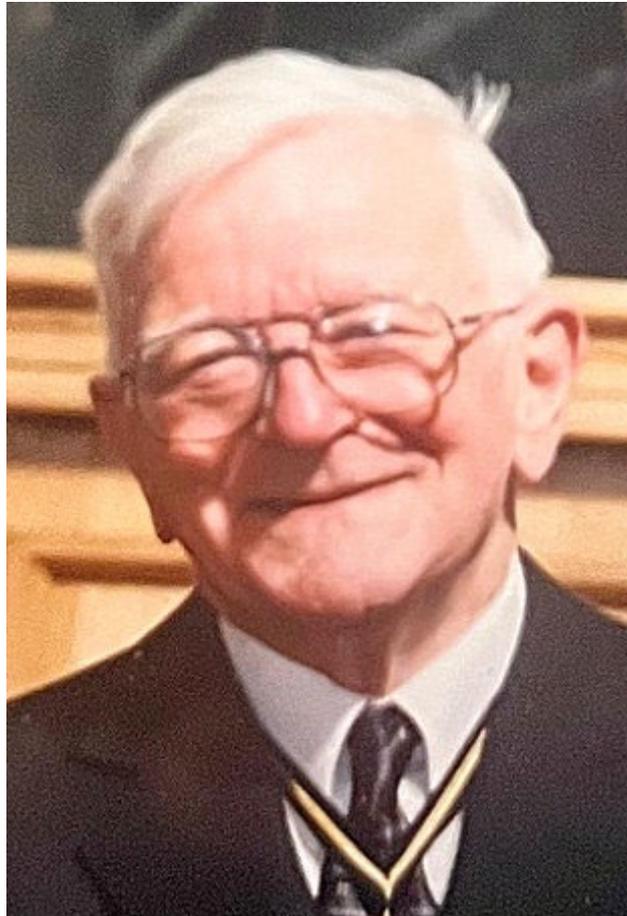


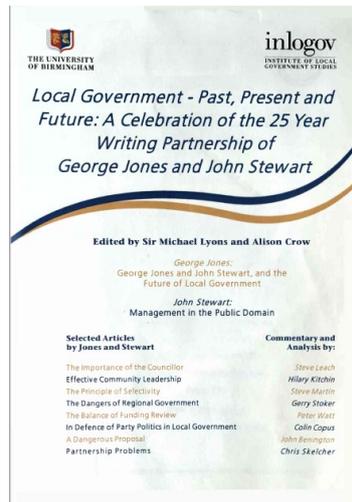
# Professor John Stewart



**‘The most significant British thinker on local government in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’**

**(Sir Rodney Brooke CBE DL)**

An earlier collection of Professor Stewart's work, *Local Government, Past, Present and Future: A Celebration of the 25 Year Writing Partnership of George Jones and John Stewart*, is available on the INLOGOV website.



This collection was first published and printed in June 2023 by the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) in the School of Government at the University of Birmingham.

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## Foreword

I was very pleased to be asked to contribute this short foreword to Inlogov's celebratory review of the work of John Stewart. It represents a fitting tribute to a much-loved leader and colleague, but also demonstrates that Inlogov remains at the heart of UK local government and that the results of John's thinking, writing and engagement remain fresh and relevant today. It is sound testament to the fact that John achieved his ambition to establish INLOGOV as "a learning institution for Local Government."

The publication represents an affectionate survey of all John's work and his impact on a generation of Local Government actors, both elected and appointed. It is particularly enriched by the painstaking "archaeology" undertaken by Chris Game and a wide range of personal appreciations. John's commitment to effective local democracy and scepticism of central government's attempts to proscribe form and process shines through as does his skill at coining a telling phrase like "wicked issues" to capture a complex debate and so promote reflection and learning.

At a time when Local Government often feels under siege and friendless, when key services like social care and child protection face unmanageable pressures, when there is still no agreed model for the sustainable funding of local services and there is a growing list of Councils facing the, hitherto unimaginable, prospect of bankruptcy, there are both lessons and inspiration to draw from the legacy of John Stewart and those who have followed in his footsteps.

### **Sir Michael Lyons**

Director of INLOGOV 2002-2008 and Chair of the Lyons Enquiry into Local Government 2004-2007

## Introduction

Everyone in or with links to the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) was saddened in November to learn of the death of Professor John Stewart, who from 1966 developed INLOGOV to focus on UK local government and made an enormous and lasting contribution to the development of local government, local governance and public administration scholarship over several decades. This publication provides a small sample of his published writings and unpublished notes.

I had the good fortune to meet John last year when, following the death of his wife, Councillor Theresa Stewart, he kindly offered his research library to the department. We had a lovely afternoon recalling the earlier days of INLOGOV: developing the first courses, contributing to the insightful Layfield Commission of Inquiry into Local Government Finance, travelling all over the country to review training and development needs in hundreds of councils, and leading thinking on the sector through articles in both the scholarly and professional journals.

John was a strong advocate of local government as community leadership at the heart of a vibrant democracy – rather than a facilitative conduit for central government’s directives or a mere provider of various local public services. He and his co-authors often led the thinking in key areas. In the 1970s, he promoted the development of corporate planning and management in local authorities bringing synergy to the various service areas. In the 1980s, he asserted the value of the public good in the face of New Public Management’s push to convert public service into private consumption. He argued that developing Quangos for specific services was creating a late twentieth-century version of the fragmented local public service world of the Victorian era. In the 1990s, he challenged the narrow consumerist Citizen’s Charter approach and instead asserted the importance of citizens’ rights, participation and accountability.

In 2014, John published his reflections on the past four decades in local government. He argued that the problems facing the economy, society and the environment need effective local responses:

Local government can draw on its own and its citizens’ ideas and aspirations, but this genuine localist approach cannot be achieved in fragmented and imperfectly accountable structures over-controlled by central government. The lesson of the last 40 years is the need for a learning government that welcomes diversity. All can learn from the relative successes and failures of diversity, whereas too often centralism builds uniformity from which all that may be learnt is general failure. (Stewart, 2014, p. 845)

As well as research, John developed a strong teaching capacity in INLOGOV. He created residential courses, held at Wast Hills House outside Birmingham, which had been given to the University by the Cadbury family. It was adapted as a residential facility with 25 bedrooms and a range of teaching rooms. These courses became the essential preparation for local government officers with ambitions to become senior managers and chief executives. Much of the work on the courses was in small groups, which led to many lasting friendships between future senior local government officers and chief executives across the country – providing an essential support network for those in these tough roles. The Local Government Training / Management Board later commissioned John to visit almost all English local authorities and many in Scotland and Wales, assessing their capacity and recommending approaches to develop this further.

This publication is organised in five parts. The first looks at the early years, from the book of John's PhD thesis to the establishment of INLOGOV and some of John's early articles. Part two presents the further development of INLOGOV and John's thinking around issues such as citizenship, public service orientation, and local government organisation. Part three presents some of John's later articles, including the issue of elected mayors, handling 'wicked issues' and the politics of hung councils (the latter particularly relevant following the recent local election results).

Part four celebrates the Jones / Stewart partnership including some of their later articles reflecting on lessons from the UK and overseas. Part five provides some examples from John's visits to hundreds of local councils as part of his work for the Local Government Training and Management Boards in the 1980s and 90s. Finally, part six provides some of the appreciations of John's career from his colleagues in academia and the public sector. In each part, text which is right justified and bold represents contextual information from the current authors.

Hugh thanks are due to the many contributors to this volume, particularly Chris Game, Andrew Coulson and Stewart Ranson. Chris's tireless work to find, organise and summarise many of John's papers was a real labour of love. In addition to his remarkable 36-year writing partnership with George Jones, John nurtured and collaborated with successive generations of scholars including Bob Hinings, Royston Greenwood, Stewart Ranson, Rod Rhodes, Kieron Walsh, Chris Skelcher, Steve Leach and many more. Thanks to all of those who contributed testimonials to this volume.

**Jason Lowther**

Head of the Department of Public Administration and Policy, and Director of INLOGOV

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## Part 1: The early years (1958 – 1979)

John was born and brought up in Stockport. His father, David, was a doctor and a lecturer at Manchester University. His mother, Phyllis (nee Crossley), had worked at the Manchester Stationery Office before her marriage. After graduating from Balliol College, John studied for a DPhil at Nuffield College, Oxford, on the influence of British pressure groups on the government (published in 1958). By then he was working for the National Coal Board, where he became head of industrial relations in the South Yorkshire coalfield.

After joining INLOGOV, in 1974 John was asked to sit on the Layfield Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Finance. It was there that he met LSE's late Professor George Jones, and the two of them had a major influence on the report which made a convincing case for a local income tax to finance local government. But this was too much for central government, and then in the late 1980s the Conservatives replaced the rates with a poll tax. The opportunity for decentralisation and local democracy had been missed. However, the experience led to a remarkable 36-year writing partnership. Some of these writings are presented later in this collection, and many have already been discussed in INLOGOV's 2005 publication, *Local Government - Past, Present and Future: A Celebration of the 25 Year Writing Partnership of George Jones and John Stewart*, where over a dozen articles are considered by contemporary scholars.

This section outlines key aspects of John's early academic career, starting with his PhD and exceptional first academic publication – on both sides of the Atlantic – through the initiative to establish INLOGOV's work on British local government. Two of John's early monographs are reviewed, on local government management and the 'responsive' local authority. Finally, we explore an early internal think piece John produced on 'the uncertain and changing world of local government'.

### British Pressure Groups: Their Role in Relation to the House of Commons (PhD thesis) (Stewart, 1958) (summary by Chris Game)

John's move to Birmingham and the founding of INLOGOV were prompted certainly in part by his distaste for the Macmillan Government's early 1960s' appointment of the future Lord Robens as Chairman of the National Coal Board, John's then employer. One can speculate about what the study, understanding and promotion of UK local government might have looked like in an alternative Robens-less world; but, even had he never returned to academia, John's imprint was already unmistakably there, in the form of his first book-length publication – researched, written, published and acclaimed while still in his twenties.

Studying for his doctorate at Oxford's Nuffield College, John had identified one of the then several significant research holes in the sphere of British politics and government, occupied at the time chiefly by American academics: the influence of pressure/interest groups on national government. The full title of John's book is important. The thesis/book was so much more than a survey of the pressure group terrain: it was about the strategy and tactics

deployed by a very wide range of 'lobbying' groups in pursuing, particularly through the two Houses of Parliament, their objective of influencing and pressurising British governments over the decade following WW2.

A very wide range indeed. I once asked John if he'd realised the coincidence of his heading in INLOGOV one of the UK's most recognisable genuinely acronymic higher education institutions [*pronounceable* word formed from initials of the name, as opposed to a mere initialism], having written a thesis and book about the work and *modi operandi* of some of its most recognisable acronymic pressure groups.

Cringeworthy question, and I quickly withdrew it, but not before reminding him of some of his book's numerous examples: BISAKTA – British Iron, Steel & Kindred Trades Assn; BLESMA – British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Assn; NALGO, of course – National & Local Government Officers' Assn; and possibly my favourite: NUFTO – National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives.

And that is what the book is about – describing, analysing and categorising the work of dozens, verging on hundreds, of these groups. Not, though, through information derived from interviews or observed meetings, but in what sounds the more laborious and mind-blowingly tedious way imaginable: from trade journals, written group reports and statements stocked by major research libraries and the various groups' annual reports.

To give some idea of the scale, and evident nature, of the exercise, the book's index lists nearly 60 self-labelled 'National' Associations, Campaigns, Federations, Unions, etc. alone. Plus – of course – the Cremation Society, Crusade for World Government, Face the Facts Association, Our Dumb Friends League, and dozens more.

It really was a remarkable project to have conceived, undertaken, analysed, written up and published – and would have made him a recognised and respected academic researcher on both sides of the Atlantic, even without the fortuitous intervention of Lord Robens.

### Establishing INLOGOV (Jason Lowther)

INLOGOV was first established on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1964 under the leadership of Professor Henry Maddick, with an initial focus on the global south. The following summer, Henry reached a novel agreement with the British local government associations that INLOGOV should provide three 10-week courses a year, each for thirty councils. Each authority who wished to participate contributed a proportionate fee (50p per 1,000 population) to a central fund, and councils then nominated participants to the programme. John Stewart was appointed in July 1966, with the course programme commencing in January 1967. In 1967, the University was invited to take over Wast Hills House, a Cadbury mansion on the southern edge of Birmingham; this became the base for INLOGOV's British local government courses. In 1976, Henry Maddick retired and was succeeded by John Stewart as INLOGOV Director.

The ten week course was succeeded by the Advanced Management Development Programme (AMDP). A range of courses and seminars, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees were subsequently developed. John Stewart saw INLOGOV as more than a collection of teaching, consultancy and research activities – the key matter was ‘the creation of a learning institution for local government’ (Stewart, 1992). INLOGOV both learns from local government and aids local government’s learning, aiming to develop both the sector’s management and its democratic processes. Academics bring knowledge and a framework within which to develop knowledge; a fresh perspective to illuminate issues; and rigorous methods of systematic research. The interaction of academics and practitioners in teaching and development activities leads to ideas to be developed and tested; those ideas then must be developed in practice (which INLOGOV supports through consultancy); the outcome of the practice can then be evaluated (through formal research). INLOGOV is part of the network of academic departments supporting and working with local government and its service areas.

The West Hills residential building



[Management in Local Government: A Viewpoint](#) (Stewart, 1971) (Summary by Chris Game)

This was the first in a series of books by INLOGOV staff and associates produced in conjunction with publishers Charles Knight & Co., dealing with various aspects of local administration and local government in the UK and overseas. Other titles included *Setting Up the New Authorities* by Joyce Long and Alan Norton; *Corporate Planning in English Local Government* edited by Royston Greenwood and John Stewart; and *Taxing a Peasant Society: Graduated Taxes in East Africa* by Kenneth Davey.

John's book opens with the warning that 'This book is not a textbook'! The exclamation mark is added, but almost redundantly. It wasn't his first book – that had been *British Pressure Groups* back in 1958 – but it was his first as the Associate Director of INLOGOV. And it reads almost as a warning to any students browsing in the University bookshop and attracted by the price tag – £2.50 for a hardback: decent value even then – that this is NOT an easy guide to anything you might be examined on.

Those opening paragraphs continue with what else the book isn't. 'It does not explain in detail the management system of local government. It does not provide an introduction to the use of management techniques in local government.' The reasons here stemming at least partly from the substance of book having been put together at a time of unforeseeable change – with the Redcliffe-Maud Royal Commission, and both Labour and Conservative Governments' White Papers on Local Government Reform all published as the book's content was being assembled.

What it is, if fortuitously, is an insight into AMDP – the 10-week residential Advanced Management Development Programme for senior local government officers that John and INLOGOV colleagues were delivering at West Hills House – structured around the premise that the needs and problems of an increasingly urbanised society required changes in the managerial and political processes of local government.

The first part of the book shows and illustrates the need for new processes of management – for local authorities' policy planning to be steered by and more directly related to the needs and problems of the areas they control.

