've got to put some money into it. But I don't think it can all be on the shoulders of local authorities, even if they had the resources; I think there is a real need to have partnership between central government, local government, and business, and we are a long way from achieving anything like that (interview, 18/10/94).

Clearly there are problems in the relationship between central and local government, and in the lack of real support in terms of resources for local government to implement LA21 strategies, and this is discussed further below.

### *7.3.1 Financing Local Agenda 21*

Chapter Three discussed the changes to the financing of local government, with the reduction in central government grants since the late 1970s, and the concomitant restrictions on local authorities in relation to the level of council tax they can levy. In Richmond's most recent update to the original LA21 document (LBR, 1998), it reports some of the problems encountered in attempting to implement the strategy. A key constraint is the lack of finance, with little additional funding being made available to support the development or implementation of LA21, either nationally or locally (as noted earlier). According to the 1998 report:

(R)ichmond Council says that the threat of rate capping and the reduction of rate support grants has significantly reduced the finance available to support such local initiatives. Funding for some specific projects can, in principle, be obtained from charities and other funding agencies. However, the Strategy Implementation Groups, who are unpaid volunteers, are not in a position to put in the effort required to research and apply for such funds (1998, p4).

This is a serious barrier to implementing LA21, since, without adequate funds from national government, the strategy will not be able to be put into practice. Reliance on funds from individual organisations for separate projects exacerbates the fragmented nature of the process, and involves considerable time spent applying for such resources. The 1998 report states that Richmond should be able to:

... consider the need to innovate, to take more risks, and to be willing to resource measures which may look to have long payback periods or fall short of 100% guaranteed success ratings (1997, p2).

However, it then identifies the financial constraints to innovation and to implementing long-term strategies such as LA21. There are extremely limited opportunities for capital investment, and the report therefore suggests an alternative option is re-prioritising programmes of reinvestment of savings for example from energy conservation, although this is tinkering at the margins of policymaking, and a longer-term approach to dealing with environmental issues is required. This issue was also raised by the Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow (interview, 2/2/96), who argued that there was a long-term vision for the Borough but that this was restricted to some extent by having to compete for funds. Whittaker (1995) points out that local authorities do not have the financial resources required to contribute effectively to sustainable development initiatives, and argues that this issue has been highlighted in particular by international agreements on urban settlements, such as the Toronto Declaration on World Cities and their Environment in the early 1990s, and the European Charter for Sustainable Cities and Towns. Whittaker also notes that local authorities are having to compete for funds to address the socio-economic degradation in many towns and cities in Britain.

The relationship between central and local government has provided a national context for policymaking on LA21, although clearly there are variations in individual local authorities' responses, as they respond to the needs of their particular locality. But in general, local authorities are restricted in the measures they can adopt to develop a LA21 process, due to the lack of resources they possess. The following section now turns to consider how the three West London Boroughs have attempted to adapt their internal staffing structures, to respond to LA21.

#### **7.4 Internal restructuring to accommodate LA21**

In the three West London Boroughs, the approach to allocating LA21 responsibilities has been varied. At the time of interviews (1996) Hounslow had not appointed an LA21 co-ordinator, and had incorporated the responsibility for LA21 into the post of the Ecology Officer, who was allocated roughly two days per week on this. In addition there were one or two people assisting with the administrative aspect on an *ad hoc* basis, in particular when the document was being produced, but there was not a formal LA21 team. The

time allocated to LA21 was reduced as the LA21 process, following the publication of the 1996 strategy, progressed no further, for a number of reasons, such as reorganisation of the Environmental Service Department, lack of funding, and the continuation of separate environmental projects, not placed under the banner of LA21 (as noted above, a temporary one year LA21 appointment was made in 1999). In Richmond, responsibility for LA21 is divided between a senior officer in the Corporate Policy Unit (CPU), who oversees the process, and a senior officer in the committee section who deals with the administrative aspect of implementing LA21, but neither of these are new posts specifically for LA21. In Wandsworth, LA21 is also based in the Corporate Policy Unit, with responsibilities allocated to a senior officer who also has responsibility for environmental policies. However, more recently (1998), an LA21 officer has been appointed. According to the senior officer (interview, 21/3/96), there is direct support for the process from the Chief Executive (as discussed below).

The LGMB (1995b, 1996b, 1998) surveys reinforce the findings of the West London research. Table 7.1 shows that the majority of respondent local authorities have continued to add responsibilities to the work of existing officers, rather than appoint new staff, although the proportion adopting this approach has reduced between 1995 and 1998. The percentage of local authorities appointing new staff has increased significantly, from just over 10% in 1995, to over 50% in 1998, which suggests greater recognition of the importance of LA21. Moreover, nearly 22% had set up a specific unit to deal with the implementation of LA21, although this had not occurred in any of the West London case studies. The London Boroughs as a whole were making greater progress in appointing officers to deal with specifically LA21. LGMB (1998) data for London showed that 31.6% of respondent authorities had added responsibilities to the work of existing staff, but 63% had appointed new staff, and 21.1% had set up an Environment or LA21 unit. According to the LGMB (1997), the environment focus is reflected in the way in which staff have been allocated to the task. Staff with responsibility for LA21 delivery are mainly from environmental backgrounds, and located in environment-related departments, and no LA21 officers in its survey were located in education or social services.

**Table 7.1 Approach to allocating Local Agenda 21 issues (% of local authorities)**

Year of survey	None	Adding responsibilities to staff	New staff	Secondment of staff
1994/5	4.4	79.2	10.4	3.6
1996	14.3	75.3	34.2	9.5
1998	0.3	59.8	50.4	No figure available

Source: derived from LGMB (1995b; 1996b; 1998).

In addition to the issue of allocating officer time to LA21, is that of integrating LA21 into local authority policy mechanisms, in terms of officer working groups, and committee procedures. The main officer involvement in Hounslow was to provide expertise and information on specific areas, for each of the LA21 working groups, and for the Environmental Forum, but there have, up until recently, been no formal structures within the committee system (Ecology Officer, interview, 23/2/96). However, during summer 1999 the committee structure for the whole Borough was reorganised, as part of a shift to decision-making at local level (divided into five geographical areas). In this structure, one of the new central committees is the sustainable development committee, which considers planning applications, and environmental issues, but excludes waste management and air pollution (although the reasons for these omissions are not yet clear). In Richmond there was a sustainable strategy sub-committee (no longer in existence since 1998), for which the Chair was also the lead councillor on LA21, but there is no overarching LA21 committee. Every committee report has to carry a statement on the environmental impact of a proposed policy. However, the Corporate Services Manager suggested this needed to be monitored more formally, to ensure that officers devising policy have an adequate understanding of the potential environmental impacts. In Wandsworth, the LA21 process has been tacked onto the work of officers in individual departments, instead of through a working group of officers, but has not been incorporated into the committee structure.

The LGMB (1998) survey reinforces the findings of the West London research. The survey suggests a number of ways in which local authorities across Britain have started the LA21 process. One way is to set up an inter-

departmental working group, and another is to establish a sub-committee of elected members to integrate LA21 into policymaking. The LGMB (1998) survey findings reveal that 37.7% of respondent local authorities have a procedure for all committees to consider the impacts of policies on sustainable development, however 54.8% do not have such a procedure. Integration at officer level is predominantly through the establishment of a new officer working group.

In concluding this section, there has been some attempt to integrate the LA21 process into committee structures in Richmond, but the approach in Hounslow and Wandsworth has been *ad hoc*. A further way of attempting to integrating sustainable development principles is through staff training and raising awareness of the issues involved, as this could help officers and councillors to adopt a corporate vision for LA21.

## **7.5 Raising Awareness of Local Agenda 21**

A key factor in the successful adoption and development of a LA21 process is an awareness by officers in all departments, of what the LA21 process involves, and how this relates to the role of the local authority in terms of services provision, and its wider economic and social role. In Wandsworth it was noted by the officer with responsibility for LA21 (interview, 21/3/96) that the Chief Executive was interested in LA21, and this meant that there was a strong lead from the Corporate Policy Unit. A working party had been set up with senior managers from each department, and it was suggested that due to the influence of the Chief Executive's Office, these senior managers were more aware of LA21, and were also more prepared to respond to the issues in their own departments. However, the approach is still fragmented, the issues being considered within each department, rather than as part of a corporate vision. The development of a cross-departmental approach is crucial to the development of a LA21 process, as it requires a shift from the traditional departmental approach to policymaking. The Corporate Services Manager for Richmond emphasised this point, commenting that:

(W)e're asking them to understand a lot more, a lot more corporate activity, CCT and how that leads to strategic change, environmental issues and again that cuts right across departmental functions and boundaries. So I think there has to be a corporate approach (interview, 8/5/96).

The hope of the CPU in Richmond was that this increased awareness of LA21 would filter down into departments. However, interviews with managers, based in individual departments, or DSO units in all three Boroughs revealed a lack of awareness of how LA21 links into their activities. Part of the problem is that LA21 is wide and unfocused, and often seen as simply *another* local authority initiative. As the Ecology Officer for Richmond argued, the lack of a clear definition of LA21 meant it was very difficult for officers to relate to it:

(E)ven our own council officers can't see that the strategies that they have overlap with the Local Agenda 21 strategies (interview, 29/2/96).

The Ecology Officer, and Lead Councillor for CCT in Hounslow both suggested that, until the concept of sustainable development is clarified, it will continue to be difficult for departments, and the local authority as a whole to develop an appropriate LA21 strategy. The vagueness of the notion of sustainable development, as discussed in Chapter Two, is a barrier to implementing a LA21 strategy, which incorporates environmental, economic, and social aspects (also see Gibbs *et al.*, 1998 on this issue). The lack of awareness of LA21 was evident amongst the managers of some DSOs. The Head of Environmental Services in Richmond (interview, 12/3/96) acknowledged that the work of the DSO for street cleansing and refuse collection impacts on areas covered by the LA21 Strategy, but he commented that no particular action had been taken, and neither he, nor the Area Supervisor for refuse collection and street cleansing, were clear about what LA21 involved. None of the client officers for refuse collection, nor the client officers for grounds maintenance in Richmond and Wandsworth were aware of the existence of a LA21 process.

The support of elected councillors is also vitally important, since in principle they have the power to determine policies in line with sustainable development principles. In Richmond it was suggested that it was important to increase awareness of LA21 amongst councillors. One approach used by the CPU was to make clear to Directors of all departments that they needed to explain to councillors the relevance of sustainable development in relation to their particular department. In Richmond the attempt to raise awareness seems to have had some success, although it was commented that it was a slow process:

(I)n 1988/89 there were three or four councillors who were committed to environmental protection, but it was just an idea, and now it's more like ten to twelve councillors who are articulate and well briefed about

the issues, but they are still in the minority (interview, Policy Analyst, 4/3/96).

Moore (1994), in a survey of councillors and officers (from the Vancouver Task Force on Atmospheric Change), found that there were several barriers to effective action on environmental programmes, one of these being perceptual and behavioural. She suggests that this obstacle to policymaking is due to an inadequate understanding of environmental policies; the perceived lack of effective powers to enact changes; and competing issues for attention and finance, and clearly these findings correspond to the experiences of British local authorities. Selman & Parker (1999) have also acknowledged this barrier, although their research in four 'leading-edge' local authorities on LA21 did find evidence of increased acceptance of LA21 by both officers and councillors. The LGMB (1995b, 1996b, 1998) surveys provide more extensive evidence of local authority approaches to raising awareness of LA21. Between 1994 and 1998 there was a rise in the proportion of local authorities providing some form of awareness raising, either through seminars or workshops, from 28.5% of respondents in 1994/5 to 60.9% in 1998 for councillors, and for officers the figure rising from 29.8% to 62.6% (see Table 7.2). In London, 57.9% of local authorities were providing awareness-raising workshops for officers, and 36.8% for councillors: in both cases the figures are lower than nationally (LGMB, 1998).

**Table 7.2 Percentage of all local authorities which have seminars/workshops to raise awareness about LA21**

Year of survey	Councillors	Officers
1994/5	28.5	29.8
1996	48.4	44.0
1998	60.9	62.6

Source: derived from LGMB: (1995b; 1996b; 1998)

The empirical research has shown that there is an increasing awareness amongst some councillors of LA21, and particularly in areas related to the environment, but in the client officers and DSO managers, awareness of LA21, and of its consequences for their own practices, is patchy. One route through which officers at all levels might find out about the consequences of LA21 for local authority activities is through trade unions, which were cited in Agenda 21 as one of the sectors crucial to the process of sustainable development. There are signs that some unions (particularly Unison, and the General,



Municipal, and Boilermakers Union - GMB) are responding to this on a national scale, however this response is not yet feeding through to the regional, or local level. At the London-wide level, an officer for the Transport & General Workers Union (T&GWU) commented that he had no involvement in environmental issues, and had not heard of LA21, but that he would not have the time to consider the issues raised by LA21, as he perceived them as not relevant to workforce issues (interview, 4/4/96). At the local level, a trade union officer for Unison in Hounslow had not heard of LA21. Once the nature of LA21 and the expected role of trade unions was explained to him by the researcher, he was particularly concerned that he hadn't even heard of LA21, especially since he had been the lead trade union officer for CCT in the Borough since 1993, and he believed there were implications for the CCT process. A point made by one trade union officer for Wandsworth (interview, 11/4/96) who had heard of LA21 was that it was not a statutory requirement, and therefore little attention needed to be paid to it, although the trade union secretary for Battersea and Wandsworth did recognise the importance of incorporating environmental considerations into the services of refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance, for instance in relation to the vehicles used, recycling, and health and safety issues.

CCT has in some cases transferred provision of services to the private sector (although not always permanently, and the majority still remain in-house). Although the local authority is responsible for the incorporation of environmental or sustainable development criteria into a contract (as discussed in Chapter Six), it is important for private contractors to have an awareness of environmental issues, and of their application to the particular contract. In general, those private contractors responsible for providing refuse collection, street cleansing services in the three West London Boroughs were not aware of LA21. In grounds maintenance, contract managers did at least have an awareness of the Boroughs' policies on the environment, although they had not heard of LA21, and in the case of Wandsworth there were regular meetings between the manager and the local authority's Ecology Officer to discuss environmental issues in relation to parks and other open spaces.

In concluding this section, within the three West London Boroughs, awareness of LA21 in councillors has been raised. The main weakness is that there is not sufficient publicising of LA21 to officers, trade unions, DSO managers or private contractors, although clearly it is necessary for them to be aware of how their services impact on the environment, and of how they can

contribute to the LA21 process. One significant obstacle in raising awareness of policies in line with sustainable development is the lack of a clear *local* definition of sustainable development (see Chapter Two). Local authorities are expected to address issues which in practice need an overarching national and international response, as a framework in which a local approach to sustainable development could be adopted. Due to the narrow interpretation of sustainable development, and the focus on environmental initiatives, rather than socio-economic aspects, local authorities are finding it difficult to develop a corporate vision of how LA21 should determine the way in which all policies are developed (Evans, 1998), and therefore to construct appropriate structures and internal arrangements to incorporate LA21. The next section assesses whether LA21 is being integrated into the provision of refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance, which are the services being considered for this research.

## **7.6 Local environmental services and LA21**

According to the LGMB (1998), environmental services are the areas where LA21 is most likely to have had an impact, possibly because local authorities regard LA21 as a logical step forward, building on the provision of traditional environmental services such as refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance. Waste management, which incorporates refuse collection, is discussed first.

### *7.6.1 Waste management*

Chapter Two discussed the increasing importance of waste management and reduction initiatives, in the light of the shortage of potential landfill sites, and the environmental hazards of these, and the consequent tax on local authorities for using landfill sites. The Association of London Government (ALG, 1995), in its LA21 strategy for London, has stated that waste reduction should be a top priority for local authorities in achieving a process of sustainable development, with an increasing emphasis on energy recovery and recycling. The ALG suggests that attention should be given to local opportunities for job creation through the establishment of new markets for collected recyclable materials. In the three West London Boroughs, the recycling of waste materials was an important part of their waste management strategy, and in both Hounslow and Wandsworth the recycling contract is part of the refuse collection contract. In Richmond the two contracts are completely separate. The national target for recycling of domestic waste, set by central government, is 25% by 2000,

however as Table 7.3 shows, none of the case study authorities had reached this by 1999.

In Hounslow, the figure had more than doubled, from 8.5% in 1996/97 to 17.3% in 1998/99. The marked increase between 1996/7 and 1997/8 was due to a borough-wide weekly collection scheme being established. In Richmond, which operates a borough-wide, fortnightly collection of paper materials, the figures during the period of 1996/97 to 1998/99 were steady at 15.5%. In Wandsworth, the figures were lower, rising from 6.9% in 1996/97, to 10.7% in 1998/99. The Borough operates a weekly system of collecting paper, glass, and cans. Both Hounslow and Richmond have other waste management initiatives, in terms of home composting, and waste reduction, and in Richmond there are waste reduction projects, for example a reusable nappies service, and the promotion of Global Action Plan, whereby families opt to follow a programme to reduce waste, energy consumption and other environmentally damaging activities.

**Table 7.3 Level of recyclable materials collected as a proportion of all waste 1996/97-1998/99**

Year	Hounslow (%)	Richmond (%)	Wandsworth (%)
1996/97	8.5	15.5	6.9
1997/98	15.0	15.5	8.3
1998/99	17.3	15.5	10.7

Source: derived from personal communication with LBH, LBR, LBW (1999)

As discussed in Chapter Six, the refuse collection service in all three Boroughs has been affected by the CCT process, whereby significant cuts in budgets have been made, whether the service is kept in-house or won externally. This has had a negative impact on the ability of local authorities to provide adequate recycled material collection programmes, and therefore to dramatically increase the percentage of materials which are recycled. Barriers to achieving greater success in recycling are due to the reliance in some cases of local authorities on external bodies (such as private contractors), and the fragmentation of purchasing policy to individual service units. This has occurred as part of the restructuring of local government, whereby financial responsibilities are devolved to individual units or DSOs, and to other external organisations such as schools. A further constraint to achieving greater recycling of waste, according to the Head of Environmental Services for

Richmond (interview, 12/3/96), is the prohibitive cost of composting green waste from Borough-maintained open spaces, and of promoting waste minimisation in the business community. Wandsworth, in its consultation document for LA21 (LBW, 1996), states that it needs to encourage the elimination of waste, re-use of materials, and the use of 'environmentally friendlier' products, however this conflicts with the restrictions on local purchasing in the CCT legislation (see Chapter Six). At present, no direct link is being made in the three West London Boroughs between sustainable development and the provision of the refuse collection service. Despite recycling programmes being developed in response to government requirements, the CCT process and related budget cuts, are restricting the progress of local authorities in this area. The following section considers the integration of LA21 into the management of parks and open spaces.

### *7.6.2 Management of parks and open spaces*

The second of the services under consideration, grounds maintenance, involves the management of parks and open spaces, and there is considerable potential for this to be linked with LA21 strategies. The ALG (1995) points out that the protection and enhancement of green open spaces is of paramount importance in London. It recommends that programmes should include the protection of the Thames corridor, railways and other green corridors, and more tree planting, and argues that London should ensure there is no net loss of green space, with attention to be paid to making sites accessible for all. The LA21 documents in the West London case studies acknowledge the importance of open space, for instance the Wandsworth LA21 strategy (1997) states that the amount of open space in the Borough has increased in recent years, now covering over one third of its area. It regards the role of the Borough as being to encourage access to public open spaces for all sectors of the community, the development of green chains, linking areas of open space, and discouraging the use of pesticides and other materials that could damage the environment. The grounds maintenance service is central to achieving this, as it involves a range of environmental activities and has an impact on the health and well-being of the local population. However, there are barriers to achieving the maintenance of the ecological nature and value of open spaces, one constraint being the pressure on local authorities to cut costs and therefore to produce lower specifications and accept low bids to carry out the work (see Chapter Six). The Wandsworth LA21 document (1997) states that private contractors could review their grounds maintenance procedures to see if these could be made more sustainable, for instance by reducing chemical use and encouraging

wildlife, yet the contractor interviewed in Wandsworth (16/4/96) was concerned that, because contracts were being won at very low prices, there were insufficient resources and staff to be able to adopt a more environmentally sustainable approach.

One obstacle to retaining the current amount of open space is the nature of the statutory planning system (discussed in Chapter Two). The LA21 strategy for Hounslow (1996) states that the inability to address the loss of green spaces is due to local authorities having to work within the current, inadequate planning legislation, and due to a lack of protection for some areas. The loss of open spaces has included areas such as allotments, and school playing fields, due to pressure on local authorities to develop the land in order to raise funds, reinforced by legislation which has forced local authorities to sell off land for development. This issue is noted in Richmond's LA21 document (LBR, 1997), which states that the Borough should explore opportunities for using the planning system to achieve nature conservation benefits, and also that it should draw up a land management and land use strategy for the Borough's owned/managed sites and adopt it as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Yet, as indicated in Chapter Six, the government guidance on integrating sustainable development principles into contracts is not specific, and therefore difficult to interpret. The next section considers the scope within street cleansing for the application of sustainable development principles.

### *7.6.3 Street cleansing*

Street cleansing is clearly an important aspect of a local authority's environmental role, in terms of the cleanliness of streets, public health, and the visual quality local environment. Hounslow's 'Vision 2010' document (LBH, 1996) states that the quality of the street scene environment, in terms of its state of repair, cleanliness, and general appearance is a matter of daily importance to residents, workers and people passing through, and notes that a significant contribution to this environment comes from local authority services, including street cleansing, signs and trees, provision of access for the disabled, and general environmental improvement. Thus there is clearly a central role for the street cleansing service. There are direct links being made between a clean and pleasant street environment, and the wider aspects of sustainable development, in terms of quality of life, and the health of local people. However, neither in Hounslow, nor in the other two Boroughs, were sustainable development criteria incorporated into street cleansing contracts.

#### 7.6.4 *Purchasing policies*

Purchasing policies are an area affecting the provision of all local government services. Clearly there are a number of aspects of green purchasing that local authorities could, or have considered, such as buying recycled products, or accredited timber. Purchasing from local suppliers is important for sustainable development, however, under CCT provisions, it is deemed a 'non-commercial' issue, and local authorities cannot dictate where contractors purchase their supplies. The Ecology Officer for Hounslow (interview, 23/2/96) commented that the Borough has a purchasing policy, but because it has to be worded in such a way that it is not 'anti-competitive', or 'non-commercial', it is ineffective. As noted earlier, the Richmond LA21 strategy document comments on the importance of ensuring that contract site management is in harmony with the principles of sustainable development by using biologically sound methods of pest and weed control, but the financial constraints act against the achievement of these objectives. Wandsworth's strategy for LA21 states that the Borough will look for 'good buys' from local suppliers, which could be a positive step towards more environmentally sustainable forms of purchasing, but the Borough is no more specific than this. The following section widens the discussion on the development of LA21, and considers the extent to which policies relating to local economic development, local employment and social welfare are integrated into LA21 strategies.

### **7.7 The social and economic aspects of LA21**

LA21 is intended to incorporate social equity in the provision of services, and the inclusion of all groups in decision-making. In addition, the Local Agenda UK Steering Group (1994) calls for a response to the economic development aspect of LA21 by local authorities as they are major players in the local economy, in addition to managing important aspects of the local environment (also see Lusser, 1994; and Webber, 1994, on importance of integrating economic, and social with environmental issues). However, Gibbs *et al.* (1998) refer to LGMB (1993) work on greening economic development. This identifies several potential aims for an integrated approach to environmental and economic policies, including helping businesses to reduce their environmental impacts; and encouraging a more environmentally sustainable mix of businesses, through inward investment, and similar aims are advocated by the European Union Expert Group on the Urban Environment (1994). One way in which this could occur is through the Single Regeneration Budget

(SRB) process, in which partnerships in local areas bid for funding from central government for regenerating economically and socially deprived areas. One example is in Brentford, in the London Borough of Hounslow, in which there is an attempt, through the SRB funding, to encourage local businesses to employ local people, in areas such as retail and tourism, and building construction.