The second part examines the problems of turning into reality a planned process of management to meet the needs of general management: setting objectives for the authority and determining how those objectives might be achieved. Topics covered in some depth include programme budgeting, environmental analysis, cost benefit analysis, and new management structures – each considered as an element to be used in building up local authority policy planning.

## The Responsive Local Authority (Stewart, 1974) (Summary by Chris Game)

John liked slogans, particularly if he could see possibilities for deploying them in his writing and lecturing. A big favourite was 'Wicked Issues', covered elsewhere in this Festschrift, and the 'Responsive Local Authority' was an earlier example. It's possible the adjective appears somewhere in his earlier 1971 book, but certainly not the slogan, in the prominent and thematic way it is used here.

Indeed, it is not entirely clear when – during the four-year period in which the papers and articles that form the basis of the RLA thesis were written – its thematic and organisational potential occurred to him. It looks core, with its own Part Three in the five-part book, but there could also have been an element of *post hoc* structuration.

The 1960s had been a decade of growing concern for complex and interdependent particularly urban problems, in Britain but also internationally – transportation; environmental pollution; deprivation, highlighted and politicised by immigration – and a growing awareness of particularly our urban areas' incapacity to respond to new demands for housing, transportation and leisure.

This new awareness was in turn reflected in legislation and in action – in the urban programme, inner city and community development projects, and educational priority areas. Reflected too in the academic world, and John notes the Centre of Environmental Studies and various centres for urban research and management, but not – modestly obviously preventing – his own contemporaneous INLOGOV appointment and AMDP work.

Governmentally what was required was a system of urban government capable of dealing with complex and changing problems, of differing scale and type, and, perhaps above all, capable of learning in an uncertain environment. Existing local authorities had the democratically underpinned multi-purpose capacity to take a lead role in any system of urban government. But – big BUT – this book argues, the reality too often fell way short of the potential.

In the past, too many local authorities, far from being main instruments for urban government, were organised 'merely to be agencies for the administration of a series of separate services' – a traditional approach at least three tendencies of which had to be overcome if local government were to play an effective lead role in a system of urban government.

First, the tendency for local authorities' structures and processes to be more appropriate to the administration of services than to the requirements of government, for the work of running the services to dominate to the extent that the services themselves are rarely reviewed – leading in turn to 'an authority passively accepting a role as an administrative agent of central government ... rather than governing its area.'

Second was many authorities' high degree of procedural and geographical centralisation – requiring reference to the centre of the authority and an insensitivity to local or limited problems.

Third was the tendency to separatism: for authorities to organise themselves internally as a series of separate services – a separatism likely to be exacerbated by the new institutional structures being set up in 1974: Health and Regional Water Authorities, Counties and Districts.

All of which pointed to the need for responsive local government, at both the individual council and collective functional level – both of which are addressed in this book, although the principal focus is obviously on the former. The responsive local authority must be a learning authority – accepting that its activities don't justify themselves, that they must be challenged, evaluated and reviewed, looking outwards to 'the environment of changing problems, changing needs, and changing knowledge' – all of which requires an attitude going way beyond that induced by the traditions of administration. It was a tough ask!

### [The Uncertain and Changing World of Local Government](#) (Stewart, 1975)

**Local 'rates', the UK's longstanding form of property taxation from the C17th Poor Law to the late 1980s, were never popular. But the fevered political reaction to the huge inflation-driven increases of the early 1970s, coinciding with the culmination of the protracted structural reform process across GB, prompted the minority Labour Government in 1974 to set up a Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Finance, chaired by (later Sir) Frank Layfield QC – the first such inquiry since WW1. The Committee reported in 1976, offering the Government a choice between a more centrally controlled system of local authority finance or, as favoured by a majority of the Committee, one that would significantly have increased local financial autonomy, created a new source of local revenue – and transformed the world of UK local government.**

**Layfield was also a key formative chapter in John's life, not least because it proved the catalyst for his enduring personal friendship and writing partnership with LSE's George Jones, another Layfield member – as recalled '40 years on' in one of the last of their joint articles, also reproduced here. First, though, one of John's earliest internal 'think pieces' in this collection that to some will read almost as ancient history: the opening section of a characteristically reflective, and in some ways prophetic, paper, written in the middle of Layfield – while carefully eschewing any direct mention of that reform agenda. It includes a classic sentence that might have made an even better title: 'Organisational dogma is the enemy, not organisational change'. (CG)**

There is a dream in local government: that one day normality will return. Change will stop and local government will become once again the stable organisation that none can remember but of which all can dream.

It has been a valuable dream, sustaining officers through the difficult period of the early-1970s reorganisation. It has sustained the hope that once again the world will return to normal and the organisation will settle down. Maybe it will take two years, maybe three, but eventually the hope is there – or perhaps it is the despairing call. Surely things will return to normal.

But they never were normal – at least not as far back as any present serving officer can remember – and they never will be. Or, rather, abnormality *is* the normal. Change will not be completed with local government reorganisation – even when, or if, it settles down.

Few can really believe that the world in which local government is set is a stable world, or that the environment it must continually confront will let it settle down. That world is a changing world, and local government's search for stability is a forlorn one, which all too often leads to change being imposed upon it.

It is important that those who work within local government should understand that **the new situation is not stable**. The new authorities that have been set up [notably the two-tier structure of metropolitan and non-metropolitan county and district councils, created in England and Wales by the 1972 Local Government Act] are not fixed in form or area, in duties or in problems.

On the contrary, the new situation carries with it many forces that imply change, both within and outside local government. The effect of those changes will be worked out over time. It is part of the task – perhaps the essential task – of management to help the complex organisation of local government face those changes. It cannot rest in a hope of stability.

The very structure of local government is itself far from stable. Most hoped that, whether they welcomed or regretted the form taken by reorganisation, it would at least have removed the issue from the sphere of argument and uncertainty. Unfortunately, that depended upon the new structures achieving a greater degree of reform than many feel they have.

Reorganisation has not achieved the degree of acceptance to remove from the agenda the question of further change. The strains implicit in a fragmented system of community government are ever-apparent. It is likely that the memory of the past reorganisation will prevent a further reorganisation on the same scale being adopted in the immediate future. The point is, however, that such further reorganisation has not been removed from the medium-term agenda. Local government has to live with the uncertainty that implies.

**The new management structures too are not stable.** Already they are under pressure and stress. Too easily and too quickly adopted, without the thought that the Bains Group themselves wished to stimulate [a committee/working party set up by the Heath Government to advise on intendedly more streamlined management systems in the new local authorities], they are now under attack in some, perhaps many, councils.

The Policy and Resources Committee is seen as a challenge to the role of other councillors. The management team is feared as officer domination by many councillors. The fact that there are suspicions of the new structure is not to be regretted. The establishment and acceptance of the roles of the Policy and Resources Committee and management team are important, but it will not be easy.

Too much was hoped for in the new structure by those who believed that, pure and pristine, could be born a new organisation that could operate successfully from the outset. The new structures will develop best if they are allowed to develop over time. Around them will grow new conventions and approaches. The one thing that cannot be assumed is that the organisational structures are a stable element in local government. Perhaps there lies the danger. Organisational dogma is the enemy, not organisational change.

The same dilemma and the same need for growth lie in many of the new roles established in the new authorities. Chief Executives, County Secretaries, Personnel Officers, and new titles. These titles can be either a meaningless change, or they can denote new roles. But new roles are not easily established when the habits and approaches built up around previous roles are perhaps more real than those required for the new ones.

And these are not the only new roles being established. Posts like Director of Environmental Health face the public health inspector, both as an individual and as a profession, with a challenge, which, if they do not accept, will be taken up by others. The new Directors of Leisure and Recreation have perhaps the task of creating a new profession. The new roles established have still to be worked through.

Underlying the new structures, in theory if not always in practice, was the concept of corporate planning. In many authorities that concept too has still to be worked out. In those authorities where it is being worked out, it is developing and evolving in the process. The days are past when there was one simple, easy approach to corporate planning. The approach to corporate planning changes as the authority changes. It has – at its best – become part of an authority's process of learning.

The dilemmas that the new organisational structures of local government are subject to are partly, as suggested, the result of pressures that lie, some deeply, within the structures themselves. But there are other pressures that are playing on the new structures and to which they must adapt.

**Perhaps most important is the change in the politics of local government.** The 1972 Local Government Act, whatever it did to the areas and functions of local government, changed also its political structure. The abolition of aldermen, the linking of urban and rural politics in town and country, the introduction of attendance allowances. These all add up to a very formidable agenda. When added to other tendencies, they mean very clearly and firmly a more assertive political control, whose full effect is very far from being seen.

But, as the politics of the council itself are changing, so are the politics of the community and local authorities' response. There is a politics of the centre and a politics of the periphery. Both are perhaps the more assertive under the pressures to which our society is subject. Larger authorities have increased the centre-periphery tension and some have realised it. The politics of the locality are gaining new recognition, and the management structures of local government are beginning to adapt to that politics. Neighbourhood councils are one proposal, but so equally is the response of local authorities through area committees and area management. The area dimension is gaining new recognition.

As yet perhaps not dominant, but still important, many of the traditional models of staff behaviour are breaking down. Staff militancy and staff assertiveness are related phenomena. The social worker pressing and publicly pressing the authority of behalf of their client, links with the administrative worker refusing to work overtime. They mark the end of the old patterns of administrative loyalty.

The political dimension, the area dimension, and the staff dimension are all changing in local government. The changes will be worked out over time, the world in which local government is set is changing, and these changes are themselves the product of that change in the outside environment.

John Stewart



## Part 2: The 1980s

Having established INLOGOV and contributed to the Layfield Commission, during the 1980s John led the rapid development of both the Institute's work and his own thinking on local government. This section presents his summary of developments in the first 15 years of INLOGOV's existence, including the undergraduate degree and advanced management development programmes. The selected articles cover John's developing thinking around citizenship, the case for local government, LG organisation and the orientation to public service.

### INLOGOV: A Changing Institution (c. 1981)

**I discovered this paper, written apparently for an as yet unlocated local government professional publication, as we were transferring John's books and papers from the Stewarts' family home in Selly Wick Road to the University – and recognised it almost instantly. Because I was pretty sure I still had a copy of it myself – somewhere, although I haven't gone through the palaver of actually searching, because it almost certainly wouldn't have been precisely dated either. Its importance for John, as Head of Department, is obvious. Its importance to me was that I believe it was the first time INLOGOV's undergraduate degree, that I'd been recruited to get at least to the launch pad, was mentioned in a paper emanating from INLOGOV and written for circulation potentially well beyond the Institute itself – the briefest of final-page, single-clause mentions, as part of 'the variety within', but definitely there. And no, not remotely justification for the paper's latter-day unearthing, but the remainder of the snapshot picture of the Institute 40 years ago hopefully is. (CG)**

The Institute of Local Government Studies changes and develops as the personnel function itself changes and develops to meet new and emerging needs and problems. Above all, the Institute changes and develops to meet needs identified by local authorities.

#### **Working with local authorities**

What excites me about the Institute today is the variety of activities INLOGOV is involved in, because it has set itself the task of working with local authorities: not merely on management development generally, but on specific management and policy problems. Different processes, different formats and different activities have to be developed to meet differing needs.

It would be wrong to describe this variety as though they were a standard set of activities. I can only give a flavour by giving examples:

- the series of joint authority management development programmes provided for groups of London boroughs, which aim to combine the advantages of in-authority programmes with the wider experience of a number of authorities;

- the continuing series of management development programmes for the West Midlands County Council<sup>1</sup>;
- a management development programme for Tamworth District Council, including a 2-day management team workshop and basic management skills modules for 2nd and 3rd tier officers;
- work with the East Sussex Social Services Department in developing new management structures and processes;
- a weekend workshop for the Chairmen in Cumbria County Council;
- the development of an educational management game for the Inner London Education Authority;
- a retainer relationship with Knowsley Metropolitan District Council centring on changes in management structure and process;
- a series of management courses for Devonshire education department
- specialist seminars for individual authorities on such diverse topics as:
  - disciplinary interviewing
  - direct labour organisations
  - staff appraisal
  - the publication of information, etc.

The aim is to match the resources of the Institute to the needs of the authority. This can only be achieved in direct contact between the Institute and those concerned within the authority.

### **Seminars for current needs**

The Institute has maintained its general programme of seminars for local government officers, but has designed that programme to meet clear and immediate needs. The necessities of present constraints makes it of especial importance that any seminar programme is relevant to current problems. Commitment to management development will grow as the relevance of management approaches to current problems is demonstrated.

The seminar programme covers such issues as:

- The impact on management of new technology
- Changes in local government finance
- The impact on local authority services of a society of endemic unemployment
- Alternative forms of service provision
- Housing finance

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<sup>1</sup> The upper-tier administrative body for the West Midlands county from 1974 to 1986, one of six Metropolitan County Councils abolished, along with the GLC, in the Local Government Act 1985.

- The publication of information
- Direct Labour Organisations
- Approaches to staff appraisal.

We are also building up programmes of skills seminars to meet emerging need:

- Analytical techniques for the manager
- Finance for the non-financial manager
- Performance appraisal skills
- Officer-councillor communication
- Disciplinary interviews.

I am myself deeply concerned at this time with one critical need confronting local government as the crisis in central-local relations grows. **The case for local government** has to be appreciated. I am convinced that it is not merely the public who do not appreciate that case, but many in local government itself do not understand the rationale of that institution in which they work. I would be very interested in any views that personnel officers might have on how management development can best contribute to building up that understanding.

### **The Chief Officers Inquiry**

One very important joint activity has recently been undertaken by the LG Training Board and ourselves: The Chief Officers Inquiry into the management development needs of chief officers, the outcome of which will be a report to the Board, which will hopefully lead to wide-ranging discussion of many issues, including career patterns, job change, the case for sabbaticals and secondments, as well as issues about continuing management development processes.

One important development has already taken place. As part of the Inquiry the Institute has provided – with LGTB support – workshops for particular professional groups, including one held in September for personnel officers. These have proved to have a value in themselves for those attending, providing them with an opportunity to consider and reconsider their role, work and career in a way not possible in the normal working situation. Such workshops are likely to be continued after the inquiry and will include further workshops for personnel officers, covering not merely the larger authorities, but also the smaller authorities.

### **Advanced Management Development Programme (AMDP)**

The Institute's major management programme – the Advanced Management Development Programme – strongly supported by the LGTB and originally launched after consultation with personnel officers, plays a major part in the Institute's activities. It provides an opportunity for those taking part in the programme to develop management understanding and sharpens knowledge and skills. The programme involves a six-week course element<sup>2</sup>, project work, seminars, and group working. It has done much to bridge the gap between management education and actual development in the authority, and has created a partnership between the Institute and authorities in the development of key staff. AMDP is an exciting element in the newly developing Institute.

AMDP makes close understanding between the Institute and personnel officers of great importance. It demands joint understanding between the Institute and the authority in selection and in the requirements of the programme. AMDP can contribute much more than the development of one individual, provided there is joint understanding both in the selection and in later development.

### **The variety within**

Much more could be written about our graduate programme, which on a part-time basis is providing a high-level management qualification for officers from a number of authorities; or our newly-launched undergraduate programme in Policy Making and Administration; about our research programme, and about our newly created capacity for relevant policy analysis used increasingly by local government.