There are, however, a number of barriers to resolving the tensions between economic development and environmental priorities, in terms of a lack of long-term resources, insufficient local skills, and the complexities of partnerships (Patterson & Theobald, 1999). In terms of strategies for sustainable development, Gibbs *et al.* (1996; 1998) have argued that there appears to be a conflict between, on the one hand creating and keeping jobs and encouraging inward investment, and on the other hand protecting the environment. They suggest (1998) that this remains the case even for those local authorities which have attempted to integrate different aspects of sustainable development. Their findings reinforce those of the LGMB (1997), which notes that, although there has been an improvement in the extent to which sustainable development underlies policy at local level, sustainable development principles have less influence in the traditionally 'non-environmental' areas of policy, thus these have remained outside the LA21 process to some extent, with the level of integration of LA21 into economic development, welfare, anti-poverty strategies, and purchasing policies remaining particularly low.

The three West London Boroughs have a range of different strategies to address socio-economic issues, for example Richmond and Hounslow have anti-poverty strategies, Hounslow has its Vision 2010 document (LBH, 1996), and all Boroughs have economic development plans, and Unitary Development Plans, as required by central government. A range of alternative economic initiatives have been established, for instance the Local Exchange Trading Scheme in Hounslow (led by the Borough), and in two parts of Richmond. Hounslow has also set up Credit Unions as a way of assisting the least financially well-off groups in the Borough. These are clearly important initiatives in their own right, however, none of them are explicitly linked to the LA21 strategies, and there was a recognition that this prevented the adoption of a comprehensive response to the demands of sustainable development, in terms of the need to integrate economic, social, and environmental policies. Bridger *et al.* (1995) found evidence of similar approaches in their survey of London Boroughs. 27.3% of London Boroughs said sustainable development

principles were integrated into policies on tendering, 9.1% on welfare, equal opportunities and poverty strategies, and 45.5% on explicitly 'environmental' services. Thus in London as nationally, very few local authorities have integrated sustainable development principles into their socio-economic strategies. In concluding this section, there are ways in which economic development, social welfare, and environmental protection could in principle be integrated, for example through the SRB programme, but there are significant resource and structural constraints, therefore local authorities are finding it extremely difficult to resolve the tensions within sustainable development.

A central issue in the development of an LA21 strategy, and its implementation, is the raising of awareness in local people of the importance of sustainable development principles. In addition, it is necessary to encourage individuals and groups (in particular those most marginalised from the policy process) to participate by using mechanisms which allow them to have a real say in decisions about their local environment, and this is now discussed.

## **7.8 Public participation in Local Agenda 21**

Agenda 21 states that local government has the appropriate system to develop appropriate participatory mechanisms, and to respond to the concerns of participants. The Local Agenda 21 UK Steering Group (1994) therefore stresses the central role of local government in increasing the level of public participation in local decision-making processes, and that this requires changes to the traditional patterns of local democracy (Tuxworth, 1994). A considerable amount has been written on public participation, specifically relating to the LA21 process and the importance of including currently marginalised groups in this process (eg Pinfield, 1996; Selman, 1996; Young, 1997; Evans 1998; Buckingham-Hatfield & Matthews, 1999). However, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is currently a lack of participation in decision-making processes by the majority of the population, except through regular national elections, and the level of participation in local elections is very low. Buckingham-Hatfield & Riglar (1999) reveal that the type of processes used by local authorities to involve local people in LA21 varies from participatory mechanisms, for example focus groups and local fora (7% of local authorities), to consultation (14%), which is about informing people of changes, but not permitting active participation in decisions about these changes. Feedback to local people on the progress of LA21 is patchy with only 13.3% of local



authorities providing information, and 27.1% providing no feedback at all. Thus, as Evans (1998) suggests, the concepts of empowerment, and political participation have hardly registered in local authorities approaches to sustainable development.

In relation to the discussion in Chapter Two of appropriate ways of approaching LA21, it is clear that in practice there are insufficient mechanisms within local authorities to greatly improve the level of public participation, and this is part of a wider problem of the way in which local government is regarded by local people, in terms of its powers and resources to enact change. Despite these barriers, local authorities are increasingly being required by central government to implement participatory processes across all aspects of policy-making, through Best Value (part of a programme to 'modernise' local government - DETR, 1998), and through specific projects such as the Early Years Development and Childcare Plans, and local transport plans.

In the three West London Boroughs, the requirement of local government to develop participation processes was acknowledged by councillors and by some officers as being of central importance to implementing LA21. The Principal Performance Monitoring Manager in Hounslow (interview, 18/10/94) stressed the importance of LA21 in terms of involving local people in decision-making processes, although in practice this has not been occurring. In Richmond, there are 'village fora' within the Borough, the aim being to get more formal public interest in the delivery of services, and getting people involved in the regular monitoring of service provision, although in practice very few people participate, and these fora are not linked to the LA21 process. If more people are to take an active role in decision-making, they need to be encouraged to do so through local authorities raising awareness of LA21, and of its potentially beneficial impact on a local area.

The majority of people on the LA21 Steering Groups in the West London Boroughs have some expertise in the particular area they are seeking to influence. However, concern at involving people with little or no knowledge of environmental issues was made by the Ecology Officer for Richmond:

... there are so many people at different levels of understanding and interest and if we try and involve the whole population of Richmond at the strategy writing stage, it may mean that we have a strategy that is almost meaningless because it will have to be so simple (interview, 29/2/96).

This statement is problematic in an analysis of the role of local government in devising and implementing an LA21 strategy. First, it ignores the fact that only a minority of people are ever involved in decision-making, as most choose not to be active in this way, and those that do have an influence tend to have some knowledge of environmental issues. Secondly, the statement implies that the input of local people is counterproductive as they are presumed to be ignorant of the issues. However, this approach means that no account is taken of conflicting views. The real concern should be that most people are already excluded from decision-making processes, and therefore the role of local government, through programmes such as LA21, should be about involving all sections of the local population, in particular those who are currently politically and economically marginalised. This approach could increase support for local government, if it is perceived by the local population to be actively seeking their involvement in decision-making (as a localist perspective advocates - see Chapter Four).

In a democratic society, individuals are in some areas *forced* through legislation to make changes to their lifestyle (for example it is illegal to drop litter in public places, to allow dogs to foul the pavements), although they can also be encouraged to consider alternatives, and this could be achieved at local level, through local authorities raising awareness, and educating local people about how to protect and maintain the quality of their environment. Indeed, the Local Agenda 21 UK Steering Group (1994) stresses the importance of local government in raising awareness, and influencing the environmental behaviour of others. This could also lead to greater participation in decision-making processes, if people are aware of the issues, and of their role in protecting the local environment. In the West London Boroughs it was recognised by the Principal Performance Monitoring Manager for Hounslow (interview, 18/10/94), and also by corporate officers in the CPU in Richmond (interviews: 29/9/94, 8/5/96) that their Boroughs had to take a certain level of responsibility in advising and educating people on environmental issues. The Ecology Officer in Hounslow (interview, 23/2/96) and in Richmond (interview, 29/2/96) suggested that a lack of environmental awareness meant that, if local people were to be involved in decisions which affected their local environment, this could prevent the integration of environmental principles. The argument was that if residents perceived there were negative consequences of making such changes, and if they did not understand the importance of retaining and protecting areas such as nature conservation sites, there were potentially negative consequences for the local

environment. An example of this was where Richmond had a deliberate policy of allowing wild flowers to grow in certain areas, this being perceived by some members of the public as creating an untidy area, or allowing a meadow to naturally flood, about which there were complaints, as it caused an inconvenience to people wanting to walk through the meadow. Therefore, the public may have concerns which differ from those of the Ecologists, but these should not be dismissed.

A further point raised by a number of respondents in the Boroughs is that, by having a participatory process, this might raise the expectations of the local population, and this was regarded as being of particular concern to local authorities at a time of severe financial constraints and other forms of local government restructuring. This was the view of the Assistant Director of Leisure Services for Richmond, who commented that:

(O)ne problem of involving the community, and asking what people want is that expectations tend to rise at the same time as the council's budget is contracting, and therefore people's demands cannot be met (interview, 4/10/94).

Yet the central issue is that local authorities, rather than discouraging higher expectations, should be actively seeking to encourage local people to demand better quality services, as this is what local government could provide if they had greater powers, and increased resources. However, it is clear that currently local authorities do not have sufficient funds or powers to address the needs of local people, an issue to which central government needs to respond.

The evidence has shown that there are tensions between the need for a corporate approach to policymaking within local government, in order to implement a Borough-wide LA21 process, and the need for greater participation by local people in making decisions about issues in their local environment which directly affect them and their local community. This could be resolved through local authorities retaining a shared vision at corporate level of the importance of sustainable development, to provide a framework for LA21, and also devolving decision-making to local people, therefore recognising their role as active citizens, rather than passive recipients of services. Furthermore, local authorities have a role to play in raising awareness within the local population, both of environmental issues, and of the influence that people can have on improving the quality of their local environment.

The following discussion evaluates the impact of the contemporary restructuring of local government on the ability to successfully implement a Local Agenda 21 process.

## **7.9 LA21 and consequences of restructuring**

The obstacles to achieving a tangible shift towards sustainable development reflect in part the changing relationship between local and central government, in terms of the loss and accretion of responsibilities, and financing of service provision, but also the changing internal structure of local government and in its relationship with its local population. The situation facing local government is therefore one of tension between the integrating and empowering ideals of LA21 and the disparate, fragmented and at times contradictory policy frameworks of local government (see Patterson & Theobald, 1996; 1999). The dominant characteristics of the new forms of local governance at local level are organisational proliferation, as external agencies become increasingly involved in traditional local government activities; institutional fragmentation; and an erosion of elected public accountability. Strategic decision-making is increasingly delivered through public-private partnerships (themselves problematic, due to different agencies having different agendas, cultures, goals, and varying levels of power in terms of influencing the policy process), and there are few indications that these will provide the long-term, holistic, and democratic frameworks for the types of local decision-making required in planning for sustainable development. UNED-UK (1998) has emphasised that political commitment in government and in society is needed to implement LA21, and suggests this may require legislation to define more clearly the duties of local government (and the recently established Regional Development Agencies) in relation to sustainable development.

Chapter Six explored the implications of CCT for the provision of local environmental services, and considered a number of issues: the negative impact of the CCT process on employment practices, and the consequences for the quality of services; the ability of local authorities to incorporate environmental criteria into contracts; and the detrimental impact of this restructuring on local government's economic and social welfare role. This empirical research has shown how CCT, linked with tight fiscal constraints on capital and recurrent spending, is having negative consequences for the ability of local authorities to deliver traditional environmental services such as refuse

collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance to an acceptable standard, and moreover their capacity to plan long term. As discussed in Chapter Six, representatives of the local authorities felt the CCT process placed them in a weak position in trying to implement LA21, as they are not only having to share service provision with private companies, but furthermore they cannot *demand* that contractors have particular environmental standards, whether the local authority already has a system in place or not. Thus the role of local government has become increasingly one of persuasion rather than actually being able to refuse to work with companies because their policies and practices are regarded as environmentally or socially unsustainable.

As illustrated through the assessment of the implementation of environmental and other policies, there is no formal link between CCT and LA21 in the three Boroughs, although clearly there should be a link between these. The general perception in the three West London Boroughs was that there were inherent conflicts between CCT and sustainable development, but there were differences between them as to how, or whether, this could be resolved. In Wandsworth the lead councillor on CCT perceived conflicts between CCT and sustainable development as being inevitable (interview, 29/4/96), and argued that LA21 should strike a balance between the optimum environmentally provided service, and the cost of service delivery. In Hounslow the Ecology Officer (interview, 23/2/96) explained that the Borough had examined the impact of CCT on the local authority generally, and yet he, having responsibility for LA21, was not involved in any of these considerations which, he suggested, was indicative of a departmentalised approach to policymaking. In Richmond it was suggested (interview, 4/3/96) that the Borough would use LA21 to help try and incorporate sustainable development into areas such as CCT contracts, however this was constrained by the restrictive nature of CCT and the more general lack of powers. Thus there is a lack of integration between the CCT process and LA21 strategies, and there are clear indications that CCT restricts the implementation of policies in line with sustainable development. Agyeman & Evans have suggested that benefits may come from the changes brought about by CCT, as a more holistic and integrative approach to policymaking is:

... beginning to emerge in some authorities as a consequence of the processes of 'market testing' and CCT. These requirements of central government tend to encourage the formation of a more centralised form of local authority administration and decision-making as the work of peripheral departments becomes a potential candidate for some kind of privatisation (1994, p17).