### **Towards a partnership**

As I write, I become the more conscious that, while we have set our aim as relevance to the needs of local government and to the special circumstances of local authorities, that cannot be achieved without an active partnership with personnel officers. I would like to see this article as part of that partnership. If it provokes ideas, advice or guidance, it will have fulfilled its purpose. I would welcome letters from any personnel officers who have comments to make on Institute activities in the past or on their development in the future. The Institute is a resource to be used by local government – a resource that the LGTB and the Associations have helped to build and make available to local government. That use must be guided by local authorities themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> At Wast Hills House, King's Norton – the former Cadbury family home and at the time the University's residential training and conference centre.

## The Undergraduate Degree and John Stewart's Vital, If Ambivalent, Role (Chris Game)

Think 1998 – the year the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Google was founded, and Bill Clinton was impeached for messing with Monica Lewinsky. During the Spring Term, while all this international trivia was happening, some 30 INLOGOV undergraduates would leave the UoB campus each Wednesday afternoon – not to play inter-university sport, or earn desperately needed money for newly-introduced tuition fees, but for their weekly Policy Analysis ‘fieldwork placements’.

That year roughly a third went to various Birmingham City Council departments – Policy, Planning, Social Services, Leisure Services, Research (thanks, BCC, once again!); several to other West Midlands councils – Warwickshire, Walsall, Sandwell, Coventry, etc. And about a third, sometimes at least partly self-arranged, went to other employers: including in that year the West Midlands Police, Selly Oak Hospital, and Eco Tec – possibly the boiler makers, but the student was a Philip Whiteman, and who knows what subsequently happened to him; although oddly it's also the name of the current Director of INLOGOV's distance learning MPA (Masters in Public Administration) degree!

These placements were at the time an exceptional feature in a politics/government-focused undergrad social sciences degree – the **B.Sc. in Public Policy Government and Management**, as it by then was. And they obviously took a considerable amount of arrangement, way beyond the conventional responsibilities of an undergraduate degree secretary: principally, throughout most of the life of the degree, Mary Furamera. The students, I know, appreciated both the opportunity and the organisation it entailed, grateful not least for the extra paragraph or so it could add to their future job applications – of which more later.

INLOGOV was then, of course, still based on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors of the JG Smith Building – meaning that the sight and sound of mainly late-teenage students up and down the corridors, in the ground-floor **Joint Centre Library**<sup>3</sup> (shared, like the whole building, with CURS: the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies), and even the ground-floor lounge (with free newspapers!), had long since become, certainly during term-time, the norm – not unanimously appreciated, but fully accepted. But 'twas not ever thus, as can perhaps be best sensed from Professor Rod Rhodes' testimonial later in this volume.

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<sup>3</sup> This was a huge asset for both INLOGOV and CURS, their staff and students. It would have comprised at the time some 40,000 items, centred on the areas of local government, urban studies, management and planning, and would have received roughly 200 current journals. Its more specialist items – development plans, budgetary material, reports of and evidence to Committees of Inquiry and Royal Commissions – were either unpublished or had been specially collected and systematically coded for the Library. Regrettably (certainly in my view), sometime around the turn of the century, it was wholly dismantled, part going to the Main Library and part into, I believe, never-to-be-reclaimed storage.

The JG Smith Building



### Origins of the degree – John’s seminal role

It was striking, to me anyway, that in Jason’s assemblage of JDS testimonials there were very few even passing mentions of undergraduates and the Institute’s undergraduate degree – which, after all, did have a lifetime of roughly a quarter-century, raised significantly and positively INLOGOV’s profile across the University, and produced several hundred high quality graduates, many of whom went on to work in or with the world of local government.

The sparsity of references is understandable perhaps, but a shame, as well over half of these testimonials’ authors taught, supervised, advised and contributed to the assessment of our u/g students, and most, in their various ways, were and were acknowledged as being pretty good at it. John himself, of course, did none of these things, as will be briefly touched on later; his contribution was merely to have conceived the idea, piloted it through to realisation, and made the whole thing possible.

One who at least passingly alludes to the topic is Rod Rhodes, who records how ‘daunting’ he found it in the early 1970s, as a 28-year old apprentice academic, to ‘not teach undergraduates, only postgraduates and local government officers’. As a near-contemporary, I knew Rod passably well at the time, and could certainly empathise with the dauntingness – though he undoubtedly made a far better fist of it than I could have done, had I even been allowed near West Hill House, its dozens of ambitious local government officers and their ‘10-week residential course’.

Had he not, as self-described, tiffed and flounced, Rod might easily, and probably earlier, have taken the lead role that Royston Greenwood, Bob Hinings, Kieron Walsh, Stewart Ranson, Steve Leach, Chris Skelcher *et al.* eventually assumed. In their various ways they supported John in persuading first departmental colleagues that, for both educational and small-p political/institutional reasons, a public policy-focused undergraduate degree should be included in INLOGOV's Quinquennial plan; and then, in 1978, the University via the Commerce & Social Sciences Faculty Board to back it with a UGC-funded two-year 'special initiative' lectureship.

On the other hand ... had that Rod-scenario happened, I wouldn't have. For much of the 1970s I was employed as a lecturer on Stanford University's Overseas Studies *Program* (!) based then at Cliveden House, Berkshire – teaching visiting American undergraduates a wide variety of UK politics-related courses for all four of Stanford's academic 'quarters' (terms). Which meant that, as the end of the decade neared, I had a negligible publishing record (one second-authored journal article, to be precise), but unusually wide-ranging undergraduate teaching/lecturing and syllabus-designing experience. Plus, even more importantly, an influential friend who offered to write me a flattering and, it proved, job-clinching reference: the late (Professor) Ken Young, who, as it transpired, would in the late 1980s become Director of INLOGOV.

Back to me. In April 1979 – literally days before the May General Election that would so radically transform the UK national and local governmental world – I was offered, and grabbed, the two-year lectureship, with its three-and-a-half-part job spec. One, produce a proposal, rationale, and structure for 'a B.Soc.Sc. programme in Public Policymaking and Administration'<sup>4</sup> – together with an explanation of how, despite its modest-if-not-minimal undergraduate degree experience, INLOGOV's 'unique advantages and facilities' made it a supremely qualified and appropriate provider. Two, with John's leadership and demonstrable backing, persuade first the Commerce & Social Science Faculty Board (and thereby 'the University') plus the politically crucial Departmental colleagues, that this addition to the INLOGOV repertoire was 'a good thing'. Three, publicise the new degree and recruit a viable (undefined) number of qualified students ... thereby, four, making myself at least temporarily indispensable and getting my two-year contract limitedly extended.

For obvious reasons that contract didn't come into effect until July 1979, and, living in Maidenhead, my first proper introduction to staff colleagues – plus invitees from some 15 academic and other institutions – was at a Wast Hills House<sup>5</sup> two-day Departmental Workshop that had been organised with the help of a £500 grant from the University (you tend to remember such details when they really matter!). Entitled 'The Teaching of Public Policymaking', the workshop was, for me, an odd and bewildering experience – being

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<sup>4</sup> The title change to 'Public Policy, Government and Management' came several years later.

<sup>5</sup> The Cadbury family home on the outskirts of Birmingham, given to the University, adapted, and used for several years by INLOGOV as a residential managerial training facility for senior local government officers.

functionally at the center of the event and yet, previously knowing few others in the room, literally peripheral.

It more than served, however, the purposes – institutional, academic, and personal – that John and those afore-mentioned supportive colleagues had envisaged for it. I got to meet most key Institute members and get some impression of their diverse views of the implications of the proposed degree, and of me. We learned at firsthand more about the different kinds of cognate degree schemes already in existence. And, above all, we were able to record and report a genuinely Department-wide agreement that, provided the interests and mostly limited organisational experience of our prospective students were kept firmly in mind, the teaching of ‘policy studies’ at undergraduate level, as envisaged, was ‘valuable, feasible, and likely to prove highly popular’ – the latter confirmed by the then newly established BA in Policymaking and Administration at the University of Essex, which had attracted more than 180 applications in its first year. Don’t even wonder!

### **Why ‘Public Policymaking and Administration’ – as an undergrad degree?**

At which point it is worth – even, or perhaps especially, more than 40 years on – briefly outlining the nature and distinctiveness of the kind of degree we were proposing to introduce. Its broad aim was to guide students’ knowledge of how public policies are shaped, determined, and administered. They would take the University/Faculty norm of five courses per three-term year – some compulsory, some optional; some with INLOGOV staff, others from other departments in mainly the then Faculty of Commerce and Social Science – with particularly the larger, introductory, first-year courses<sup>6</sup> contributing to **three key areas** of understanding:

(1) an **analysis of policy form** and of the ‘context’ within which public policies are developed. This would include an appreciation of the social, political, and economic structures of contemporary society, with particular reference to urban areas, and a detailed study of the organisational and political determinants of policy form. This component, therefore, could be said to be concerned with the analysis of policy and of the policy process.

(2) an examination and evaluation of the various forms of **analysis for policy choice** – the techniques and approaches available to and used by those actually responsible for the making of policy. Included here would be a consideration of specific analytical techniques – cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis, operational research, etc.; and of some of the procedures developed within the public sector for allocating expenditures and establishing management objectives and programmes – corporate planning, the Public Expenditure Survey, PPBS (Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System), etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Yes, they were ALL ‘courses’. ‘Modularisation’ came gradually and rather later, following the Blair Government’s 1998/99 replacement of maintenance grants with tuition fees of £1,000 per academic year and the perceived need to appear to compensate students by offering them a bit more flexibility and choice – or, as some might put it, reduced coherence.

(3) the **application** of these theories of the policy process and techniques of analysis to a range of substantive policy areas – e.g. housing, education, health care, recreation – and functional arenas, such as industrial relations and social policy.

While much of the ‘context’ material would be concentrated in the First Year and much of the ‘substantive’ material in the Third Year, the three component elements weren’t intended to and didn’t correspond to the three years of the degree – the outline structure of which is summarised below, together with some indication of the input and responsibilities of INLOGOV staff members in those crucial germinal years.

### **Outline of the degree as initially presented in 1981/2**

(INLOGOV staff or responsible department indicated as relevant)

#### **YEAR ONE**

Economics 1(a) (Economics)

British Government (Political Science)

Introduction to Social Administration (Soc. Admin)

Policy Studies I – Introduction to Policy Studies (Steve Leach)

Policy Analysis I – Introduction to Social Research (Bob Hinings)

#### **YEAR TWO**

Political Economy of Urban Government (Royston Greenwood/John Gibson)

Social Issues of Urban Government (Bob Hinings)

Policy Studies II – Policymaking in the Public Sector (S. Leach, Royston Greenwood)

Policy Analysis II – Analytical Techniques (Peter Watt, Mary Davies)

ONE from:

- Political Sociology – Political Evolution of Industrial Societies (Sociology)
- Problems of the Urban Economy (John Gibson, John Mawson – CURS)
- Social Psychology (Psychology)
- Concepts and Problems of Political Thought (Pol. Sc.)
- British Central and Local Government (Chris Skelcher, Chris Game)

#### **YEAR THREE**

Policy Studies III – Current Issues in Local Government (Barbara Webster, Chris Skelcher, et al.), incorporating fieldwork placement in Term 2

ONE from:

- Economics of Social Policy (John Gibson)
- Industrial Relations II (IEBS C)
- Administrative Theory (Royston Greenwood)

TWO from:

- Social Issues in Housing (Soc. Admin. D)

- Policies and Problems in Education (Soc. Admin. C)
- Health Care Policy ((Soc. Admin. F)
- Policies and Problems in Recreation (Tony Veal)
- Studies in Local Government Expenditure and Finance (Peter Watt)
- Comparative Social Administration (Soc. Admin. G)
- Economics of Social Policy; Indust. Relations II; Admin. Theory (see above)

ONE further course for which student is eligible, chosen from any other course on the timetable, subject to the agreement of the Head of Department.

### **Extended essay**

In the above overall degree outline, it risks dropping off the end, or at best just being noted – rather than highlighted as one of its most important features. Students would submit, early in their final year, a proposal for an extended essay or project of up to 7,000 words, to count as a full final-year paper. They, together with their tutor, chose their topic, and a supervisor familiar with that topic area would then be allotted.

Given the nature of the degree, students were particularly encouraged to consider something other than an exclusively library-based essay, and to select a real situation or policy problem – possibly in their own home area – which they could investigate at first-hand. The obvious reason being that this was the best opportunity available to undergraduate students to undertake and write up a sustained piece of personal research – knowing that, particularly in the local government sphere, it could well (and on occasion did) prove adaptable for publication, in journals like the *Local Government Chronicle*, that from the outset had followed our students' progress with photographic interest (evidence is available!).

### **A small selection of the Extended Essay topics chosen by 1996/7 Third Years**

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Eileen  | Reorganising the Committee Structures of Solihull MBC  |
| Stephen | School Governance in Warwickshire  |
| Richard | Effects of the Nolan Committee Recommendations on the Accountability of NDPBs [Non-Departmental Public Bodies] in Stafford |
| Sam     | Impact of the Government's Community Care Legislation on the Delivery of Services for the Elderly                          |
| Barry   | The Changing Face of Liverpool City Council, 1983-96: The Rise and Fall of Militant and Labour Group Politics              |
| Deborah | The Turnbull Report: An Analysis of the Policy-making Process in the Church of England                                     |
| Ros     | An Assessment of the Policy Development Underpinning Military-style Regimes for Young Offenders                            |
| Simon   | The Impact of Next Steps Agencies on Government Policy-making  |
| Alison  | Implications of the Transfer of Power from Elected to Non-elected Bodies   |
| Rachel  | The Conservation Policy of the Built Environment: A Case Study of Stratford-upon-Avon                                      |
| Mark    | The Factors Behind Manufacturing Decline in the West Midlands: Has There Been a Recent Improvement?                        |
| Julia   | The Privatisation of the Prison Service  |
| Charlie | The Public Policy of Prohibition: Parallels Between the US Volstead Act and Drugs Misuse Act (1971)                        |
| Melanie | The Evolving Role of Chief Executives in British Local Government  |

## **Back to 1981**

The primary focus on public policymaking and analysis [as described above, and which might, incidentally, have been my personal choice for the 'A' in the PMA degree title] – on what governments actually do, how, and why – and the consequent instrumental or secondary focus accorded to the institutions responsible for those policies, had by the mid-1990s come to seem unexceptional. 15 years earlier, though, as the title and therefore promoted emphasis of an undergraduate degree, it was something of a novelty.

There had been for some years, particularly in and led by the US, a growing 'policy orientation' within the social sciences – directed specifically towards the 'policy process' as an appropriate object of academic study in its own right, and thus cutting across existing disciplinary specialisations. The lead came partly from governments themselves. Seeking to be more systematic in their consideration of alternative policies, they would regularly find themselves thwarted by the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the increasingly complex managerial tasks of policymaking in the public sector, and, on the other, by the abilities of those in positions of responsibility to shape and control these tasks.

Few academics had a better or more first-hand insight into this experiential clash in at least a senior local government context than INLOGOV's. They may not have managed John's own extraordinary record of 300+ local authority visits and accompanying reports, but even those not involved in the Wast Hills senior management programmes would be visiting local authorities and talking with senior staff and elected councillors on a regular basis. Even to consider, therefore, embarking on an undergraduate degree programme without being able to focus it around the Institute's uniquely advantageous assets and its multi-disciplinary base would have been almost insane – as John and those above-mentioned colleagues clearly appreciated, long before I arrived.

It should also be emphasised just how far in practice, as well as in dominant culture, INLOGOV had moved in the several years since Rod Rhodes' recalled experiences and impressions. The biggest institutional change would have been the launch, jointly with the University's Health Services Management Centre (HSMC), of the M.Soc.Sc. in Policy Making and Management in Local Government and the NHS – yes, in that order! – which naturally involved some of the newly recruited staff members who would be supportive of and involved in a future undergraduate degree. In the meantime, as indicated on the Degree Outline, some were already contributing 2nd and 3rd year modules to the undergraduate degrees of other Faculty departments. None of this diminished the scale of the jump from INLOGOV having no undergraduate students to having its own three-year degree, but it certainly contributed hugely to the required cultural evolution.

### **Crunch time – 1980 to September 1981**

You'll have taken the hint: no, we didn't match Essex's 180+ applications via what was then the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA – later UCAS). Though one of the 1960s 'new' universities, Essex was by then well established with a national/international reputation for its social and political science degree programmes. INLOGOV in this arena was unheard of. My genuine concern was that we would get no more than a handful of applications at this first time of asking. Moreover, unlike in (considerably) later years, when I myself was Undergraduate Admissions Officer for the whole Faculty of Commerce and Social Science, I would have no decisive say in either how many or which applicants should be made offers, even those whom by then I would have personally interviewed.

And then there was the 'bigger picture'! We didn't know it at the time, but from a big-P Political perspective it was indubitably not the most propitious time to launch a new degree. That 1980/81 academic year saw the Thatcher Government, in fairly quick succession, impose 'full-cost' fees on overseas students, terminate the 1963 Robbins Report's famed principle that university places 'should be available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment', and announce forthcoming Higher Education funding cuts of up to 15%. Which in turn prompted the University to revise its planned admissions targets – literally days before the confirmation of offers – in the Commerce & Social Science Faculty's case from a targeted 317 home and overseas students down to 279. On the plus side, the Faculty was acquiring computing facilities that, from 1982, would enable departmental admissions officers like me to receive 'up-to-the-minute' information on offers, likely acceptances, offers made by competing institutions, etc. Not, at the time, an enormous consolation.

Each applicant could apply to up to five individual degree programmes from across their choice of universities, and list them in order of preference. Faculty admissions personnel would then reject some, and forward the remainder to the relevant department (me) to recommend whether or not these students should be made 'conditional offers' – the conditions mostly comprising a combination of A-level grades: AAA for, say, Medicine, BCC/CCC at that stage for us. We received in that first year roughly 50 applications in all – which came as something of a relief – just over 30 of which were forwarded by the Faculty for further consideration, possible interview, and recommendation.

I issued interview invitations to virtually all, personally interviewed most, and recommended a total of 31 conditional offers – a number which almost doubled the following year. In both years 'firm acceptances' – listing us first out of five possible offers and committing the student to us if they achieved the required A-level grades – were proportionately fewer than, almost certainly naively, I'd hoped. That first year 10 of the 31 were 'firmly accepted' and 12 'conditionally accepted', meaning we were the student's second choice, and could accept them if they failed to achieve their first choice. There were other negotiated bits and pieces, but, long story slightly shortened, we ended up in that first year with six – extremely variegated – students, who, both individually and collectively, were a delight, as well as a

relief. INLOGOV had its first-ever undergraduate students – substantially thanks to someone they'd never heard of and would barely/rarely meet during their three years with us.

Oh yes – I nearly forgot. Neither they nor I received any condescending favours from Faculty Admissions. If anything, the reverse. That first year, our students' '3 A-level points average' of 10.75 was (at least a little) higher than that for the Faculty as a whole (10.69). Higher too than for pretty well all the main and established degrees: Economics, Economic History, Political Science, Sociology, Social Administration, Social Work, et al. How do I remember this stuff? Because stats like those were proverbial gold dust in future years' negotiations of student quotas.

### **2+2 equals gains all round**

At which point it seems defensibly relevant – despite John's lack of any kind of personal involvement, and yes, I'll return to him shortly – to jump ahead and add at least a couple of paragraphs about the '2+2' version of the B.Sc. degree that INLOGOV and several other Faculty departments ran for several years from the late 1980s. **Winterbourne House**, plus nowadays its excellent botanical garden – off Edgbaston Park Road and easily visible from the Muirhead Tower – were originally built for and owned by John Nettlefold of Guest, Keen & Nettlefold (GKN), who, among many other accomplishments, moonlighted as a town planning pioneer. Following WWII, both house and garden were bequeathed to the University, the former becoming for a time a women's hall of residence and eventually, by the 1980s, part of the Extramural Department.

In which capacity it created its own on-site library and offered a range of daytime history and general interest courses to members of the community. Which, towards the end of the decade, prompted our Commerce and Social Science Faculty to see it as the means through which to offer what became known as '2+2' degrees for members of the community who, for whatever personal, family, financial, or other reasons, would find it prohibitively difficult to manage a full-time, three-year commitment, but could at least contemplate, say, two or three evenings a week for two years – plus 'homework', of course. For their part, interested departments would offer their key First Year courses, taught mainly by their own lecturers – incentivised by the prospect of recruiting some 'different' but usually highly motivated adult students for the final full-time two years of their degree programmes. It was an imaginative, enterprising initiative – and it certainly worked for us, with at least a couple of those Extended Essayists having been Winterbourners.

### **John and undergraduate students**

As anyone who had any contact with either John or Theresa Stewart would become almost immediately aware, 'family' was massively important to them both, in their albeit differing ways – including, unsurprisingly, their children's education. I don't know for certain, but I've always assumed that their close involvement with their own children's and grandchildren's school and further education was at least one of the principal reasons for John being so

keen that INLOGOV should have its own undergraduate degree. And, as I've tried to indicate, the initiative was his, his role that of the almost missionary persuader – of INLOGOV colleagues and University committees – and the achievement very substantially his.

It seemed, therefore, the most natural thing in the world that I should want to invite him at an early opportunity to address each intake of students, for whose presence at UoB he was substantially, if indirectly, responsible. Not necessarily a whole lecture – although he could deliver several a day, if required, to audiences of senior local government officers. I even offered to provide the biros to break and paper clips to twist that Rod Rhodes' testimonial recalls. Just ten or fifteen minutes, so that, in a way, the students would know whom ultimately to thank for their presence here.

But John was really, really reluctant – in a way that I can't recall witnessing over anything else. John: 'What should I talk about?' Me: 'Absolutely anything. Yourself, INLOGOV, what you and other colleagues do. Something local governmenty would be good.' John: 'Would I have to have slides?' Me: 'No, but if you'd like to, I'll prepare them for you.' It was quite unlike any other conversations I ever had with him. I did persuade him, though, for probably the first two or three years – just one brief appearance per student intake. But he'd go to such lengths to postpone or try to get out of it altogether that eventually I gave up – and would end up telling the students myself about 'the man'.

I miss him, and Theresa, and – at least intermittently – the undergrad students, who collectively not only changed the JG Smith Building but, for that quarter-century or so, INLOGOV itself, and, I like to think, enriched it.

[Citizenship: Rights, Community and Participation](#) (Prior, Stewart and Walsh, 1995)  
(Summary by Chris Game)

This book was one of the more tangible products of the **Public Policy Partnership** – a 1990s collaboration between Birmingham City Council and the University's School of Public Policy, of which INLOGOV and CURS (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies) were members. The PPP's aim was to bring together the two organisations' differing knowledge and experience, and thereby contribute to the development of useful theory and effective practice in public policy and management.

**David Prior**, at the time of this publication, was Head of Policy Development in the Council's Strategic Management Department and – to legitimise the time away from his desk, lecturing and writing on the Edgbaston campus – also an INLOGOV Honorary Lecturer. Among his later publications, joint-edited with Marian Barnes, was the popular 2009 paperback *Subversive Citizens: Power, Agency and Resistance in Public Services*.

**Kieron Walsh**, INLOGOV Professor of Public Sector Management as the book was being written, died almost as it was published, aged just 46. He had joined INLOGOV in 1975 and quickly became one of its most influential and popular figures, and an active contributor to an exceptionally wide range of the Institute's work: from AMDP, through serious research, to the undergraduate programme. He was to have become Head of Department. He produced key reports on citizenship and competition, sat on [Sir] Simon Jenkins' 1993-95 Commission for Local Democracy, which declared Britain 'now the least democratic country of any democracy in Europe', and was unique and irreplaceable.

The book starts from the premise that public services were undergoing massive change, with long-established assumptions being challenged, increasingly in terms of **citizenship** – 'a concept which has traditionally played much less of a part in British political analysis than it has in other countries'. Topical note: then as today, the British are, of course, subjects of the Crown, rather than autonomous citizens.

The Citizen's Charter, a John Major initiative (1991) – and its various offspring Charters, for schools, housing tenants, motorists, *et al.* – had become the centerpiece of what the Government reckoned was a public service revolution. The debate about how government should be organised, managed and what it should do had become about the nature of citizenship. The development of a market-based approach to public service management embodied assumptions about what it means to be a citizen, about the meaning of citizenship.

The book's central theme/argument is that this reconceptualising of citizenship recasts its traditionally understood collective rights and obligations as rights of individual consumers, and correspondingly the traditional obligations of government as tasks of management. Both collective rights and individual obligations become secondary issues in this approach. The citizen moves from being a member of a community to being an agent in a public sector market.

To argue, however, simply for a reversal of these trends and ways of thinking would imply that all was well with the traditional organisation of the welfare state, which it clearly wasn't. It was adequate, given the circumstances of the immediate post-war years, but not to the more complex and multi-cultural nature of contemporary social organisation and a more difficult economy.

The market-oriented approach, on the other hand – constituting citizens as customers – was too limited. Hence the authors' alternative: community government. Not 'communitarian', based on an undifferentiated concept of community, and dominance of society over the individual. Rather, to see society as comprising individuals and groups with differing, and potentially conflicting, interests and purposes, with government's role being to make possible a pluralistic society in which contrasting ends and purposes are resolved in collective decision – the recognition of difference, not an assumption of an undifferentiated community.

Individual chapters, possibly – though not stylistically obviously – written individually by the three authors, include: ‘The meaning of citizenship’, ‘Charterism and the public service’, ‘The limits of citizenship as consumerism’, ‘Citizens and democracy’, ‘Organising for citizenship’, and ‘Opening up Government’.

### [The Case for Local Government](#) (Jones and Stewart, 1983)

**This was a personal choice – earned by doing lots of typing! I arrived at INLOGOV – so unfamiliar with what it was about that I remember rehearsing the order of the syllables in the acronym – at the end of May 1979. As described elsewhere in this Festschrift, I had one very specific responsibility – to enable INLOGOV to launch in two years’ time its first undergraduate degree, for which John, with mixed backing from other staff members, had gained the University’s conditional go-ahead.**

**But other stuff too was happening that May 1979. The political world – and most relevantly the local government part of that world – was shortly to change dramatically. And arguably the best person around to understand what was happening and write both comprehensively and, every bit as important, comprehensibly about that local government dimension was the one to whom I owed my INLOGOV existence. The first edition of *The Case for Local Government* (Allen & Unwin, 1981) by George Jones and John Stewart, and their previously published journal articles that went into it, would become my proverbial bible.**

**It was a unique partnership: nearly four decades of genuinely collaborative writing, always in that authorial order, invariably thoughtful and structured, frequently trenchant and passionate, resulting in getting on for 300 articles in the *Local Government Chronicle*, *Municipal Journal* and numerous other publications ... but just two books, literally bookending the writing relationship.**

**Actually, one clause in that last paragraph isn’t quite true. There was at least one exception to the authorial order, in the second of those two books: *Centralisation, Devolution and the Future of Local Government in England* by Steve Leach, John Stewart and George Jones (Routledge, 2018), the date possibly providing the clue. George Jones had died in the April of the previous year – after the book’s completion, but before its publication.**

**The J&S template had been set nearly four decades earlier, at the very start of the collaboration as described elsewhere in this Festschrift: the 1981 letter to *TheTimes*, the early stream of columns in the *Local Government Chronicle* ... and the first edition of *The Case for Local Government*.**

**The two editions adopt the same model: chapters based around articles and papers written mainly by the authors, a few by and with colleagues – Royston Greenwood and John Raine from INLOGOV, LSE’s Tony Travers – ‘in defence of local government against attacks of recent years’. Those ‘recent years’, of course, would be roughly, say, from 1979 through the early ‘80s – early Thatcherism and from the outset her Government’s disregard for and centralist rejection of the ‘Layfield Analysis’, to which J & S had been key contributors.**

The policy details are all there, of course: GREAs (Grant-Related Expenditure Assessments, for younger colleagues), rate-capping, expenditure targets, 'over-spending' penalties, the 'false trails'. But plenty of positive proposals too, several as relevant today as back then: the desired relationship between central and local government, appropriate taxation to promote local accountability, alternatives to domestic rates, a local income tax.

And, of course, a J&S favourite: if a written constitution isn't realistically even a starter, then a Charter for Local Government ought to be an imperative: setting out the necessary conditions for the operation of effective local government, and specifying the principles that should guide central government intervention in the affairs and activities of local authorities. Should, by some almost unimaginable happenstance, such constitutional clarification ever be called for, it's been available here for decades.

There would be, in this tribute, 'A Case for Quoting Great Chunks' of *The Case for Local Government* – not, obviously, because its aspirations and recommendations have been realised, but because they so manifestly haven't. I've limited myself, though, to extracts from the summary Chapter 14 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (1985) edition: 'The Future of Local Government', partly because it at least touches on something that John, George, and also Theresa, felt particularly strongly about: the lost case for a local government of health. (CG)

### **A Fundamental Reorganisation Next Time**

The issue of local government reorganisation is once again on the political agenda – in part because of the weaknesses of the 1974 reorganisation, but also because of the impact on the working of local government of the continuing changes in central-local relations and in the financial conditions of local government. Local government's very pattern and the relationship between local and central government have been so destabilised by the continuing changes in the financial conditions under which authorities operate that the only prospect for responsible local government may well be a new settlement embedded in a new structural reorganisation.

The need to strengthen local government now requires a further reorganisation. To restore local government to a strong position, it is important to ensure that the new structure is geared to meet changes and challenges over the coming decades, and that it is clearly seen as the government of the local community, so that local loyalties can sustain it.

For that purpose, reorganisation must be fundamental. This reorganisation:

1. Should not start from the functions that local government happens to have at present, but should consider the whole range of functions by which a local community is governed, including those currently exercised by health authorities, the Manpower Services Commission, central government departments, and other public organisations.
2. Should not start from the working of local government in its present form, but should seek to make local government an instrument of learning, of response, and of change, grounded in public acceptance.