Unfortunately, this may be an over-optimistic view, since CCT has in many cases led to increasing institutional fragmentation as the evidence from the empirical research shows. As discussed in Chapter Six, the client-contractor split has exacerbated this fragmentation, as it can lead to the contractor, whether DSO, or private, arguing that it is the local authority's responsibility to set the specification. A Policy Analyst in Richmond pointed to the tendency for responsibilities to be fragmented between departments, and argued that:

CCT, in my view creates fragmentation. It tends to get departments thinking about their own empires, for instance if the centre can't provide me with the support services I need, I'll set them up in my own department, I'll have direct control over them and I don't need to worry what the centre's going to provide or not (interview, 4/3/96).

One of the assumptions inherent in Agenda 21 and in the guidance from the LGMB (1994b) is that local authorities have the capacity to make decisions in response to the views and concerns of their local population, through adequate consultation and participatory processes. However, CCT leads to weakened accountability mechanisms, and thus a weakened role for elected councillors, partly due to the client-contractor split, and also due to the difficulty of changing the level of service delivery until a contract is renegotiated, which could be as long as seven years. As highlighted in Chapter Six, this is one way in which the powers of local government have been reduced. CCT has led to a model of local government contract management and service delivery that is based on producing decentralised, fragmented decision-making and administration, driven primarily by the need to cut costs. This places serious constraints on the ability of local authorities to implement the environmental, social, and economic aspects of LA21.

## **7.10 Conclusions**

In the West London Boroughs there has been some progress, particularly in Richmond and Wandsworth, towards incorporating environmentally sustainable principles into policy structures, partly due to the LA21 process being led from their corporate policy units. However, in all three Boroughs, the lack of awareness at senior officer level is problematic, exacerbated by decision-making processes being fragmented to departments, and this is restricting the integration of the LA21 process across the Boroughs' policy structures. The evidence shows that an overarching corporate vision within local authorities is required, in order to address environmental and socio-economic aspects of LA21 in a systematic way, yet local authorities seem

unable to make LA21 a corporate vision or strategy which spans all departments, instead leaving it to individual departments to adopt their own approach to incorporating environmentally sustainable principles into policy making, with LA21 often seen as peripheral rather than being central to service provision.

There have been some achievements in environmental aspects such as recycling, energy efficiency, and less so on socio-economic aspects, but generally these remain as separate initiatives, with little funding, and not within the overall remit of a LA21 strategy. In many areas, strategies have been devised, but are still at the policy stage, rather than being put into practice (for example Hounslow's 'Vision 2010' document - LBH, 1996) and therefore it is not possible at this stage to determine what impact these might have on the local population, and the environment. The linkages between social, economic and environmental issues have not been addressed at local level (nor at national level), for several reasons: first, the inherent tensions between environmental protection and economic development, and, *linked to this*, the vagueness of the concept of sustainable development, and particularly the lack of an explicitly *local* dimension of sustainable development. Secondly, there are significant constraints on resources within local government. There has been a lack of support and no extra funding for LA21 from central government, and this absence of funding tends to lead to a short-term approach to policymaking and therefore to less risk-taking, and fewer innovative projects. Thus there has been a lack of progress in implementing LA21 programmes. Thirdly, the implementation of an LA21 strategy requires a shift from traditional consultation processes to improved participatory mechanisms, yet Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth are still involving very few people in their LA21 processes. Fourthly, CCT has led to elected councillors being sidelined, with their accountability and their control over policymaking reduced. This has negative consequences for the capacity of local government to respond to the collective needs of its local population. Clearly LA21 involves different priorities to CCT, the latter resulting in cost cutting in environmental services, a reduction in the terms and conditions of local employees, decreased accountability of councillors to the public, and a fragmentation of decision-making. The next chapter draws a number of specific conclusions from the research, and also considers the wider implications of the findings, in terms of the future role of local government in responding to the sustainable development agenda.

# 8

## Conclusions and Reflections on the Research

### 8.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, there were three central aims of this thesis: first, to examine the role of local government, in addressing environmental issues, and in responding to the demands of sustainable development; secondly, to explore the consequences of contemporary forms of local government restructuring for the ability of local government to fulfil its environmental role; and thirdly to resolve the tensions between the debates on the environment, and on the nature of local government, through a consideration of local government environmental practices. Meeting these aims required the analysis of the existing literature in two distinct areas: the contemporary environmental debate, and theories on the nature and purpose of local government. The discussion of these theoretical perspectives has illustrated the complexity of the issues, and has highlighted gaps within the literature. In particular it is apparent that neither debate has taken sufficient account of the contemporary nature and role of local government, both in providing a range of environmental services, and in responding to the wider requirements of sustainable development. Addressing these issues is the main purpose of this thesis. In these conclusions, the key findings of the literature review are discussed. Then, there is an analysis of the methodological approaches



adopted for the empirical research. The key findings of the empirical research are presented, and then the key themes of the thesis, and future avenues for research are set out. The following discussion sets out the key findings of the literature review chapters.

## **8.2. Key findings of the literature review**

Chapter Two discussed developments in the environmental debate, and noted the tensions between the ecocentric perspectives and technocentric perspectives. The environmental debate has been manifested in policymaking through the concept of sustainable development which has attempted to resolve tensions between economic development and environmental protection. In Chapter Two it was argued that the state is central in providing an adequate response to environmental problems, and that local government as part of this response has historically played an important environmental role. Linked to this, it was noted that Local Agenda 21 (LA21) requires local government to use its position to influence the behaviour of individuals and organisations, and to develop participatory mechanisms to involve more people making decisions about their local environment. However, local government is clearly constrained in its response to sustainable development: first, due to the cross-boundary nature of environmental problems, and the lack of a definition of local sustainable development which could clarify the role of local government; secondly, due to the loss of regulatory powers from local government to unelected agencies such as the Environment Agency; thirdly, due to the downward pressure on local government funding from central government which has resulted in a lack of resources to finance the development and implementation of LA21; and fourthly, institutional fragmentation through a departmentalised approach to policymaking, and the devolving of powers to individual units, including private contractors, through the CCT process. Just as the demands of LA21 require more from local government, its role is being eroded as a result of the form of restructuring taking place (see also Patterson & Theobald, 1996).

As discussed in Chapter Three, a radical restructuring of local government, in terms of its financing, political status and internal organisation, has taken place, with the main changes to the financing of local government, and to its relationship with central government, occurring after the fiscal crisis of the state in the mid-1970s. The Labour Government's response was to seek reductions in public expenditure, and as a result, local government grants were

curbed. This formed the origins of the restructuring of local government, although, with the election of the Thatcher government in 1979, the attack on public sector expenditure became a central aim, with legislation enacted to directly impact on the powers and resources of local government. A number of areas of central government policy have had an impact on the powers of local government; first, in terms of the promotion of competition in the production and delivery of local authority services, and the associated pressure to cut the cost of service provision; secondly, and related to this, the desire to reduce the power of trade unions as they were perceived by the Government as resisting its proposed changes, and as wielding too much power; thirdly, a substantial restructuring of consumption patterns intended to lead to increased diversity and 'choice', implied in a variety of forms of service provision; and fourthly, new forms of political management which have negative implications for local democracy and for the autonomy of local councillors. The introduction of CCT into a range of local authority services from 1980 onwards has resulted in a reduction of its functions, powers, and democratic accountability, and therefore in the capacity of local government to fulfil its environmental role.

In Chapter Four, three radically different perspectives on local government: pluralist, New Right, and Marxist are evaluated, in order to explain the current nature of local government in Britain. A New Right perspective is useful in explaining the justification given for the restructuring of local government during the 1980s and 1990s, but it is limited as a theoretical framework in which to consider the role of local government. A localist approach (from within a neo-pluralist perspective) is particularly resonant with the assumptions underpinning Agenda 21, of the ability of local government to adopt participatory mechanisms to involve local people in decision-making, and to respond to demands or needs which may arise through such a process. In practice, a localist approach could result in further fragmentation of policymaking as power is decentralised. An approach is therefore needed which places emphasis on involving local people in decisions on specific issues which impact on their local environment, but with local government retaining a corporate vision and developing overarching strategies on the environment, economic development, and social welfare, delivered through a LA21 process. The localist perspective is limited for a further reason, in that it does not seek to account for the role of local government in relation to the central state, nor does it provide an explanation for the political nature of local government (an omission which neo-Marxist perspectives address).

The regulationist perspective explains local government restructuring as part of the shift away from the Keynesian Welfare State from the mid-1970s onwards, due to the economic crisis of this period, and the subsequent change in government approach towards the role of the public sector (the empirical research highlights how cuts to local government expenditure have continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s). The restructuring thesis provides an empirically-based explanation of the changes in the nature of local government service provision during the 1980s and early 1990s. It locates this in wider changes to public service provision in terms of a shift towards contracting-out, flexible forms of work, and the intensification of working practices, and thus is of particular importance as a framework in which to consider the impact of CCT. Gandy (1992; 1996) and Gibbs (1996) have attempted to consider the implications of local government restructuring for local environmental policies, using a regulationist perspective to conceptualise the emergence of the sustainable development concept, and the simultaneous economic restructuring in Britain. Their focus is at a conceptual and policymaking level, and provides a useful basis for this research which examines environmental *practices* in specific localities, focusing on services subject to CCT.

### **8.3 Reflections on the methodological approaches adopted**

In order to provide a more useful analysis of the environmental role of local government which could inform policymaking, empirical research was required which focused on local environmental practices, and which took into account the pace and extent of the social, economic, and environmental changes that local authorities are having to cope with. This necessitated a particular methodological framework, which permitted the consideration of the experiences of individuals, situated within wider institutional structure of local government, on the nature of CCT, and on the development of LA21 strategies. In order to address the research aims, a methodological context was required which would also draw out the differences between individual responses, and between localities. Therefore a research methodology underpinned by both critical realism and feminism, was adopted. A realist perspective is underpinned by a belief that real objects or structures exist to be studied, but that the interpretations of these objects are subjective, guided by evolving theory and also grounded in empirical data.. The thesis also draws on two central concepts from feminist approaches to social research - the subjectivity of the researcher, and positionality. Thus it emphasises the importance of a researcher acknowledging her own position in conducting research, and of

building this into the analysis of the findings. A feminist approach has resonance with the basis of realist methodology, as both emphasise the potentially transitory nature of theories, and recognise the influence of the researcher on the process of developing knowledge, of particular relevance when considering changes to policy and practice in an institution such as local government, where its role and purpose is constantly evolving.

Within this framework, it was appropriate to conduct an intensive study of a small number of local authorities, in order to identify the causal links between the findings, rather than engage in a purely descriptive study. However, extensive data from other sources was used to support the in-depth case study material. A series of semi-structured interviews was undertaken to ascertain the views and experiences of a range of individuals within and linked to the local authorities. The use of pilot case studies as a way of testing the viability of the research, and of the subjects for research - the three West London Boroughs, is based on a realist conceptualisation of theory as being an evolving and changing process, to be refined through the collection of data, and then through the further development of ideas.