3. Should not ignore the problems produced by the fragmentation of local community government, but should seek – as a prime requirement of local accountability, responsiveness and effective action – a comprehensive structure in which division of responsibility is minimised.
4. Should not deal with structure and functions in isolation from the resources with which those functions are carried out, but should ensure that the system of local government finance sustains local accountability.
5. Should not ignore the central-local relationship, but should establish stability in the relationship as a foundation for responsible and responsive decision-making at the local level.
6. Should not ignore the essential need for local accountability and responsiveness, but should establish these goals at the heart of the review, recognising that they may involve a new electoral process for local government.

These requirements are critical for a major reorganisation designed to establish local government on a stable basis, capable of tackling imaginatively and effectively the complex problems of society in the future.

### **The Functions of Local Government**

In 1974 no consideration was given to the functions appropriate to local government. The [Lord Redcliffe-Maud] Royal Commission on Local Government [in England, 1966-69] was restricted by its terms of reference to the existing functions of local government, and the White Papers prepared by both the Labour Government in 1970 and the Conservative Government in 1971 looked no further. Indeed, in 1974 the only significant change in the functions of local government was the removal from local authorities of certain health and water responsibilities, which had been the subject of separate functional reviews. The functions which happened to be part of local government at that time were merely reparcelled and shared out between the two new tiers of local government.

Any new reorganisation must take as its starting point not the particular set of functions that local government happens to exercise when reorganisation takes place, but should consider what functions are appropriate to local government. The need is for a reorganisation that will consider both the whole system of local community government, covering the total complex of governing agencies which work within, and have an impact upon, local communities, as well as the place that local authorities can and should play within that system.

Two significant insights about local government should guide that consideration: one focuses on particular functions; the other on the interrelationship between functions. The first is that local government is a means through which choices are made; the second is that choices are about priorities between many services.

Local government is an instrument for making local choice. To give a function to a local authority is to give it to a government body constituted for local choice. Other public authorities may have some capacity for choice. But these other agencies of government, be they local offices of departments of state or specially constituted boards, are not – as local authorities are – constituted for local choice about policy, expenditure and taxation. The fact of election legitimises that capacity for choice and gives the local authority the right and the responsibility to make a choice.

Local choice can be sensitive to local needs and problems, and to the circumstances in which those needs and problems have to be met. Local choice can reflect values held by those responsible for decisions made by the local authority. Local choice can express local initiative and innovation. A function can and should be given to local government when a significant field for local choice can be defined. Local choice derives from the local authority being an elected authority, but local authorities have another characteristic which provides a criterion for the allocation of functions.

Local authorities carry out not one but many functions. They are able, therefore, to consider and plan for the interaction of their many services in dealing with the problems their communities face. They have to choose between the resources they devote to different functions. They have to go beyond decisions on how to use resources to meet a single main purpose, and make the difficult choice between, for example, education and the care of the aged – whether that choice is made explicitly or implicitly.

Our local government system is organised around the functional principle. It emphasises separate functions, rather than the interaction between them. Below Cabinet level, only at local authority level does there exist the capacity to consider and appraise not one function but many. Local government is expressed in choices involving many functions. In considering the functions of local authorities it is important to consider them not as separate but as a set, and to explore the inter-relationships between them.

### **Recommendations**

Our aim is to create new and powerful local authorities, strengthened as the basic units and agencies of local community government by three major functions being deeply embedded in the working of local communities and closely interrelated to other functions of local authorities being made their responsibility.

1. Local authorities should be given responsibility for the local government of health, taking over the responsibility of district health authorities.
2. The case here lies in the need for local choice, at present imperfectly expressed through appointed district health authorities, which have formal authority for local choice, but lack the legitimacy that comes from the fact of election.
3. The case for local choice in health is deeply embedded in the complexity of social learning. The government of health confronts complex problems, and for the solution of

those problems learning is required. From the diversity of local choice social learning can the more readily advance.

4. Furthermore, the government of health is artificially separated in the present system of local community government from the government of education and social services, and indeed of other main community services, such as housing. By a reintegration of the health services into the mainstream of community government, the potential of local community government to meet and to direct change will be significantly increased.
5. The training functions of the Manpower Services Commission should be transferred to local authorities. The case here lies directly in their interrelationship with the existing education functions of local government. The recent growth of the Commission's training responsibilities has led to dangerous divisions emerging in the government of education. Training and education need to be considered together.
6. The probation service is directly controlled by local authorities in Scotland, but not in England and Wales. Its close inter-relationship with social services suggests the probation service should be made a direct responsibility of local authorities.

These are our main recommendations for the extension of the direct functions of local authorities. Other sets of functions may also be thought suitable for transfer to local government. Some examples:

- The remaining functions of the Manpower Services Commission – e.g. job centres, special programmes for the unemployed.
- Inspectorate functions – e.g. the factory and alkali inspectorates, controlled by the Health and Safety Executive.
- The functions of the Water Authorities – water supply and sewage disposal – that they carried out before reorganisation.
- The distribution functions of gas and electricity authorities.
- The police service could be made clearly and unambiguously the responsibility of local government.

These services are the main candidates for direct transfer. However, because a function should not be directly transferred does not mean that the local authority need have no responsibility in relation to that function. We need to look at local authorities in a new way and not just as providers of services.

### **A New Conception of Local Government**

Local authorities have been considered in the past as direct providers of services. To give a local authority responsibility for a function has been to give it responsibility for direct provision.

A local authority can, however, have responsibilities for a function even when it is not providing that function itself. Such responsibilities have not been widely developed in this country, but flow naturally from a concept of **the local authority as the basic unit of local**

**community government** with a wide-ranging concern for its area and involvement in many activities of government. This view does not require the local authority to have direct involvement in each and every activity of government, but it can have a role as representative of the consumer and of recipients of the services provided by other agencies, both public and private. Short of direct provision, local authority involvement in a service can take many different forms.

A local authority can be given a formal right of consultation on the activities of specified governmental agencies in its area. It can be given statutory rights to require of non-elected governmental agencies a level of service above that normally provided and laid down nationally. It can be given a formal right of inquiry into the activities of other government bodies in its area.

It can also extend its direct provision of services to the local community in new and different ways. It might 'sell' to the private sector many of its services and professional expertise, in such fields as management techniques, auditing, accounting and financial control, legal advice, public relations, architectural and engineering skills – all of which may be especially valuable for small commercial, service and industrial concerns, unable to provide a full range of such facilities themselves. Local government enterprise can thus assist private enterprise.

A local authority as the representative body of the local community can act as the protector of its citizens in their capacity as consumers of privately provided services. It can promote consumer rights by monitoring the private sector, disseminating information, investigating complaints, and generally acting as the guardian of the welfare of consumers.

Finally, that general concern should be given expression in the conferment upon local authorities of a **general competence** to provide services and to carry out any function not specifically prohibited by law. Such a provision would remove present restrictions based on the *ultra vires* principle, and would thereby enable the local authority to respond through local initiative to the diverse problems and needs of its area and of the local community within it. It would encourage local authority enterprise and experiment.

What is being put forward is a very different conception of a local authority from that of being a provider of a collection of services congregated together by historical accident or for administrative convenience. It is the conception of a local authority with a wide-ranging responsibility and concern for the social, economic and physical well-being of its area and for those who live and work within it. Such a local authority with a capacity for local choice requires a new approach to the nature of its responsibilities. **Local government would be local community government.**

**Unitary authorities, responsible for the provision of all local government services within a designated area, have had a patchy history in the UK generally, but particularly in recent decades in England. The 1972 Local Government Act abolished the effectively unitary system of county boroughs in England's larger towns and replaced it with a two-tier structure of county and district/borough councils in all areas of the country except the Isles of Scilly. Just 14 years later, in 1986 – when this *MJ* article was written – a broadly unitary system was introduced in Greater London and six metropolitan counties (including the West Midlands), the former upper-tier authorities being abolished and their functions split between central government, the metropolitan borough councils, and various joint boards. Since 1986 there have been numerous bursts of structural reform, several resulting progressively (if that's not too laden a term) in the creation of steadily more unitary authorities of varying structures and sizes – most recently in Dorset (2019), Buckinghamshire (2020), and Northamptonshire (2021) – without perhaps the public engagement or even awareness for which J&S might have hoped for their 'pioneering' model.**

**By chance, however, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, just as this tribute was being prepared, a further four were officially added to the growing collection, now numbering 62 – more, possibly, than even some followers of local government business would guess. The new unitary authorities – North Yorkshire (8 councils, pop. 818,000), Somerset (5 councils, pop. 545,000), and two in Cumbria (Cumberland 4 councils, 275,000; Westmorland & Furness 3 councils, 225,000) – were officially added to the growing collection.**

**It will still require the realisation of the unitarisation proposals in a further few counties before England overtakes the joint Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish total of 65 – yet one feels Jones and Stewart would approve of at least the direction of travel, if not the speed, waiting time, and maybe even some of the arguments deployed. (CG)**

The *MJ* (5 September) provided a service for local government by drawing attention to an important and far-from-abstract debate. It is about the value of a unitary, as against a multi-tiered, system of local government. The outcome of this debate will determine the future structure of local government in this country.

Redcliffe-Maud's advocacy of the former, except in three metropolitan areas [Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool], was defeated when local government was reorganised in the 1970s, and looks as if it will remain rejected if the current ideas of the Labour and Alliance parties are implemented.

The present Conservative Government has retained a two-tier system outside the metropolitan areas, but has come upon the unitary model in these metropolitan areas following the recent abolition of the GLC and metropolitan county councils. This act had destabilised local government, putting back on to the political agenda the structure of local government.

It has fuelled the unitary ambitions of the larger shire districts which used to be county boroughs. They are, after all, in many cases larger in population than some of the metropolitan districts, yet the former do not possess the full range of local government responsibilities enjoyed by the latter.

### **Election**

Whichever party forms the next Government, it will have to take critical decisions about the future structure of local government, including whether it wants a unitary or multi-tiered system.

The *MJ* article is an important contribution to the debate, but its argument is wrong. It opposes vigorously the unitary concept, for long the basis of Britain's most enterprising local authorities, as Redcliffe-Maud recognised, and urges the merits of a multi-tiered structure.

We agree that there is no ideal structure and that trade-offs have to be made. Gaining on one dimension means losing another. The multi-tier system entails losses, which have to be taken into account as much as the gains.

But the chief defect of the article is its distortion of our view of the unitary authority. The article describes it as easy and simple, and implies that we think it is a panacea. It would, the article asserts, be a rigid model, the same for all parts of the country, constraining local authorities to be of a similar size of population.

That is not our approach. We seek to tailor the structure of local government to the nature of local communities, and since local communities vary in size, we recognise that the unitary authorities will vary in size too. We have suggested a range of between 150,000 to 500,000, with some even bigger where the community is larger – and perhaps we should allow also for smaller ones as well<sup>7</sup>.

### **Approach**

Thus our approach is not so much dictated by the needs of particular services, nor even by the needs of parts of particular services, but by the need to relate local authority boundaries to areas that are perceived to be local communities.

If you begin from the needs of particular services, you reach no conclusion about the appropriate size or shape of a local government unit, since each service is stated to have its own most convenient area – although the basis of such a statement may lie more in the ambitions of professionals than in the needs of the public.

The objective of local government is not to meet the needs of particular services, but to provide for local community government – that is, for linking all community services to the needs of local citizens as they want them fulfilled. It is to enable local choices to be made over public services.

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<sup>7</sup> The present range is from North Yorkshire's 818,000 to Rutland's 41,000 and Hartlepool's 92,000.

The *MJ* article suffers from a limited vision about local authorities. It still conceives of a local authority as merely a provider of services, not as local government; and it assumes the necessity of the local authority to provide these services directly itself.

This attitude requires the local authority to be self-sufficient, employing itself all the staff who deliver the services.

With this view a local authority will tend to bigness, because it will have to be sufficiently large to provide each service itself. However, our approach has been to cast doubt on the notion of the self-sufficient local authority.

We have advocated that the authority should set objectives, make contracts with the providers and monitor their performance to ensure quality control, thus enabling the community to obtain the services it wants. The responsibility laid on the local authority will be to secure the provision of a service, not necessarily to provide it directly itself.

This suggestion does not mean acceptance of the uniformity of private contracting. It could acquire the services it wants in a flexible way from a variety of bodies, both public and private, whichever offered the service best in the judgement of the local authority. There could be provision by private sector firms, other local authorities, joint boards, voluntary organisations, public boards, trades union collectives, or co-operative associations. But the local authority would make the decision on what would be provided and it could, of course, determine to provide the service itself if it wanted.

We urge that the choice about who provides be made locally and not imposed as the Government now threatens by insisting that local authorities must contract out to the private sector. Our approach offers the prospect of more variety and flexibility than the *MJ*'s suggested two-tier system into which all services would have to be squeezed.

The *MJ*'s prediction is that a consequence of the adoption of the unitary system would be a loss by local government of its services to *ad hoc* boards. However, with a two-tier system, the move away from local authorities to *ad hoc* agencies has been considerable. Our proposals enable local authorities to remain close to what are felt to be genuinely local communities and for services to be provided in the most efficient and flexible ways, with great scope for local diversity and experiment.

Our local unitary authorities are not artificial entities, but expressions of local community consciousness. The public would see clearly who is responsible. Buck-passing between tiers would not be possible. Local accountability would be enhanced.

Our system would allow local authorities voluntarily, where they thought fit, to combine in joint activities with their neighbours, without having to be corralled into regions. They could also decentralise within their areas where it was felt appropriate, to decentralised administrative management structures or to parish-type bodies, if people wanted and were prepared to pay for them.

This system is not rigid and it imposes no uniformity. It enables the fulfilment of a function curiously neglected in the *MJ* article: governing. It seems to be suggested that the only role of local government is to express interests. That, however, is only one function of an elected authority.

In addition to this ask of articulating interests, it has to reach authoritative decisions about what has to be done. It must decide what is to be binding on the community, that is: to govern.

Our system allows wide scope both for the expression of a variety of opinions and for the resolution of conflicts about what should be done by the elected representatives of the community, in the interest not of particular groups, areas or service providers, but of the community as a whole. These decisions will be taken after due consideration of the special interests which will have been given more chances to express their views than in an intractable two-tier system.

The article's final point is to counsel caution because it cannot find a comparable foreign country which has adopted our model. But that is no reason why we should not be pioneering. We do not have to do something only if others have done it before. One day others may come to us to learn from our enterprise.

Our unitary system promotes diversity and encourages experiment. It does not confine local government within a uniform mould, as the suggested model does.

[The Public Service Orientation: Issues and Dilemmas](#) (Stewart and Clarke, 1987) (summary by Chris Game)

Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, in his recent *Municipal Journal* tribute ('An advocate for localism', 18 April, 2023), recalled how, like so many others:

'I first got to know John – a truly amazing educator – when I attended sessions that he ran for senior local government officers at West Hills in Birmingham in the late 1980s. By then his seminal work, *Management in Local Government: A Viewpoint* [1971 – see separate review] had been published a decade earlier ... but remains topical even now, 50 years later.'