Having conducted the research, and analysed the findings, there are specific areas where, on reflection, the approach could have been slightly different, and primarily are in relation to the collection of data. It would have been helpful to have interviewed more councillors, to provide a greater depth of opinion on the restructuring of local government, and on the integration of LA21 into policymaking. However, access at the time of interviews was difficult in some cases, as noted in Chapter Five. In retrospect, it would have been appropriate to interview respondents together, as requested by one particular councillor at Wandsworth. This would have better reflected a grounded theory approach, in which flexibility in the collection of data is important (and indeed, later in the research this was done, with three interviews being held with pairs of respondents). Finally, a greater focus on the economic and social aspects of LA21 in the interviews, would have been useful, to bring out the complexities of the sustainable development agenda at local level, and the significant variations in responses, according to whether the respondent was a local authority officer, councillor, trade union officer, or private contractor. Given these thoughts, however, the empirical research produced a rich source of data, which are considered next.

## **8.4 Key findings of the empirical research**

The central findings of the first empirical chapter (Chapter Six), which explores the impact of different forms of restructuring, and specifically CCT, on the delivery of three traditional environmental services, are as follows:

- 1) The CCT process, in conjunction with the pressure on local authorities to cut costs, has had a detrimental impact on the quality of the local environment, because of the lowering of prices for contracts to deliver the grounds maintenance, street cleansing, and refuse collection services.
- 2) In many cases contract specifications are being reduced by local authorities, in order to reduce the cost of service provision.
- 3) Savings have been made nationally, and within the West London Boroughs, through the process of CCT, yet these have in many instances been at the expense of the workforce, due to job losses, worsened employment terms and conditions, and the intensification of work. Even where contracts have remained in-house, with the DSO adhering to nationally determined pay and conditions, there are areas where local conditions of service have been altered, such as bonuses, and overtime. Where contracts have been transferred to the private sector, terms and conditions have generally worsened, and TUPE has not afforded adequate protection from this.
- 4) There are considerable costs associated with CCT, both in terms of the high cost of the tendering process, which local authorities have to incur; and the costs of monitoring services due to the client-contractor split, and these costs have reduced the real value of the reported savings due to CCT.
- 5) One of the major detrimental impacts of CCT has been on local government employees. The loss of employment in all three services studied is considerable, and the national figures reflect the experiences in the three West London Boroughs. This loss of local employment has a negative impact on the ability of local authorities to address the demands of sustainable development.
- 6) There has been a recomposition of the workforce, with a trend, particularly in refuse collection and grounds maintenance, towards younger employees, often with little specific training, or appropriate qualifications. This is of particular concern in the grounds maintenance service, which often has

specifications requiring experience of horticultural practices, and environmental sensitivity in the management of parks and open spaces. The recomposition has involved a loss of older, often more experienced staff, with a knowledge of the local area, of key importance to the delivery of these environmental services. There has also been a rise in the number of casual, or seasonal staff, at the expense of the permanent workforce. This has exacerbated the problem of a lack of experienced, committed staff, and have sometimes resulted in a lower standard of work being performed.

7) The main area of employment change has been in working practices. In most cases, DSOs have raised the level of productivity required of the workforce, in order to submit a competitive bid, and thus have a chance of winning contracts against the private sector. In both DSO and privately-run contracts, there had been an intensification of the work in order to meet the contract specification but with fewer staff. This has clearly had negative consequences for the manual employees, with lower morale, an increase in long-term sickness, and a lack of security of employment. There has been a resultant detrimental impact on the local environment, with corners being cut in order to meet specifications.

8) There are a range of restrictions on local authorities in relation to the inclusion of environmental criteria in CCT contracts, and in requesting an appropriate environmental stance from contractors. This is mainly due to local authorities having to abide by rules which stipulate that they must not act in an 'anti-competitive' manner, or take 'non-commercial' issues into account. These, and European Union regulations restrict local authorities in the information they can require on a company's environmental policies. There are also short-term cost implications of incorporating environmental or sustainable development criteria into contracts (although the costs of this may reduce in the medium or long-term). Thus local authorities have in some cases not included methods of working which are less environmentally polluting, except in order to meet specific legislation. The main barrier is the perceived cost of environmentally sound practices, when pressure is on local authorities to accept the lowest bid. Also problematic is the shift towards output contracts, which specify that certain objectives are achieved, but not the methods to be used, and this has in some cases involved contractors using the cheapest, but least environmentally sustainable method, in order to meet specifications.

9) Local authorities are limited in their scope for strategic planning in contracts subject to CCT, due to the nature of the process. This is due to the lack of flexibility in contracts, resulting from the need to have tightly drawn specifications which minimise the risk of contractor's cutting corners in providing the service; and also due to the nature of the client-contractor split.

10) There has been a move towards function-based, lower skilled work whereby employees are less able to use their initiative, in delivering services. This has occurred in private companies, but also when services are retained in-house, since under contract conditions, a DSO would have to charge for any work outside of the specification. These changes have been shown to lead to a generally less innovative, and less flexible approach to working, with consequent impacts on the local environment.

11) Contracts require monitoring, in order to ensure that specifications are being adequately met, however this is a costly aspect of CCT, and increasingly local authorities are moving away from inspectors specifically trained to monitor one area of service provision, to a generic approach to monitoring, which requires less expertise. This, in conjunction with a shift to self-monitoring by the contractor, and an increasing reliance on non-experts such as the local population, through resident surveys, has had a detrimental impact on the standard of environmental practices, as it relies either on a contractor to be honest about the level of the work being carried out, or only involves the local authority responding to complaints from the public. This latter approach is based on an assumption that people know the specification, and therefore are aware of whether it is being met, yet this is generally not the case.

12) An area of concern, both for the quality of environmental services, and for the wider role and purpose of local government, is the negative consequences of CCT for the control of service provision by councillors. Accountability mechanisms have been weakened by the client-contractor split, with councillors having less opportunity to directly influence the provision of services. This is less of an issue when the service is retained by the DSO, however, even in this situation, the devolving of budgets to individual business units means that the link between service providers and councillors still becomes less direct.

13) The less tangible effect of CCT is the impact on local government in terms of meeting its social responsibilities. There has been a reduction in local authorities' capacity to act on behalf of the local community. This is evident in the change from local authorities employing a certain proportion of disabled employees, or those with learning difficulties in protected jobs, mainly in the areas of street cleansing and grounds maintenance, to a situation where most of these jobs have disappeared, due to the pressures on local authorities to cut costs, increase productivity, and have multi-skilled staff. A further example of the impact on the wider social role of local authorities is in the parks service, where CCT, in conjunction with cuts in budgets, has been responsible for the closure of some parks, the degradation of others, and the loss of permanent park teams. The consequences have not only been for the local environment, but also on the local population who use parks for social, leisure, and health reasons.

The main findings of Chapter Seven are as follows:

1) In the West London Boroughs there has been some progress, particularly in Richmond and Wandsworth, towards incorporating environmental considerations into corporate policy structures. However, in all three Boroughs, the lack of awareness at senior officer level is problematic, exacerbated by decision-making processes being fragmented through devolution of powers to departments, and to business units. This is restricting the integration of the LA21 process throughout the local authority. In many cases, local authorities seem reluctant to make sustainable development a corporate issue, preferring individual departments to adopt their own approach to incorporating environmental policies and sustainable development principles into policy making, with LA21 often seen as an add-on rather than central to local government policy decisions.

2) Local authorities are encountering significant barriers to the delivery of high quality environmental services, and moreover, they do not possess the capacity to integrate environmental protection with economic development strategies. The tension between inward investment and jobs, and environmental protection remains a difficult issue, due to structural and resource constraints, and due to often conflicting agendas operating in different departments.

3) LA21 is meant to involve local people in decision-making processes, and this requires a shift from traditional consultation processes to improved



participatory mechanisms. However, Hounslow, Richmond, and Wandsworth are still involving very few people in their LA21 processes, and are not sufficiently devolving decision-making powers to local people. Yet it is crucial that more people are drawn into the process of LA21 and other policy processes, in order to extend the awareness of the importance of responding to environmental problems.

4) There has been a lack of support from central government, and no extra resources for implementing a LA21 process, and the lack of funding is tending to lead to less risk-taking, a short-term approach to policymaking, and to slow progress being made in policy implementation. The CCT process, in conjunction with yearly budget reductions, has also hindered the implementation of LA21.

Having set out the key findings of the empirical chapters, conclusions are now drawn on the contribution of the thesis to debates on local government's environmental role and on its response to the sustainable development agenda.

## **8.5 Contribution of empirical findings to theoretical debates**

The empirical findings contribute to an understanding of local government's environmental role in several ways. First, the thesis has shown that a weak form of sustainable development forms the basis for the British Government's approach to the environment, and this does not seek to challenge the assumption of continuing economic growth within a capitalist system. In the local services studied, the protection or enhancement of the local environment is not placed at the centre of service provision. However, there is clearly a need for increased regulatory powers for local government, both in terms of addressing environmental degradation, and in enhancing its locality. Such an approach would represent a more appropriate state response to the environmental problems created by the failures of advanced capitalism, as identified by a regulationist perspective.

A second key contribution emerging from the empirical research is an understanding of the tension between the empowering and integrating ideals of LA21, and the fragmented and contradictory policy frameworks of contemporary local government. The mechanisms of CCT are constraining local government in its attempts to respond to the demands of sustainable development, due to the requirement on local authorities to compete with the

private sector for the delivery of public services. This acts against the implementation of environmentally sound practices and the retention of local knowledge and expertise. These tensions between CCT and LA21 reflect broader conceptual and policy conflicts, in that capitalist economic development and environmental sustainability are inherently incompatible. The extension of market mechanisms to the delivery of environmental services only exacerbates the environmental crisis, preventing the resolution of environmental degradation at local level. Moreover, there has been a lack of political commitment by national government to adopt a stronger form of sustainable development (ecological modernisation), and to provide a framework in which the role and powers of local government in responding to sustainable development are clearly defined. Thus the findings contribute to a regulationist perspective, since they identify a broader problem of how the state addresses environmental problems.

Thirdly, the empirical research reinforces the regulationist argument relating to the impact of economic crises on local government, as part of the state. The restructuring of local government from the late 1970s has been a response by central government to the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. In relation to this, the findings have shown that the contemporary development of local environmental policy has been shaped by the economic and political inability of local government to play a major role in the implementation of policy, due to the shift from a Keynesian Welfare State to a neo-Fordist framework. This weakening in its role is exacerbated by internal fragmentation and compartmentalisation of decision-making, in particular through the devolving of power to business units, which acts against a corporate approach to sustainable development. This particular form of local government, as part of a wider state response to environmental degradation, is inadequate as it is constrained financially, and structurally.

Fourthly, the empirical findings have highlighted the importance of recognising the complexities and variations in approaches to sustainable development at the local level. This is indicated in the position occupied by those individuals taking part in interviews; the political stance of local authorities, and (not always directly emanating from this stance) the ways in which policies are interpreted by local authorities; the location and type of local authority; and the varying levels of knowledge and understanding of LA21. The findings reinforce the regulationist argument as they emphasise the need to consider the different responses of local authorities, due to uneven

development, local needs, and the impact of restructuring on local government's role as service provider.

A final issue emerging from the findings has been a questioning of the appropriate scale at which to deal with the complexities of sustainable development, due to the local, national, and global nature, and impacts of, environmental degradation. The local level is clearly central to delivering sustainable development, but there is currently a lack of clarification of the concept of local sustainable development, and of local government's role within this. This issue informs the regulationist perspective, as it focuses on the tensions between the adoption of policies aimed at achieving sustainable development and the implementation of these, and the current structure and powers of local government.

The consideration of the contribution of the empirical research to theory necessitates a reflection on the theoretical perspectives themselves, and this is discussed below.

#### *8.5.1 Reflections on the theoretical stance underpinning the thesis*

The thesis has succeeded in bringing together two currently disparate theoretical areas of local environmental policy and practice, and local government restructuring, in order to explore the complexities and tensions involved in the delivery of high quality local environmental services. In adopting a regulationist perspective, which situates the role of local government as part of a wider state response to environmental crises, the thesis has shown how environmental policies interact with, and are influenced by, broader changes in the economy and in political processes. The outcomes at the local level are the result of tensions within local authorities, and between central and local government. A regulationist framework has therefore helped to explain the subsequent impact on local government, in terms of financial constraints, a loss of powers, and a diminishing role in many areas of service provision.