The one other publication Quirk mentions specifically was:

'an important book, with Michael Clarke, on *Public Service Orientation: Issues and Dilemmas* [1987]. This argued that many councils had become over-fixated with their internal challenges and had to re-learn how to put service to the public first. He then developed this argument through hundreds of seminars over the next ten years ...'

It's not important, but the remembered 'book' title was, at least originally, a Stewart and Clarke article in the *Public Administration* journal (Vol. 65, Summer 1987). It was based on a

series of four 1985/86 Clarke and Stewart papers on aspects of the public service orientation produced for and circulated to local authorities by the Local Government Training Board (LGTB) that, when combined, did constitute one of the first academic book-length products of their writing partnership. Given the lifelong impression it made on no doubt other perceptive readers like Quirk, it seemed worth at least a brief summary.

The Public Service Orientation (PSO), explain S & C, sets service for the public as *the* key organisational value. Easily overlooked under the pressures of resource constraint, yet it is the core sense of purpose that can drive forward management and motivate their staff. The article describes the PSO, then focuses on the major issues arising from its adoption: service *for*, not to, the public; the ways in which the PSO differs from consumerism; and its relationship to the political process. Finally, the article surveys some of the dilemmas it potentially poses.

In summary, the PSO recognises that:

- a local authority's activities exist to provide services to the public.
- it will be judged by the quality of service provided within the resources available.
- the service provided is only of real value if it is of value to those for whom it is provided, who are ...
- customers demanding high quality service.
- quality of service demands closeness to the customer.

The PSO, therefore, challenges those senior managers who:

- judge the quality of service by organisational or professional standards, rather than by customer standards.
- devote little time to learning about the customer away from the central office in which they work.
- provide no training for staff on quality of customer service.
- do not involve customers in decisions on the services provided or projects undertaken.
- have not considered whether reception arrangements help the customer.

There was, to quote a phrase, plenty more where that came from, in the book and certainly in a 10-week West Hills programme – enough in some cases evidently to last a lifetime.

[Citizenship and Government: The Challenge for Management in the Public Domain](#) (Ranson and Stewart, 1989) (introduction by Stewart Ranson)

The decades following the Second War have been called by Daniel Picketty 'le trentes glorieuse'. This encompassed the growth of full employment, the vast expansion of educational opportunity and social justice. Great progress was made to defeating Beveridge's five evils: want, ignorance, insecurity, idleness, disease.

But the oil crisis of the early 1970's generated unemployment and inflation. Conflict ensued about the appropriate remedy: continuing Keynesian demand management or the innovation of neoliberalism, liberating individuals to pursue their own interests in market-place competition. Capital ensured the triumph of neoliberalism.

This political framework has, however, generated accelerating degrees of inequality and poverty leading to the return of Beveridge's five evils. Moreover, privatising public services such as social care has failed with calamitous consequences for the well-being of service users and patients, while privatising the utilities has too often led to squalor in the management of water supply.

As the 2020's unfold the argument has grown for restoring the value and commitment to the public good, if fairness and wellbeing in society, for the many not just the few, is to be realised.

The significance of this paper on 'Citizenship and governance' is that it sets out a conceptual and theoretical framework to understand and promote the public good that can meet the challenges of management in the polity. This case was timely in 1989; it is now an urgent need to lead the reform of the polity for a just society. The domains of the public and private are different. Analysis of management which obscures the distinctive characteristics will miss the significance of each domain. This paper seeks to analyse the values, institutional conditions and management tasks which are unique to the public domain. It is argued the distinctive challenge for the public domain derives from the duality of publicness: the need to enable citizens in their plurality to express their contribution to the life of the community and out of that plurality, to enable a process of collective choice and the government of action in the public interest to take place.

The original article is available free of charge here:

[Citizenship and Government: The Challenge for Management in the Public Domain, Stewart Ranson and John Stewart, Vol 37 Issue 1 Political Studies.](#)

## Part 3: The 1990s

During the 1990s, John and his co-writers turned their attention to how local areas are governed democratically. This section explores their work on hung councils, accountability and executive mayors. It also asks how government can tackle the 'wicked issues' which are so important in local areas.

A selection of books which John (co-)authored



### [The Politics of Hung Authorities](#) (Leach and Stewart, 1992) (Summary by Chris Game)

Today nearly 30% of English local authorities are 'NOC'; add in Scotland and Wales and it's 43% - and, if the figures are tabulated, the NOC initialism may well not even be explained. No need: councils in which NO single party has a majority of seats and thereby OVERALL CONTROL have become commonplace. In the early 1980s things were different. During that decade there was a marked increase in the number of these 'hung' local authorities, particularly counties, and certainly at INLOGOV they became a topic of fascination and study, of which this joint-authored book was but one example.

In England the 1980s increase was due largely to the increased strength of third-party politics, and particularly the Liberal/Social Democratic Party Alliance – demonstrated initially

in the 1985 County Council elections, following which over half the counties became 'hung', and then in subsequent years' elections.

This book described the different patterns of 'hungness' that evolved and the response of local authorities to what for large numbers of councillors and officers was a new situation, stripped of the certainties of majority control and calling for new patterns of behaviour. It showed, unsurprisingly, that different authorities responded differently, some achieving a good deal of cooperation between the political party groups, others less so, to the extent, in some instances, of major conflicts.

The book explored the reasons for these differences. It argued that the experience of hung authorities can increase understanding of the political management of local authorities and of political behaviour at the local level. It showed that, while there are clear differences between the issues raised by hung authorities and those faced in a hung Parliament – like those in February 1974 and again in 1976 – in neither case can it be assumed that past ways of working can continue unchanged in the hung situation.

[Professor Drives Another Lesson Home in Quest for Accountability](#) (Donaldson, 1994)

**Independent on Sunday** journalist, Liza Donaldson, explored John's 'way of touching off debate' and in particular his role as a 'quango critic' in this 1994 article. (JL)

Who is Professor John Stewart? Some would say he is public management's answer to television's private company 'troubleshooter', Sir John Harvey Jones. But this management guru has no flair for flamboyant ties, but for ideas that leap the divide between the public and private sector, stirring debate along the way.

Well known in public management circles as a riveting speaker, top-flight trainer, and longstanding Professor of Local Government and Administration at the University of Birmingham, Stewart stirred up a tempest recently with his warning that a non-elected élite is taking control of many public services, creating a 'crisis of accountability'.

The growth of what he calls 'quangoland' is turning the clock back more than 100 years to the 1880s, he says – before control of local services was transferred from magistrates to locally elected councils. He used the phrase '**the new magistracy**' to describe the new lay élite that is being appointed centrally by the [Major] Government.

His ideas, released just over a year ago in a paper entitled 'Accountability to the Public' for the European Policy Forum, a right-wing think-tank, created a storm of interest among opinion formers in a way that observers say demonstrates his abilities to seize on the key public service issues of the day.

Professor Stewart's analysis – that 'a non-elected élite are assuming responsibility for a large part of local governance' on the boards of health authorities, hospital and housing trusts, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), boards of governors of grant-maintained

schools, and the governing bodies of colleges of education and further education – has also clearly stung Government ministers.

The rub for them was Professor Stewart's argument that: 'There is no sense in which those appointed can be regarded as locally accountable ... membership of these bodies is largely unknown locally'. He says they are not as open as councils, nor are they governed, as councils are, by legislation on access to information, external scrutiny and sanctions of surcharge. In sum: 'Accountability, such as it is, rests upon the accountability of these bodies to central government.'

William Waldegrave, Minister for Public Services and Science, went on the offensive, denying that public service changes were creating a 'democratic deficit', and claiming that Government reforms had provided 'democratic gain'. The minister put it this way: 'The key point is not whether those who run the services are elected, but whether they are producer or consumer responsive'.

Professor Stewart, who by no means believes all the changes are for the worse, does not accept that accountability to the customer can be substituted for public accountability. 'It can't, because accountability to the customer could mean that customers get what they want. They can't, because services have to be rationed and supplied within public policy – something the Government itself believes in.'

He cites the national curriculum as an example of public policy that restricts pure customer choice in education. The other fatal flaw in Mr Waldegrave's arguments, he says, is to suggest that elected accountability and responsiveness to the customer are incompatible opposites. Professor Stewart says both are possible and adds: 'There is no evidence elected bodies are less responsive than public bodies.'

If the customer is king, he says, they have the ultimate choice, where local councillors are concerned, of removing them through the ballot box – whereas they cannot remove appointees. Only ministers and their acolytes can do that, he says, but adds: 'Ministers of any party have never been very ready to accept responsibility for failure in policy or action, even when directly under their control.' They are even less likely to accept it, he says, 'for all that is done by the growing panoply of appointed boards.'

So what is the worst and best outcome of this crisis? Professor Stewart believes that, if quangoland continues to grow, things will go spectacularly wrong. He says the cases examined by the Public Accounts Committee in its recent report are a taster.

Further, and more seriously, the public will see the Government as remote, and apathy will grow. But, most crucially, ministers will be so overburdened that government will become ineffective and out-of-touch, promulgating disastrous policies such as the former poll tax and the current reorganisation of local government.

But he adds: 'I'm an optimist, so I see the situation reversing at some time in the future.' Other democratic countries, he says, are recognising that a decentralised system responds better to complex modern societies.

Professor Stewart would like to see the 'reinventing of public accountability'. One way would be to have quango members stand for election. But a more fundamental problem has to be solved, he says – strengthening people's commitment to voting at local level. Poor turnout for local elections of 40 to 45 per cent of voters in this country is a serious management problem – but rarely seen as such, he says. It should be addressed by examining why people do not vote and by solutions such as better advertising, postal ballots (a tried and tested method in New Zealand) and public juries to contribute to debate on public policy problems between elections (as piloted in Germany).

We should aim, he says, at 'creating a habit of citizenship'.

Ministers are clearly not amused by what Graham Mather, President of the European Policy Forum, calls the 'sparkling lucidity' of Professor Stewart's academic arguments. Guru or no, his government appointments came to an abrupt end in 1981. It was probably no surprise to the outspoken Labour supporter (his wife, Theresa, is Leader of Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council).

The professor, who reasons that the private sector management model is often inappropriate and too narrow to embrace all of public management (it does not, he says, include issues like equity or the management of rationing), has done his fair share of provoking and making life uncomfortable for policy shapers. It is a role, he suggests implicitly, that he also would play were a Liberal or Labour government in power.

His verdict, as he embarks on what may be his last overview of councils in his 65<sup>th</sup> year, is that public management has improved. It has moved away from administration and professional enclaves to a situation where there now is a commitment to management training and development, and to the job of management itself.

The public and society have come to reject what public bureaucracies determined for them, with the Citizen's Charter<sup>8</sup> acting as a stimulus for encouraging and disseminating good practice such as quality management in the health service and the customer contracts pioneered by York City Council.

Proper management, he asserts, starts from an analysis of the nature of the task, rather than the imposition of a blanket and possibly inappropriate strategy.

The job of public services is to go in quest of its holy grail – 'the commonweal'. He concludes: 'I don't think you will ever find it, but you should always search for it.'

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<sup>8</sup> The Citizen's Charter was launched by PM John Major in the first year of his premiership in July 1991. It aimed to improve UK public services by: making administration more accountable and user-focused; ensuring transparency and the right to information; improving civil service performance; and adopting a 'stakeholder approach'.

[In Search of Local Government](#) (Local Government Management, Winter 1995/6)

**The very idea of John ‘putting his feet up’ in the metaphorical sense, as opposed to literally, is almost laughable, and also in the context of this overview, a little misleading. His final recorded local authority visit in the Training/Management Board set wouldn’t be for another couple of years, but this article, in the LGMB’s own quarterly publication, is the best available summary of *Local Government Today: An Observer’s View*, the publication that prompted it. (CG)**

For 12 years I have been visiting local authorities on behalf of first the Local Government Training Board and then the LGMB. I have made nearly 300 visits, interviewing leaders, chief executives and chief officers, taking part in discussions, seeing new developments and studying documents. The results are to be seen in over 50 reports published by the LGMB or its predecessor.

The report, *Local Government Today*, is based in part on my conclusions from these visits, and in particular on a special series of visits in the last two years designed to provide an overall appraisal of the state of local government and of its organisation and management. It records the conclusions of a journey in search of local government.

Three impressions stand out. The first is of the **dynamism** of local government. Local authorities have faced challenge and change, but have adapted to them and have led the way to new possibilities. The second, as always, is of the **diversity** of local government, despite the effect of much legislation designed to impose uniformity. Diversity is the strength of local government, for from diversity comes learning and development.

The third is the point at which danger lies. As the attention of local government has turned away from real issues to the struggles over local government reorganisation or the implementation of ever-changing legislation on compulsory competitive tendering, one sees an institution uncertain of its role. The certainties of the past are far behind. A local authority cannot see its role as satisfied by the direct provision of services, even though that role is embedded in traditional structures of departments and committees. From **uncertainty of role** can, however, come a search for a new role.

Local government is aspiring to a new role in, and as, **community government**. In part this is a response to the reduction of in the traditional role of local authorities as agencies for the provision of services. But it is also, and importantly, a recognition of the complexity of problems facing local communities. Towns and cities face major transformations as past roles are challenged by economic and social change. Rural areas too face challenges. There are **‘wicked issues’** that do not fit traditional patterns of management or the new specification of contracts. They include:

- the environmental problem and the aspiration to sustainable development;
- problems of law and order and the aspiration to safer communities;
- discrimination and the aspiration to an equitable society.

These and many other issues cannot be resolved by any one agency or organisation; least of all in the fragmented structure that has been built for community government. These are issues whose nature is imperfectly understood and to which the response is unclear. For local communities the government of uncertainty is the new reality, replacing the government of certainty. A **learning government** is needed for a learning society.

The aspiration to community government is a response to the new reality. It means that a local authority sees its role as involving:

- a wide-ranging concern for the area and the communities that constitute it;
- a readiness to work in many different ways, providing services directly or indirectly, influencing and networking and giving expression to local choice and local voice;
- closeness to the diverse communities that are found within the area and to the citizens who constitute them, for that is the basis for a learning government.

To achieve the full development of their role in community government, local authorities require legislative change, but even in its absence they can develop towards that goal. That requires an understanding of the diversity that is local government, for local government is the government of difference both of need and aspiration. It requires too a recognition of the diversity within, for any community of place is marked by the differing needs and aspirations of the diverse communities within it.

To develop its role in community government will place new demands on the organisation and management of local government. There have been major changes in the management of local government. It is almost as if there is a **new doctrine** as to how local authorities should be managed that is accepted to a greater or lesser extent by most authorities.

A local authority will:

- have a statement of organisation values;
- emphasise closeness to the customer and quality of service;
- have a hierarchy of plans leading to targets for the managers of cost centres to whom management and financial responsibility is delegated;
- be subject to processes of performance management;
- develop management by contract, separating client and contractor;
- put relations between services and central departments on a quasi-trading basis and through service-level agreements.

There are strengths in these approaches, but there are also **problems**. There is a stress on the customer, but not on the citizen. The measurement of performance is more common than the judgement of performance. Learning does not form easily across the barrier between client and contractor.

The danger is that the organisation and management of local government is being based on an assumed model of how the private sector is managed, rather than on the distinctive purposes, conditions and tasks of local government. Often that model does not correspond to the reality of management in the public sector, for it assumes that there is one way of managing, whereas effective management depends upon analysis of the management situation, and each situation has its own requirements.

The test of the emerging organisation and management is whether it lets local authorities achieve an effective role in community government, and by that test it is inadequate. It has **no place for citizenship** and creates barriers to it. The report focuses, therefore, on what is required if organisation and management are to support the role of community government. It does not necessarily reject recent changes, but suggests change is required – even **change in the language**.

The report uses language that may surprise because it is not the usual language of management and reflect subjects not normally covered in management courses. **Balancing objectives** may be more at the heart of management for community governance than setting objectives. **Equity** is at least as important as economy, efficiency and effectiveness. **Boundary spanning** is required to overcome the fragmentation within and without. Although unfamiliar in much discussion of management, the language may better fit the reality of local government than the language of business planning, so often inappropriately used for public services.

The report sets out new directions for organisation and management in local government. It suggests each authority has to give its own **meaning to community government**, since there are a range of possibilities. Community leadership, community partnership and community advocacy are all possible at the macro (or local authority) level as councils engage with other agencies and organisations within their area.

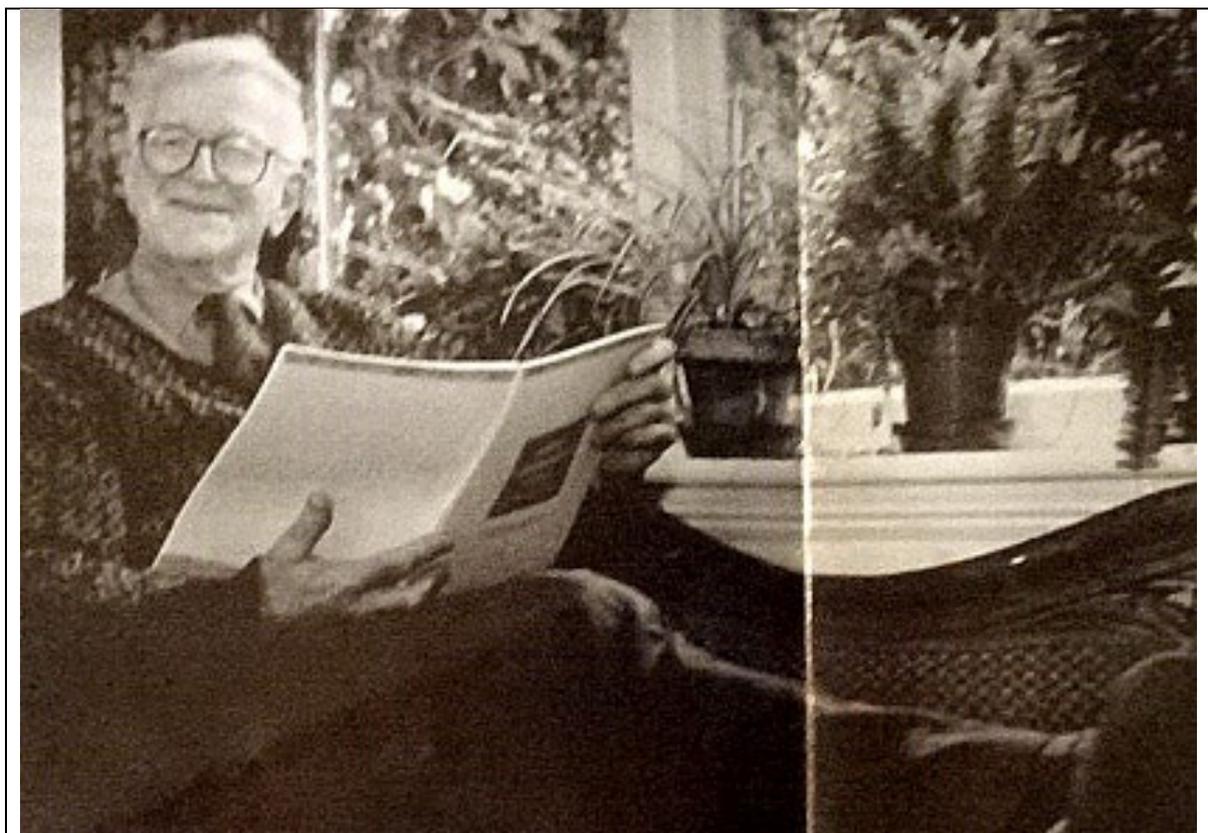
It is when the complexity of interests and views, of values and objectives that face a local authority in community governance are recognised that the phrase ‘knotty problems’ springs to mind. Solutions do not come easily from pre-set objectives. The task involves **balancing, reconciling and judging**, which is at the heart of the role of the local authority.

That role is only justified by an effective local democracy. The report discusses how management in local government can help us realise that aim. **Innovation in democratic practice** is required and the organisation of local government should enable the representative role in judging community needs.

In judgement the elected representative seeks to realise values for the communities within. For many **the value of equity** will be a guiding value, although there can be legitimate disagreement on the meaning to be given to it. Marketing for equity may be the guiding principle for the management of rationing – itself a neglected subject for management courses, though not for management action.

Developing management practice should be informed by the requirements of community government, of which the key is **organisational learning** with and for the communities. Performance indicators can be used for learning, if it is recognised they are more often a basis for judgement rather than a measure of success. Strategic management can guide organisational learning, if it is not reduced to a routine that denies learning.

The report is not easy to read, because it extends the language and subjects of management from the familiar to the unfamiliar. It shows the possibility of management and organisation in local government being guided by the concept of community government. This requires a recognition of diversity for the learning government, based on an effective citizenship.



## Executive Mayors for Britain? (Clarke *et al.*, 1996) (Summary by Chris Game)

This was one of a small number of UoB publications around this time, another being Clarke and Stewart's *Diversity and Choice: Reflections on the Role of the Chief Executive in Local Government* (1998). This one stemmed from a Wast Hills House event involving senior local government figures and INLOGOV staff members, the overall project being funded by Capita, the international business process outsourcing company.

The intention of the report – published four years before directly elected Mayors (aka Metro Mayors) would be introduced first in London then in other mainly metropolitan areas – was to promote 'serious and open debate' about the principle and practice of executive mayors in UK local government. There was felt to be 'much misunderstanding' about the idea, and 'a tendency to simplify the issues'. Also, the need to have a better appreciation of both the experience of executive mayors in other countries and the practical consequences of their introduction into councils in England, Scotland and Wales.

The arguments for introducing executive mayors had five principal strands:

- to achieve national prominence for local political leaders and to strengthen the local government side of the central-local relationship
- to re-invigorate local democracy
- to strengthen community leadership
- to reinforce internal leadership
- to change the impact of party politics.

Evidence drawn from other systems is inevitably varied, but does not suggest a case beyond contention. When it comes to looking at different forms of political executive, there are two key variables:

- whether the executive is individual or collective
- whether directly elected or appointed.

This report's emphasis is on the individual executive, elected or appointed – though it also touches on the collective executive and notes a number of other approaches, all distinct from the traditional British council/committee model:

- the US, Germany, Italy, Israel and Japan (directly elected executive mayor)
- France, Spain and Portugal (appointed executive mayor)
- Denmark, Belgium, Holland and Canada (collective executive)
- the Nordic countries, Ireland and Switzerland.

The wide diversity of approach shows both the weakness of the shorthand 'elected mayor' and the importance of 'getting under the skin' of the debate. There are no simple,

generalisable models, and the transfer of experience must take into account the nature and role of the particular local government system.

The overseas examples show up some popular misconceptions in the British debate. The executive may be more powerful than the leadership of a contemporary British council, even where there is a clear majority, **but** the council is still an important body, councillors have a key role, and committees will still feature. There will be new ways of working, new roles and new agendas – but not an end to the representative council.

[Handling the ‘Wicked Issues’ – A Challenge for Government](#) (Clarke, Clarke and Stewart, 1997)

**The idea of ‘Wicked Issues’ wasn’t a new or original concept, even in public administration, but I clearly remember the Monday morning, probably early 1990s, on which John insisted on regaling anyone he could pin down along the top corridor of the J G Smith Building with how he’d spent the weekend working out how to apply it to local government. Which he subsequently did – at pretty well any available opportunity: in a series of INLOGOV/School of Public Policy papers on *Innovation in Democratic Practice*, in this severely edited version of an 8,000-word paper with the late Prof. Michael Clarke, then Head of the School, and, of course in his own regular appearances at the ‘management development programmes’ he gently chides *en passant*. (CG)**

### **What are the ‘Wicked Issues’?**

The ‘wicked issue’ has become part of the contemporary currency of public administration and management. The concept refers to various policy challenges: ‘wicked’ not in the sense of evil, but as a crossword addict or mathematician might use it, suggesting an issue or problem difficult to resolve – something different to the conventional issues of public policy, which are solved or tamed, or at least capable of solution or taming, by a mixture of common sense and ingenuity.

They suggest a special class of policy problem: one without an obvious or established (even common sense) solution, defying normal understanding – and often not sitting conveniently within the responsibilities of any one organisation; seemingly difficult or intractable problems for governments to solve, and yet which they have to face.

Such issues include:

- environmental issues and an aspiration to sustainable development;
- problems of crime and an aspiration to safe communities;
- problems of discrimination and an aspiration to an equitable society;
- problems of poverty and an aspiration to more meaningful life.

Almost by definition, wicked problems cannot be dealt with as management traditionally deals with public policy problems. They challenge existing patterns of organisation and management. Organisations are usually structured by – or themselves structure – problems and defined solutions. For wicked problems there is no accepted solution; what is required is a learning approach which must not be confined and should be prepared to think and accept the unthinkable. Such an approach comprises several distinct requirements, outlined in the remainder of this paper.

### **Holistic – not linear or partial – thinking**

Much of the emphasis in current management thinking – public and private – is on setting objectives and relating activities to them. We organise and think in a focused way. Problems are identified and established solutions applied; operational plans set objectives and the targets necessary to achieve them. Such approaches focus management attention: a framework of certainty is provided and aims defined, ensuring that activities are clearly related to them. They have the strength of ordered, linear thinking; but the weakness, when confronting the wicked issues, of focusing attention on the immediate objectives and the routine issues and solutions, neglecting the impact upon other objectives and on the unexpected. Linear thinking gets in the way of seeing the unexpected.

The handling of wicked issues therefore requires holistic, rather than linear, thinking – capable of grasping the big picture, including the inter-relationships between objectives and the interaction between activities and different objectives. To achieve this holistic view will demand new forms of thinking, expressed in **new forms of management analysis**. The emphasis of such analysis will be on the interactions as much as on direct actions, and it will highlight the impact of activities on particular wicked issues.

It is worth noting that what happens in most **management development programmes** probably encourages linear thinking to the neglect of holistic thinking by emphasising focus, performance and the like. Programmes need to emphasise more the interactions and inter-relationships between activities and between objectives. Exercises could be used to seek out the hidden interactions.

### **Thinking and Working Across Organisational Boundaries**

A crucial part of handling wicked issues involves crossing organisational boundaries and drawing many organisations into the frame – which raises issues both between organisations and within them. Organisations cannot work effectively together if they do not work effectively within themselves. Inter-organisational working will be limited by the inadequacy of intra-organisational working. Again, it is important to think holistically.

The skills of inter-organisational working are very different from those required for working within organisational boundaries, and the handling of wicked issues in an interorganisational context will involve a number of stages:

- the search to define the issue, recognising that it may be incapable of obvious definition;

- awareness building, to gain acceptance of the issues on organisational agendas, as a basis for development;
- building understanding and commitment to inter-organisational working amongst the organisations concerned;
- exploration of the issue, the different understandings of it, and the possible approaches which may be adopted;
- building institutions and processes to enable effective inter-organisational working as the issue is faced; building processes for learning from each other as approaches are developed.

There is a choice to be made about how far **structures and processes** should be built to encourage joint working on an issue, or reliance simply placed on the relevant organisations working separately but maintaining contact with each other as appropriate. On many issues the latter is likely to be inadequate. At the local level the solution may be to set up bodies such as an Environmental Forum, a strategy group for community safety, and so on. Such bodies could be supported by a joint officer unit, if there is a readiness to finance it.

It will be obvious that handling wicked issues will almost certainly require capacity for inter-organisational working between different levels of government. This brings with it the need for a particular kind of inter-organisational understanding. Working between levels of government has often proved particularly difficult. The key, as in other relationships, should be a **learning relationship** between central government and government at the local level. Jointly both sides should confront issues on which there is imperfect understanding and/or uncertainty as to how to proceed.

### **Involving the public**

An important part of handling many wicked issues will be finding ways of drawing in the public. Many of the traditional processes of representative democracy are inadequate in this context, because they have tended to assume the passive citizen, whose role is often reduced to no more than that of the elector making a choice between competing parties every few years.

The process of representation has been reduced to the passive roles of electing or being a representative, rather than an involvement in an active process of deliberation between the representative and those represented. It is all too easy to see the handling of wicked issues as a top-down process. Learning and problem-solving may come as well – or better – from the bottom up.

The distinction between participatory democracy and representative democracy is a reflection of this passive (latter) concept. Participatory democracy, far from being opposed to representative democracy, can be seen as necessary to it – giving expression to an active concept of representation. Rather than doing away with the need for representative democracy, it ensures that the elected representatives are informed by the views of those

they represent. It does not lessen the roles of the elected representative; it may even emphasise the importance of their position.

Wicked issues require the involvement of citizens for two reasons. Because the wicked issues represent intractable problems imperfectly understood, it is important that they are widely discussed, both to deepen understanding and to draw upon **the experience of those who face these problems** at their point of greatest impact. The voices of those who live in crime-ridden areas, of those who know discrimination, or of those who face poverty, have to be heard if the reality of the issues is to be understood.

Secondly, many of the wicked issues, as we have said, require **changes in the way people behave**. Those changes cannot be readily be imposed on people. Thus, the changes that may be required to meet the threats to the environment will require ways of life that are not so wasteful of non-renewable resources or contribute so much pollution. Behaviours will only be changed if issues are widely understood, discussed and owned. Public participation is therefore a necessary part of gaining this and so of handling the wicked issues.

### **Conclusion: A New Style of Governing**

Handling the wicked issues requires a new style of governing. It involves a capacity to work across organisational boundaries, to think holistically, and to involve the public. It means different ways of:

- **understanding** – recognising that understanding is partial at best; seeing through a variety of perspectives; being wary of apparent certainty and accepting uncertainty;
- **thinking** – pursuing the holistic and not being seduced by the linear; looking for the interactions and inter-relationships;
- **working** – refusing to be trapped by the obvious and conventional; tolerating not knowing; and accepting different perspectives, approaches and styles;
- **involving** – drawing in as wide a range of organisations and interests as possible and being open to participation;
- **learning** – about the issues and about the responses, encouraging experiment and diversity, and requiring reflection. Learning government is a pre-requisite for handling wicked issues.