The restructuring thesis has been particularly useful, as an empirically-based approach which draws upon a regulationist perspective, in contributing to an analysis of the shift in local service provision through contracting-out. This has occurred both in the production and delivery of key local authority services. As the empirical findings highlight, the impacts of such a shift have been framed in terms of changes to working practices, in particular more 'flexible' modes of working. These have had negative consequences for the employment

conditions of manual workers in the services studied, and for the quality of the local environment. Thus from a regulationist approach, a neo-Fordist framework involves a changing role for local government. This was explicit in the New Right attempt to restructure local government, in order to make its purpose compatible with flexible economic structures, a contracted state welfare system, and the 'enterprise culture'. Local government has traditionally been a provider of environmental and welfare services, within a relatively consensual political system. However with the 'crisis' of Fordism, there has been increased conflict between the institutions of local and central government in responding to environmental problems, at a time when the former's enhanced environmental role requires additional staff, resources, and powers.

As discussed in Chapter Two, sustainable development has been developed as an attempt to reconcile the fundamental tensions between continuing economic growth within a global capitalist economy, and the recognition on an international scale of the need to address environmental problems. However, these conflicts are not resolved at international level, and this is problematic for local government environmental policymaking. In a wider sense, a regulationist approach has been important in explaining how the restructuring of local government has undermined its capacity to both deal with environmental degradation, and to enhance the local environment. The approach has permitted an exploration of the ways in which the link between environmental sustainability and the potential for economic development is a dynamic relationship as opposed to a static one, since the nature of local government, and of environmental crises is constantly evolving.

Clearly there are important links between the theoretical stance adopted and the philosophical approach underpinning the research. A regulationist perspective, as with a realist approach to social research, rejects the findings of positivist 'value-free' ahistorical analysis, and also refutes a purely individualistic interpretation of social change. Both stress the continually evolving nature of societal structures, and of human understanding of these. Consequently the emphasis of the research was a consideration of the contemporary political, economic, and social processes in delivering environmental services. The key findings of the empirical research therefore have contributed to the process of theory generation as advocated in a realist conceptualisation of the nature of knowledge. A realist approach to the research permitted a methodology in which in-depth interviews, combined with

secondary evidence, provided a rich source of data, which has contributed to theories on local government and its environmental role. This involved the study of the structures of local government, and of causal changes within individual local authorities. In addition it helped to explain the influence of individuals in determining the changes that occur within local authorities.

Having reflected on the contribution of the empirical findings to theory, and on the theoretical and philosophical position adopted, there is now a discussion of the key themes emerging from the research.

## **8.6 Key themes of the research**

A significant issue arising from the analysis of the literature on the environment, and on local government, is that the role of local government needs to be evaluated in terms of its capacity to respond to the sustainable development agenda. Thus the present system of local government in Britain needs to be expanded from one of weak regulation to an empowered local government with the resources to develop and integrate its environmental, economic, and social responsibilities. The revenue generation options of local government are regulated by national policies, however central government continues to restrict revenue and capital spending at the local level. Local governments have been made responsible for services or functions through legislation, but central government has neglected to transfer the revenue necessary for carrying out environmental responsibilities effectively.

Local government needs to be able to adopt a more pro-active approach to resolving environmental problems, but to achieve this it needs to operate within a national and global framework, rather than being expected to respond alone to environmental crises, without the powers or resources necessary. A related issue is the lack of integration of policies between the national and local level, in contradiction to the demands of sustainable development. Currently policy is fragmented, inherited through a long history of incremental, reactive approach to the environment, and this approach to policymaking is exacerbated by the fragmentation resulting from the CCT process.

There is a need for genuine commitment from national government towards sustainable development and LA21, which could be achieved first, by giving local authorities a statutory responsibility for the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities; secondly, through raising the profile of sustainable development, particularly through providing resources to inform and educate people at local level about sustainable development;

thirdly, through providing adequate funding for local government; and fourthly, through providing support and resources for the integration of sustainable development strategies at regional and national level.

The increasing emphasis on competing for the provision of services through CCT has driven down the wages of manual employees, it has worsened terms and conditions, and has also constrained local government from acting to protect its own workforce. This has particularly severe consequences for those employees who are unable to achieve the high levels of productivity required in the competitive environment of CCT. Thus there are clear tensions between the local authority role in developing strategies for sustainable development which are meant to improve the quality of life for all local people, and the harmful effects of the CCT process both on the local environment, and on the workforce.

Local government needs to be able to play a greater political, educational and empowering role without the constraints imposed through legislative measures such as CCT. Local authorities should be given a clear statutory basis for their role and function within government, and be given a power of 'general competence', to overcome the *ultra vires* restrictions, and this would emphasise the importance of local government's responsibility for and to its local population. This is particularly important in the context of LA21, as the process is aimed at establishing stronger links between local people and local government through greater participation of local people in decisions relating to environmental protection. LA21 requires local government to encourage all groups, in particular those currently most marginalised in decision-making processes, to actively participate in policymaking. This leads to a consideration of the possibilities for future study.

## **8.7 Future research avenues**

There are two areas in which it would be particularly useful to develop further research into LA21 and local government restructuring. First, there is scope for ongoing research on the implementation of LA21 in practice, as opposed to focusing on the development of policies, since in many local authorities it is still unclear *how* policies on the environment, economic development, and social welfare, are to be resolved on the ground. A second area for future research is the impact of the 'modernisation' agenda, currently being introduced by the Labour Government, on local authorities. Under this new

system, CCT is gradually being replaced by a system known as 'Best Value'. There will be a duty on local authorities to obtain "... best value in the delivery of local services linked with a rigorous regime of performance indicators and efficiency measures" (DETR, 1998b, p2), and services will need to be delivered by the most "... economic and efficient means available" (1998b, p1). 'Best Value' will therefore operate far more widely than CCT, as it applies to all the services a local authority provides, whether directly or indirectly, thus controls on local government will be strengthened further. The Government stresses that it will act wherever local authorities fail to remedy clear performance failure in any areas of their responsibility, and it appears therefore that 'Best Value' may be more restrictive than the CCT system, since it continues to place great emphasis on competition and comparison with the private sector. Meanwhile, local authority budgets continue to be cut annually, and therefore local authorities are still pressurised to accept low cost bids for service provision.

Although 'Best Value' is too recent a development to have been the focus for the empirical research, it is useful to consider its implications for LA21. The Government intimates that sustainable development might be considered if this is the expressed wish of the local community or if the local authority has sustainable development as one of its corporate objectives, in which case it should be incorporated into the corporate view of the local authority. These, however, are extremely vague statements, and it is not clear how links will be made between 'Best Value' and LA21. The DETR (1998b) states that initiatives such as 'Best Value' will provide opportunities to support and deliver the objectives of LA21, and that 'Best Value' offers the opportunity to effectively plan, manage and monitor all aspects of a local authority's sustainable development performance, one approach being to review each service against the LA21 objectives and the views expressed in LA21 community consultations. Thus 'Best Value' may be intended to encourage local authorities to integrate sustainable development across all aspects of policymaking, but it is not clear how they can achieve this, first, because CCT will continue for a number of years, until existing contracts expire, but also because 'Best Value' itself relies on competition both for service provision, and between local authorities for funding from central government.

The White Paper on modernising local government argues for a "... fundamental shift of culture throughout local government, so that councils become outward looking and responsive" (DETR, 1998 p1), and proposes a

new framework which will allow local authorities to adopt new political structures, including elected mayors, citizens' fora, and referenda. Thus the White Paper states:

... local democracy will be improved, giving councils opportunities to try out innovative arrangements for local elections and to consult their local people on key issues through referenda (DETR, 1998, p2).

The Paper states that the more a local authority shows its capacity for effective leadership, the greater the range of powers that will become available to it to promote the well-being of its area. However, no mechanisms are proposed in order to achieve this, or to measure the 'capacity' of local government. There are clearly wider issues for investigation here - in terms of the nature of local government within this context of 'Best Value', and the ability of local authorities to respond to the sustainable development agenda. The Government's White Paper on sustainable development 'A better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development for the UK' (DETR, 1999) indicates a number of ways in which the Government regards local authorities as being involved in sustainable development. According to the White Paper, the Government is developing a set of indicators which will be a way of measuring progress towards sustainable development, and linked to these will be a set of indicators which local authorities could use. The White Paper states that partnership between regional and local tiers is essential, and that guidance encourages Regional Development Agencies to take account of LA21 strategies in its own sustainable development strategies. Thus the Government rhetoric is that it recognises the need to develop strategies at all levels of government and to forge links between these, although it is not clear about the mechanisms for achieving this. In terms of local government, the Government will give local authorities a duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, and the White Paper suggests that the 'Best Value' system will stimulate new ways for local authorities to carry out their functions in line with the national sustainable development strategy objectives. Local authorities, however, remain in a position where they are restricted in their ability to respond to these demands, due to a lack of powers, and resources, and it is unclear how the 'Best Value' system, which emphasises competition and market testing, will enhance a local authority's attempts to integrate sustainable development principles into policymaking. Thus there is considerable scope for research into the tensions between the national sustainable strategy, and its requirements of local government, and the



introduction of 'Best Value' into local government. The chapter now provides some final, broad conclusions on the research.

## **8.8 Conclusions**

The past ten years have seen sustainable development being established as the leading global discourse of environmental concern. The form of sustainable development currently represented by the British Government's response to Agenda 21 is weak, and economic growth remains the basis of government policies in Britain, with no resolution of this with the need for environmental protection. Yet the complexity of global environmental management, sustainable development and other related challenges demands a broad based, integrative and strategic response from central and local government.

The restructuring of local government, through CCT and related changes, has reduced its capacity to deliver high quality environmental services. Furthermore, the CCT process, in conjunction with budget cuts, has had a detrimental impact on the workforce, as it experiences a deterioration in terms and conditions of employment, greater insecurity and low morale, and a lowering of the level of skills required. In addition, local authorities are no longer able to guarantee employment to those most marginalised in the labour market. Thus, the empirical research has highlighted the tensions between the restrictions on local government which prevent it from acting in the interests of the local environment and local population, and the principles enshrined in the concept of sustainable development.

LA21 is being implemented by underfunded and structurally constrained local authorities in the absence of an adequate national or regional framework to co-ordinate the work being carried out at local level. There needs to be greater decentralisation of powers to local authorities, which also require a 'power of general competence' to enable them to make decisions about their local area. Further devolution of decision-making to local people on issues specific to their local environment is necessary, through local authorities developing appropriate participatory mechanisms. Local authorities also need to have the resources and mechanisms to educate and inform local people on the importance of sustainable development. There needs to be a clear definition of local sustainable development which provides a framework in which to develop a corporate approach to LA21, but this approach needs to be supported by an overarching regional and national strategy.

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## **Appendix A**

### **People interviewed for the pilot research, and date of interview**

#### **London Borough of Harrow**

Peter Brown, Principal Client Officer (grounds maintenance) (26/9/94)

Roger Meakin, Area Manager for Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing  
(20/10/94)

#### **London Borough of Hounslow**

Andrew Green, Corporate Policy Officer (3/10/94)

Dave Adams, Direct Services Manager, Commercial Division (19/10/94)

Nick Pratt, Principal Performance Monitoring Manager (18/10/94)

Sig Lofnes, Contracts Manager (refuse and street cleansing) (18/10/94)

Peter Green, Principal Environmental Inspector (refuse/street cleansing)  
(14/10/94)

#### **Richmond**

David Neaves, Head of Operations (environmental services) (27/10/94)

John Kent, Head of Client Services (14/10/94)

Edward Locke, Assistant Director of Leisure Services (24/10/94)

Paul Turrell, Policy Analyst (29/9/94)

## Appendix B

### People interviewed for the main body of research, and date of interview

#### Hounslow

Stephen McAndrews, Ecologist and Strategic Policy Officer - Local Agenda 21 (23/2/96)

Cllr Crawshaw, Lead Member, CCT panel (2/2/96)

Iain Raymond, Branch Secretary for Unison (3/4/96)

Kathy Sugrue, Contract Manager, Sita (street cleansing) (13/4/96)

Keith Balmer, Head of Contract and Performance Monitoring Unit (14/3/96)

Peter Denman, full time District Officer, Transport and General Workers Union (covers Hounslow and Richmond) (4/4/96)

Phil Camp, Contract Manager, Glendales (grounds maintenance) (1/5/96)

#### Richmond

Terry Reeves, Area Supervisor (refuse and street cleansing) (28/2/96)

Malcolm Sharpe, Head of Environmental Services (12/3/96)

John Bennett, Corporate Services Manager (8/5/96)

Paul Turrell, Policy Analyst (29/9/94)

Paul Turrell, Policy Analyst (4/3/96)

John Bennett, Corporate Services Manager (8/5/96)

Eric Flint, Contracts and Services Manager, (grounds maintenance) (20/2/96)

Tom Brown, Operations Manager (grounds maintenance) (20/2/96)

Eve Risbridger, Nature and Conservation Ecology Officer (29/2/96)

Cllr Sue Jones, Chair of Client Services Sub-Committee (23/2/96)

Cllr Brian Miller, Chair of Contract Services Sub-Committee (27/3/96)

Steve Gladman, Contract Manager, ServiceTeam (grounds maintenance)  
(18/4/96)

#### Wandsworth

Simon Cooper-Grundy, Assistant Chief Parks Officer (12/2/96)

Peter Brennan, Assistant Director, Leisure Amenities Services (12/2/96)

Nicola Slawski, Senior Policy Analyst (LA21) (21/3/96)

Roger Appleton, Head of Policy Unit (21/3/96)

Philip Ward, Head of Corporate Services (15/4/96)

Cllr R Govindia, Chair of Technical Services Committee (29/4/96)

Philip Bradley, Staff-side secretary, Unison/GMB (11/4/96)

Toby Jermyn, Contract Manager, Glendales (grounds maintenance) (16/4/96)

Jack Linton, Contract Manager, Onyx (street cleansing) (22/4/96)

Tony Blyth, Senior Supervisor, Onyx (street cleansing) (22/4/96)

Martin Smith, Secretary Battersea and Wandsworth Trade Union Council  
(10/4/96)

## **Appendix C**

### **General structure for interviews on Compulsory Competitive Tendering, employment, and the environment**

**For interviews with councillors, and officers/DSO managers.**

#### **1) Background**

##### **For Officers**

- a) What is your job title, and can you describe your responsibilities?
- b) Has your job altered in any way in line with changes in the local authority's policies, or internal structure?

##### **For Chairs of Committees**

- a) What areas of policy does the committee cover?
- b) How long have you been Chair of the Committee?

#### **2) Political Context**

- a) Does the local authority have a corporate strategy/policy on contracting-out?
- b) What is the local authority's current policy on Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT)?
- c) What are the reasons for adopting this policy?
- d) Has the authority's stance on CCT changed in any way since contracting-out was introduced?
- e) Do you feel that in principle services should be contracted-out, or kept in-house? Why?

#### **3) Management Structure**

- a) What is the management structure of your division/department?
- b) Have there been any changes to the structure to accommodate the requirements of CCT?
- c) If changes have occurred, have these enabled the DSO to compete more effectively and more efficiently?
- d) Have there been any changes to management techniques or training?

#### **4) The CCT process**

##### **i) Tendering process**

- a) At what stage are you in the tendering process for the services of grounds maintenance/street cleansing/refuse collection? Have contracts been retendered?
- b) What has been the level of interest by private companies at different stages of the process?
- c) What type of companies have shown an interest?
- d) Has the level of interest, or the types of companies interested, changed in the most recent process of retendering? (if this has occurred)
- e) What do you think are the reasons for particular companies bidding for contracts?
- f) Do you think that private companies operate cartels? If so, what are the implications of this?
- g) Are you aware of companies entering loss-leader bids?
- h) What criteria has the local authority used in accepting or rejecting bids?
- i) Has the local authority been accused of anti-competitive behaviour, either in the assessment of bids, or in contract specifications?

##### **ii) Awarding of contracts, and issues of price and quality**

- a) Who has won the contracts?
- b) What is the length of the contracts?
- c) Have any contracts been retendered? If so, for what reasons?
- d) Has the local authority 'packaged' the contracts in any specific way? If so, why?
- e) How is the level of service determined each time a contract is retendered?
- f) Is the contract price reduced each time a contract is relet? What is the scope for savings?
- g) Do you think that the local authority is operating on a level playing field with private contractors, in terms of bidding for contracts, and the requirements that DSOs have to fulfill?
- h) How flexible are the guidelines for CCT, in terms of the awarding of contracts?
- i) Are contracts awarded on price, quality, a combination of these, or other criteria?
- j) Is there a trade-off between price and quality?
- k) How is quality measured?

- l) Has your department, and the local authority as a whole, made savings through the process of CCT?
- m) Have the costs of administration and monitoring increased?
- n) Has the client side or the DSO invested in new technology, or new capital?

### **iii) Client/contractor split**

- a) What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of having a split between the client and contractor?
- b) Is there a different relationship between the client and DSO, and the client and private contractor?

### **iv) Employment changes**

- a) Have there been any changes made within the DSO in order to win contracts? Why were these changes (if any) made?
- b) Have any changes to employment terms and conditions occurred after the DSO winning a contract? What are these changes (if any), and why did they happen?
- c) Have working practices changed, for instance has there been an intensification of work, increased casualisation?
- d) Has the composition of the workforce altered due to the CCT process?
- e) Is the workforce made up of local people, eg those who worked for the DSO? Do you think that knowledge of the local area is important?
- f) What types of training are available for employees, and has the training changed due to CCT? (eg apprenticeship schemes, short courses, NVQs)
- g) Does the local authority take into account private sector pay rates in the local area when deciding pay rates for the in-house workforce?
- h) Does the local authority adhere to a national pay structure, or is it involved in local pay bargaining?
- i) What do you think has been the impact of TUPE on employment terms and conditions? Do you expect this to change?
- j) What has been the impact of the changes in employment terms and conditions, and working practices, on the workforce, and on the quality of the service provided?
- k) Have managers' working practices, and conditions of employment changed?

### **v) Trade Unions**



- a) Which trade union(s) represent(s) the workforce for the service of grounds maintenance/refuse collection/street cleansing?
- b) What role do trade unions play in decisions relating to contracts, and workforce changes?
- c) How would you describe the relationship between the trade unions and the local authority?
- d) Do(es) the trade union(s) take account of the potential environmental impacts of changes in working practices and terms and conditions?
- e) Are the trade unions aware of Local Agenda 21 and sustainable development, and the implications of this for the environmental services being considered? (i.e. grounds maintenance, refuse collection, street cleansing)

## **5) Environmental issues, Local Agenda 21, and CCT**

### **i) Environmental Strategies**

- a) Does the local authority have a corporate strategy for the environment?  
If so, what is the title of this document? Do you have a copy that I could obtain?
- b) Is the strategy updated regularly? How recent is the current strategy?
- c) Does the strategy set out a long-term vision for the borough?
- d) Does the local authority have a Local Agenda 21 strategy? If so, does this cover *all* services that the local authority provides? (i.e. not simply the traditional 'environmental' services)
- e) Has the environmental *strategy for the borough changed in the light of* Local Agenda 21?
- f) Does the Local Agenda 21 strategy encompass changes in internal structures?
- g) Are there potential conflicts between the structure of the local authority and the principles of sustainable development?
- h) Is the practice of contracting-out, both voluntarily, and through CCT, considered in the strategy?
- i) Do you think the process of sustainable development applies to *all* areas and services within the local authority's remit?
- j) Do you believe that local purchasing is an important part of achieving a more sustainable way of operating?
- k) How important is the support of individual officers and councillors in achieving a Local Agenda 21 process in your borough?

- l) How important is public awareness and understanding of Local Agenda 21, to achieving sustainable development in the borough?
- m) Has a post been specifically created for Local Agenda 21, or have the responsibilities for Local Agenda 21 been incorporated within an existing post?

**ii) Environmental Strategies and CCT**

- a) Does the borough's strategy on the environment make any reference to specifying environmental criteria in contract specifications?
- b) Do you consider that there are conflicts between the CCT process and sustainable development?
- c) Are private contractors required to show an awareness and understanding of the borough's environmental strategy, and of how this links in with CCT?
- d) Do you think that CCT prevents the local authority from achieving its objectives on maintaining and improving the local environment?

**iii) Environmental Management Systems**

- a) What is your policy on environmental management systems?
- b) Are you registered on the EMAS scheme?
- c) Do you adhere to any British Standard, such as BS 7750?
- d) Do you feel that EMAS, or equivalent quality standards, improve the quality of the service provided? In what way? Are these standards relevant to the services of grounds maintenance, refuse collection, and street cleansing?
- e) Do you specify that contractors possess EMAS or equivalent?
- f) Do you encourage contractors to work towards any of these standards, and if so, do you specify a time period in which contractors must achieve these?

**iv) Contract flexibility, and environmental impacts**

- a) If private contractors are located outside the borough, does this affect their ability to respond quickly to problems?
- b) Has there been a reduction in the flexibility of contracts (CCT or voluntary), due to the need for tight specifications?
- c) Do you think a reduction in flexibility has a potential impact on the environment, for instance is it more cumbersome to adapt to changing needs and situations?

- d) Does the length of a contract have any impact on the flexibility of service provision?
- e) How easy is it to change a contract specification once the contract is underway?
- f) Has there been a reduction in workforce flexibility due to the process of CCT and associated changes in working practices?
- g) Does the presence of a tight specification allow for innovation and initiative by the workforce, both client and contractor?
- h) Is the work more 'function' based?
- i) If so, do you think this impacts on the quality of the environment in any way?

#### **6) Monitoring of contracts**

- a) How are the contracts/contractors monitored?
- b) Are there monitoring inspectors for each specific service area, or are they generic?
- c) Has the split between the client as monitor, and the contractor, led to an improved level and quality of the service?
- d) Is there a system of self-monitoring by the contractor? If so, how effective is this?
- e) Is the public involved in a formal, or informal, way in terms of monitoring?
- f) Do you think that the monitoring system is adequate to ensure a high quality service?

#### **7) Accountability and democracy**

- a) Has the process of CCT made the local authority more responsive to the needs of local people?
- b) Has CCT led to an improved quality of service?
- c) Do you think that CCT has made the local authority more, or less, accountable for its actions?
- d) Has the nature of the service(s) changed, due to the ethos of CCT, and the restrictions it imposes?
- e) Do you feel that CCT has social implications?
- f) Does the public perceive any changes in service provision, due to the contracting-out of grounds maintenance, refuse collection, and street cleansing?

- g) Has CCT led to a fragmentation of service provision?
- h) Has the CCT process led to a loss of control from the local authority over the delivery of services?
- i) Do you foresee a changing role for your local authority, in terms of service provision? How would you describe this role?
- j) Has the democratic tradition of local councillors, accountable directly to local people, been weakened through the process of CCT?

## **Appendix D**

### **General structure for interviews on Compulsory Competitive Tendering, employment, and the environment**

#### **For interviews with private contractors**

##### **1) Background**

- a) What is your job title, and can you describe your responsibilities?
- b) How long have you been in your current post?
- c) What is the management structure for this contract?
- d) What service areas does the company cover? Has the company expanded in terms of the service areas it is involved in?

##### **2) The CCT process**

###### **i) Tendering process**

- a) What are the reasons for the company's interest in the contract(s)?
- b) Do you currently hold contracts in other London boroughs?
- c) What is/are the length of the contract(s) in this local authority? Is there a possibility for the contract to be extended?
- d) Has the packaging of the contract(s) been beneficial, or detrimental to you, in terms of the successful operation of the contract(s)?
- e) Do you think that the local authority is operating on a level playing field with private contractors, in terms of bidding for contracts, and the requirements that DSOs have to fulfill?
- f) Are there more opportunities now for private contractors, compared with when CCT was first introduced?
- g) Has your company ever accused a local authority of anti-competitive behaviour?
- h) Have you invested in new equipment or machinery for the purposes of this contract?

###### **ii) Client/contractor split**

- a) What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of having a split between the client and contractor?
- b) How would you describe your relationship with the local authority?
- c) Are there formal or informal structures for communication between yourself and the client?

### **iii) Employment changes**

- a) What do you feel has been the impact of TUPE on employees being transferred, either from one contractor to another, or from the DSO to a private contractor?
- b) What is the impact of TUPE on private contractors?
- c) What is your current understanding of the transfer regulations?
- d) Did TUPE apply to the contracts you have in this local authority?
- e) Do you think that if TUPE applies, it protects employees' terms and conditions?
- f) Have any changes to employment terms and conditions occurred since you won the contract? What are these changes (if any), and why did they happen?
- g) Have working practices changed, for instance has there been an intensification of work, or increased casualisation?
- h) Has the composition of the workforce altered due to the CCT process?
- i) Is the workforce made up of local people, or do you employ people from outside of the borough? Do you think that knowledge of the local area is important?
- j) What types of training are available for employees, and has the training changed from that which was offered by the DSO?
- k) Does the contract specify that certain forms of training are provided, or that specific skills are required?
- l) Do you take into account private sector pay rates in the local area when deciding pay rates for your workforce? Do you take into account local authority pay rates? Do pay rates differ between local authorities?
- m) What has been the impact of the changes in employment terms and conditions, and working practices, on the workforce, and on the quality of the service provided?
- n) How would you describe the motivation and morale of the workforce?
- o) Have managers' working practices, and conditions of employment changed?

#### **iv) Trade Unions**

- a) Do you recognise the relevant trade union(s) for the service of grounds maintenance/street cleansing/refuse collection?
- b) If so, what role do trade unions play in decisions relating to contracts, and workforce changes?
- c) How would you describe the relationship between your company and the trade unions?

### **3) Environmental issues, Local Agenda 21, and CCT**

#### **i) Environmental Strategies**

- a) Are you aware if the local authority has a corporate strategy for the environment?
- b) If so, does the contract specification mention a requirement by the contractor to have knowledge of and understand the local authority's stance on environmental issues?
- c) Are you aware that the local authority is developing a Local Agenda 21 strategy?

#### **ii) Environmental Strategies and CCT**

- a) Are you required to show an awareness and understanding of the borough's environmental strategy, and of how this links in with CCT?
- b) Does the local authority require any quality assurance system, or does it expect the contractor to work towards a quality standard, such as BS 7750, or ISO 9000?
- c) Are environmental criteria included in the contract specification? Can you give some examples?
- d) Are the environmental criteria achievable, and do you think they could be extended?

#### **iii) Contract flexibility, and environmental impacts**

- a) What location do you operate from?
- b) If you are located outside the borough, does this affect your ability to respond quickly to problems?
- c) Is there a lack of flexibility in the contract(s) due to the need for tight specifications?

- c) If so, do you think a reduction in flexibility has a potential impact on the environment, for instance is it more cumbersome to adapt to changing needs and situations?
- d) How easy is it to change a contract specification once the contract is underway?
- f) Has there been a reduction in workforce flexibility due to the process of CCT and associated changes in working practices?
- g) Does the presence of a tight specification allow for innovation and initiative by the workforce, both client and contractor?
- h) Is the work more 'function' based?
- i) If so, do you think this impacts on the quality of the environment in any way?

#### **4) Monitoring of contracts**

- a) How are the contracts monitored?
- b) Do you operate a system of self-monitoring? If so, how effective is this?
- c) Is the public involved in a formal, or informal, way in terms of monitoring?
- d) Do you think that the monitoring system is adequate to ensure a high quality service?

#### **5) Accountability and democracy**

- a) Do you think the process of CCT has made the local authority more responsive to the needs of local people?
- b) Has CCT led to an improved quality of service?
- c) Do you think that CCT has made the local authority more, or less, accountable for its actions?
- d) Does the public perceive any changes in service provision, due to the contracting-out of grounds maintenance, refuse collection, and street cleansing?
- e) Do you feel that the public service ethos remains, in your provision of local authority services?
- f) What do you feel your company can offer to the provision of these services?
- g) How do you see the future role of the private sector in providing public services?



## **Appendix E**

### **General structure for interviews on Compulsory Competitive Tendering, employment, and the environment**

#### **For interviews with trade union officers**

##### **1) Background**

- a) What is your job title, and which trade union do you work for?
- b) Which areas/local authorities do you cover?

##### **2) Political Context**

- a) Does Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth have a corporate strategy/policy on contracting-out?
- b) What is Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth's current policy on Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT)?
- c) What are the reasons for adopting this policy?
- d) Has Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth's stance on CCT changed in any way since contracting-out was introduced?
- e) Do you think the CCT process has led to improved efficiency?
- f) Has the CCT process led to improved service provision?
- g) Do you think that there are better alternatives to CCT? Should all service provision be retained in-house?

##### **3) The CCT process**

###### **i) Tendering process**

- a) At what stage is Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth in the tendering process for the services of grounds maintenance/street cleansing/refuse collection? Have contracts been retendered?
- b) What role did you play in the writing of the contract specification, and in the submission of the DSO bid(if there was a DSO bid)?
- c) What has been the level of interest by private companies at different stages of the process?

- d) What type of companies have shown an interest?
- e) Has the level of interest, or the types of companies interested, changed in the most recent process of retendering? (if this has occurred)
- f) What do you think are the reasons for particular companies bidding for contracts?
- g) Do you think that private companies operate cartels? If so, what are the implications of this?
- h) Are you aware of companies entering loss-leader bids?
- i) What criteria has the local authority used in accepting or rejecting bids?
- j) Has the local authority been accused of anti-competitive behaviour, either in the assessment of bids, or in contract specifications?

**ii) Awarding of contracts, and issues of price and quality**

- a) Who has won the contracts?
- b) What is the length of the contracts?
- c) Have any contracts been retendered? If so, for what reasons?
- d) Has Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth 'packaged' the contracts in any specific way? If so, why?
- e) How is the level of service determined each time a contract is retendered?
- f) Is the contract price reduced each time a contract is relet? What is the scope for savings?
- g) Do you think that local authorities are operating on a level playing field with private contractors, in terms of bidding for contracts, and the requirements that DSOs have to fulfill?
- h) How flexible are the guidelines for CCT, in terms of the awarding of contracts?
- i) Are contracts awarded on price, quality, a combination of these, or other criteria?
- j) Is there a trade-off between price and quality?
- k) How is quality measured?
- l) Has Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth made savings through the process of CCT?
- m) Have the costs of administration and monitoring increased?
- n) Has the client side or the DSO invested in new machinery or equipment?

**iii) Client/contractor split**

- a) What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of having a split between the client and contractor?

- b) Is there a different relationship between the client and DSO, and the client and private contractor?

**iv) Employment changes in the DSO**

- a) What role and influence have you had in discussions relating to changes in employee terms and conditions, and reductions in the workforce (if this has occurred)? How do you balance the need to retain jobs, and the need to retain adequate terms and conditions for those who remain in employment?
- b) Have there been any changes made within the DSO in order to win contracts? Why were these changes (if any) made?
- c) Have any changes to employment terms and conditions occurred after the DSO winning a contract? What are these changes (if any), and why did they happen?
- d) Have working practices changed, for instance has there been an intensification of work, or increased casualisation?
- e) Has the composition of the workforce altered due to the CCT process?
- f) Is the workforce made up of local people? Do you think that knowledge of the local area is important?
- g) What types of training are available for employees, and has the training changed due to CCT? (eg apprenticeship schemes, short courses, NVQs)
- h) Do you think that there are the same level of skills within the workforce, compared to before CCT?
- i) Does the local authority take into account private sector pay rates in the local area when deciding pay rates for the in-house workforce?
- j) Does the local authority adhere to a national pay structure, or is it involved in local pay bargaining?
- k) Are terms and conditions of service determined locally?
- l) What has been the impact of the changes in employment terms and conditions, and working practices, on the workforce, and on the quality of the service provided?
- m) Does your trade union take account of the potential environmental impacts of changes in working practices and terms and conditions?
- n) Have managers' working practices, and conditions of employment changed?

**v) Employment changes if service goes to private contractor, and TUPE**

- a) Are trade unions recognised by the private contractor(s)?

- b) How would you describe the relationship between the trade union(s) and the contractor(s)?
- c) Has there been a reduction in the number of *local* people employed since the contract went to a private contractor? If so, what are the implications of this?
- d) Do you think that TUPE has been beneficial or detrimental to i) employees; ii) the private contractor; iii) the local authority?
- e) Do employees, transferred under TUPE, have any forms of redress if changes to their terms of employment are made after the transfer has taken place?
- f) In the service areas of refuse, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance, have changes been made to employees' terms and conditions once they have been transferred?
- g) What role does the trade union play in renegotiating terms and conditions?
- h) What is your view on the inclusion of pensions in TUPE?
- i) Do you foresee any further changes being made in the application of TUPE?

#### **4) Environmental issues, Local Agenda 21, and CCT**

##### **i) Environmental Strategies**

- a) Does Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth have a corporate strategy for the environment?
- b) Does the strategy set out a long-term vision for the borough?
- c) Are you aware that Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth has a Local Agenda 21 strategy?
- d) Is the practice of contracting-out, both voluntarily, and through CCT, considered in the strategy?
- e) Do you think the process of sustainable development applies to services provided by local authorities?
- f) Do you believe that local purchasing is an important part of achieving a more sustainable way of operating?
- g) How do you see the trade union's role in the development of the Local Agenda 21 process in Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth?
- h) Do you think the principles of sustainable development apply to the services of refuse collection, street cleansing, and grounds maintenance? If so, in what ways?

**ii) Environmental Strategies and CCT**

- a) Does Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth's strategy on the environment, or its Local Agenda 21 strategy, make any reference to including environmental criteria in contract specifications?
- b) Do you consider that there are conflicts between the CCT process and sustainable development?
- c) Are private contractors required to show an awareness and understanding of the Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth's environmental strategy, and of how this links in with CCT?
- d) Do you think that CCT prevents Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth from achieving its objectives on maintaining and improving the local environment?

**iii) Contract flexibility, and environmental impacts**

- a) If private contractors are located outside the borough, does this affect their ability to respond quickly to problems?
- b) Has there been a reduction in the flexibility of contracts (CCT or voluntary), due to the need for tight specifications?
- c) Do you think a reduction in flexibility has a potential impact on the environment, for instance is it more cumbersome to adapt to changing needs and situations?
- d) Does the length of a contract have any impact on the flexibility of service provision?
- e) How easy is it to change a contract specification once the contract is underway?
- f) Has there been a reduction in workforce flexibility due to the process of CCT and associated changes in working practices?
- g) Does the presence of a tight specification allow for innovation and initiative by the workforce, both client and contractor?
- h) Is the work more 'function' based?
- i) If so, do you think this impacts on the quality of the environment in any way?

**5) Monitoring of contracts**

- a) How are the contracts/contractors monitored?
- b) Are there monitoring inspectors for each specific service area, or are they generic?

- c) Has the split between the client as monitor, and the contractor, led to an improved level and quality of the service?
- d) Is there a system of self-monitoring by the contractor? If so, how effective is this?
- e) Is the public involved in a formal, or informal, way in terms of monitoring?
- f) Do you think that the monitoring system is adequate to ensure a high quality service?

**6) Accountability and democracy**

- a) Has the process of CCT made Hounslow/Richmond/Wandsworth more responsive to the needs of local people?
- b) Has CCT led to an improved quality of service?
- c) Do you think that CCT has made local authorities more, or less, accountable for their actions?
- d) Has the nature of the service(s) changed, due to the ethos of CCT, and the restrictions it imposes?
- e) Do you feel that CCT has social implications?
- f) Does the public perceive any changes in service provision, due to the contracting-out of grounds maintenance, refuse collection, and street cleansing?
- g) Has CCT led to a fragmentation of service provision?
- h) Has the CCT process led to a loss of control from local authorities over the delivery of services?
- i) Do you foresee a changing role for local authorities in terms of service provision? How would you describe this role?
- j) Has the democratic tradition of local councillors, accountable directly to local people, been weakened through the process of CCT?
- k) Do you foresee changes in the role and powers of your trade union, if the CCT process continues?