**John and Michael Clarke**

Michael moved to UoB in 1993 as Professor of Public Policy, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and then Deputy to the Vice-Chancellor.



## Part 4: The Stewart / Jones Partnership

After meeting during their contributions to the Layfield Commission, the late LSE Professor George Jones and John developed a prolific writing partnership over several decades which produced scores of high profile articles. This section includes an early review of their partnership, some examples of their hard hitting analysis, and their later reflections on the lessons from four decades of local government research.

Jones and Stewart – ‘Freedom Fighters’ (Fitzgerald, 1982)

**INLOGOV’s 2004 publication *Celebration of the 25 Year Writing Partnership of George Jones and John Stewart*, edited by Sir Michael Lyons and Alison Crow, was an estimable production in several ways: an interesting mix of a selection of their recent (2001-03) writings plus ‘commentary and analysis’ – by no means all effusive – from colleagues. It also included their very first published collaboration – a joint letter to *The Times* in May 1981 on the ‘Future of Local Government’ - and their first letter and article in the *Local Government Chronicle* for which they would subsequently write a regular joint column.**

**It didn’t, however, include the first Jones & Stewart profile, by LGC’s Maureen Fitzgerald, which appeared just 18 months later (October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1982), preceded by short biographies, John’s being also included here after the main article, not least because I was so taken with all the ‘Mr’s. (CG)**

Professors George Jones and John Stewart are a formidable duo of freedom fighters for local government.

Positive characters and great individualists, they have co-operated successfully over the past 18 months in a campaign against centralism, exposing fallacies in assertions of the need for central control over local government’s own revenue expenditure and the setting of targets by central government for individual local authorities.

The Jones/Stewart campaign opened with a joint letter in *The Times* of 26<sup>th</sup> May 1981 and was followed by others in *Financial Times* and *The Guardian*. Joint articles in newspapers and periodicals came next with *Local Government Chronicle* publishing the first on 7 August 1981, a week ahead of *The Times*. Since then, the pair have continued to write jointly for LGC and have sparkled in the new Agenda feature on policy and politics, providing chief officers and councillors with useful briefing material.

They scarcely knew each other before they met on the Layfield Committee in 1976. Each had read the other’s books, but this had not brought a realisation of shared views.

Mr Jones, for example, had read everything Mr Stewart had written – including his early series of seven trail-blazer articles in LGC which were later assembled into a local government best-seller and led to his being closely identified with corporate management.

Mr Jones said: ‘Up to the time of meeting him John seemed too much of a champion of the officer against the member. But he directed me to passages in his book which laid emphasis on the political side and I realised I had been unfair. Since then I know John has stressed that corporate management and planning is intended to assist political control and direction.

‘It was not until we worked together on the Layfield Committee that we realised we were very much on the same wavelength. When he spoke, I found myself agreeing.’

Mr Stewart spoke with relish of the present campaign. ‘I like George tremendously. We work well together. Joint writing isn’t easy but we complement each other. One of my weaknesses is to be too loose in writing; so, frequently though not invariably, I do the first draft; George then tightens it up. Some pieces go between us several times, some only once. Sometimes George does the first draft. We don’t meet very often – George comes up to INLOGOV to lecture and occasionally we get together in London when I’m down; but mainly we communicate by phone.’

Both come from Oxford. George Jones, with a Welsh father, was encouraged by his history master to try for an exhibition at Jesus College, which attracts talented Welshmen.

Mr Stewart, the elder, preceded him, going up to Balliol in 1949 after national service in Iraq, where he contracted polio which has left him with a slight limp. He was active in university politics and was secretary of the Oxford Liberal Club, but changed his politics to Labour – largely because he didn’t agree with Jeremy Thorpe.

Michael Heseltine was a contemporary of John Stewart – both were officials of the Oxford Union – John Stewart was secretary and treasurer and Mr Heseltine became president.

They started off as allies. ‘We put on a great campaign to raise the subscription to the Union for the first time in 100 years. Our joint policy was based on expansion rather than cut-back and included an idea for turning cellars into nightclubs’, Mr Stewart recalls.

‘But in the end we clashed. At my last meeting of the Union I moved and carried a resolution abolishing the requirement for officers of the Union and speakers to wear evening dress at debates. Michael then called a poll of the Union – which you are entitled to do. After I had left Oxford he sent me a telegram to tell me that as a result my resolution had been overturned’.

## Many misfortunes

The battle continues, but John Stewart does not regard Michael Heseltine as quite the most disastrous Environment Secretary [1979-83]: 'Michael brings many misfortunes upon himself, largely because he has gone for short- rather than long-term solutions. His big mistake, the mistake from which everything else derives, is that he introduced the Local Government, Planning and Land Bill within six months of coming into office without using the machinery which was already available.

'This Cabinet is anti-local government; there is nothing unique in that. But I think Michael actually sees some merit in local government.'

George Jones was active from an early age in local Labour politics, in Wolverhampton in the mid-1950s. He reacted strongly against the local MP – Enoch Powell – and he felt the Conservatives were leading the country to ruin at that time.

'It was through being on my ward and general management committees that I first developed my interest in local government, because I was always meeting councillors', he recalls.

'Then later, at Oxford, I was active in the Labour Party club and at group meetings – but I found the Union debates somewhat superficial.'

When he got a scholarship to do postgraduate work at Nuffield College, he came under the influence of Sir Norman Chester, whose advice, crucial at the outset of Mr Jones' career, was also sought by John Stewart before he took the job at INLOGOV in 1966.

For his doctorate Mr Jones originally intended to prepare a study of his home town of Wolverhampton in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But Norman Chester persuaded him to look rather more at contemporary development. So he produced a study of how party politics had evolved in Wolverhampton between 1888 and 1960.

At this time George Jones was interested in a political career. He got himself adopted as Parliamentary Labour candidate for Kidderminster, where the sitting Member was the redoubtable Sir Gerald Nabarro (of the whiskers).

'But soon after I became a candidate Sir Gerald had a stroke which incapacitated him. He retired and I was faced with a very charming local Conservative, Tatton Brinton, who ran one of the big carpet factories in the town. In the 1964 Election obviously I lost – it was a safe Conservative seat.

'By then my appetite for going into politics had become dulled because the leadership of the Labour Party had changed. I was a very devoted follower of Hugh Gaitskell. He had been almost an idol to me.

'He was a regular visitor to Oxford and encouraged young Labour supporters: he was a man of great inspiration and vision; his early death was a great blow to me personally and politically.

'I wasn't prepared to make the sacrifices – which you must make as you start to climb the ladder of politics – for Harold Wilson. I feared the direction in which he'd lead the party.

'I moved from Oxford to Leeds for three years, where the Professor was the late Harry Hanson – a great student of public administration. He widened my interests in the problems of nationalised industries and central government. My focus of interest became government. The other area I do research in is local government, so I have these two strings to my bow. I transformed my thesis on Wolverhampton into a book and then a job came up in London.

'It had always been my intention to go to London. If you study British politics and government, it is the place to be – you're so close to the sources and the people. The London School of Economics to my mind is unrivalled for the study of politics and government, and we have what I regard as the best social services library in England.'

At the LSE he mainly teaches public administration and policy and comparative local government. The workload has increased with the expenditure cuts and because LSE depends so much on foreign students.

John Stewart was at Nuffield in the college's early days. He prepared a thesis on pressure groups, then considered an unusual subject to tackle – he was inspired towards it by a chapter in one of the books of the late Sir Ivor Jennings (a former editor of *Local Government Chronicle*).

After Mr Stewart left the academic world for the National Coal Board his interest in active politics waned. His years as an official with the National Coal Board in the Yorkshire division frequently brought him into contact with another future member of the Layfield Committee – Sir Jack Smart [first Leader of Wakefield Council].

'I had to negotiate with Jack. He hasn't changed and it's one of the failures of Michael Heseltine not to be able to come to terms with him. Jack is a man who is looking for a reasonable proposition and, once he has got it, he will make it stick; he is very much the style of Labour trade union leader you can trust immensely. He'll fight for his position, but once a deal is done, he'll stick to it.

'INLOGOV – which had been built up by Henry Maddick at Birmingham University – was entirely international when I joined from the NCB, but it was understood it would develop an activity for British local government – the [local government] Associations had come together to support what was then considered to be a daring experiment.'

The most precious asset of INLOGOV is its degree of contact with local government officers, the fact that when we go to an authority, most people have been on one of our courses – often the 10-week course; it gives a feel for the situation.'

George Jones has positive views on the role of the local authority Associations, comparing them with their counterparts abroad, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, where a much wider range of services and activities is provided for member authorities, helping them to operate effectively though being smaller than British local authorities.

But his main message for the Associations is: 'pull out of the entanglement with the centre and make your voice heard loud and clear – and, if at all possible, work together. One of the most depressing things in recent years has been the division among the local authority Associations.'

Nevertheless, Mr Jones feels local government is now increasingly challenging the UK's long tradition of moving towards the centre. 'This is particularly so in a line I've pressed – which is that it doesn't matter that local government expenditure is a big part of public expenditure, so long as it is financed by local taxes; then there's no macroeconomic concern for the government.'

### *Biography of Professor John Stewart*

JOHN STEWART was appointed Professor of Local Government and Administration at Birmingham University in 1971, and since 1976 has been Director of the University's Institute of Local Government Studies.

He was born and brought up in Stockport, where his Scottish father, a doctor, lectured in anatomy at the university. On leaving school he went into national service and was stationed in Iraq before going up to Oxford as a commoner [student paying their own 'tuition and commons', unlike the financially supported scholars and exhibitioners]. He had intended to read history, but found he had developed a strong interest in contemporary issues and in his first few weeks switched to PPE [Politics, Philosophy and Economics].

Mr Stewart was active in the Oxford Union, becoming both Secretary and Treasurer. His post-graduate work at Nuffield College, then newly established, was subsequently published under the title *British Pressure Groups: Their role in relation to the House of Commons*. In 1954 he went into industrial relations at the National Coal Board, where he was head of the wages and control branch of the Yorkshire division.

Mr Stewart was first appointed to INLOGOV in 1966 to launch management courses for local government officers. He developed the 10-week Advanced Management course, around which grew a wide programme of courses and seminars for local government and research into its problems, which has led to the Institute being recognised as a National Management Centre for British local government.

He has published many articles on management in both academic and practitioner journals and his early series in *Local Government Chronicle* achieved further success when it later appeared in book form.

Mr Stewart is married, and has four grown-up children: two daughters and two sons. His hobby is said to be following the misfortunes of the Labour Party - and, according to his colleagues, he plays an excellent game of chess.

[Stay on the Council!](#) (Jones and Stewart, 1997)

**The 2019 General Election returned 140 first-time MPs, of whom at least a third had served as 'principal authority' councillors and most were still doing so. Headed alphabetically by Nickie Aiken, the then serving Conservative Leader of Westminster City Council, they comprised 32 Conservatives, 11 Labour, 8 Scottish Nationalists, 3 Lib Dems, and 6 others. Local government clearly remains a popular Commons recruiter, including for senior councillors. Aiken resigned as Council Leader almost immediately, and as a councillor in 2022. Likewise, here in Birmingham, Gary Sambrook, Conservative MP for Northfield since 2019, stood down after completing his second term as a Kingstanding councillor. It seems completely understandable, but Jones and Stewart sought to differ ... as did at least some MPs and councils. (CG)**

A high proportion of new Members of Parliament are councillors. They should remain on their councils, at least until they are given Ministerial jobs or are removed by their local voters. There are considerable strengths to one person having this dual mandate, both nationally and locally. It enables local and national politics to be linked together.

At the heart of many of the problems of central-local relationships in the UK is the high degree of separation between the two worlds of local and national politics, which leads to a lack of mutual understanding. If the newly elected MPs retained their membership of local councils, and their leading positions in them, they could help build a new understanding in central-local relationships.

It would be to the benefit of local government to have its voice heard loud and clear at the centre. Government would be directly informed of the views of local councillors from different parts of the country. Leading Parliamentarians and Ministers would be people who had maintained close working contacts with local authorities, and would bring to their discussions of national policy the perspectives and practical experiences of those who knew the implications of national policies for local areas.

In the past too many councillors who became MPs severed their connections to local government and increasingly adopted a centralist approach to local authorities. Their attitudes seemed determined more by the culture of the village of Whitehall to which they now gave their loyalty than by the feelings of the local communities they claimed to represent.

This proposal would strengthen the contribution of backbenchers in Parliament. By retaining their role in local government they would be in immediate touch with the daily problems of policy and practice. The life of a backbencher is not fully satisfying. Those backbenchers who have served as councillors frequently report how bored they are and lacking in influence, compared to their time in local government. By bringing their current local

government experience to bear in debates, and in shaping and scrutinising policy and its implementation, they would find they had a more satisfying role in Westminster.

Parliament would be immensely enhanced, if it could draw directly on the current knowledge of local councillors. They, after all, are elected to serve on their local authorities to promote the public interest, and their views are therefore more valuable, and should be heeded, than those of the sectional interest groups who grind particular axes and whose lobbying has helped damage the reputation of the House of Commons.

The Government party would find it an advantage to have its huge number of backbenchers usefully occupied with their local activities, rather than becoming bored, frustrated and disgruntled.

There are some practical problems to be faced, especially when an MP represents a constituency different from where he or she is a councillor, and where the authority is far from London. These problems can be overcome and, in any case, do not apply to everyone.

#### **'Double Devolution – Seeds of Change' (Jones and Stewart, 2006)**

**Following Labour's third General Election victory in May 2005, PM Tony Blair created a new Cabinet-level position in UK Government: Minister of State for Communities and Local Government – to which he somewhat unexpectedly appointed not David Blunkett, as quite widely speculated, but David Miliband, whose contrasting pre-Parliamentary background was in the Institute for Public Policy Research, rather than local government.**

**The following February, Miliband outlined proposals for a 'Double Devolution' of power to local councils and then to local communities. Councils, of which there would eventually be just a single tier, would take on a more strategic role, rather than delivering all services themselves. Citizens, at 'grassroots' level, should be empowered to change services, and where residents were critical of local council services, such as rubbish collection, the contractors should be changed. Residents and outside experts should be involved in making decisions about council services and citizens' juries should help to decide on grants – and plenty more besides. What would be the Government's third local government White Paper (*'Strong and Prosperous Communities'*) was promised for that summer, but by that time Miliband had been reshuffled and replaced by Ruth Kelly. In any case, Jones and Stewart had got their views of this earnest but barely half-baked idea in first. (CG)**

*'Representative democracy is not just about making representations; it is about decisions being made by elected representatives.'*

Double devolution was advocated by David Miliband as a major theme in the forthcoming White Paper on local government. Now that Ruth Kelly has taken over his responsibility in the new-style Department for Communities and Local Government, she has to work out her approach to the concept – and her first step must be to clarify what double devolution means in practice.

In theory, it seems a straightforward concept: the Government will devolve powers to local authorities on the understanding that they will in turn devolve powers to neighbourhoods and to local people. However, in practice, it is not so clear and there are numerous potential problems.

The first issue is whether central government is willing to devolve powers to local authorities to the same extent as it expects them to devolve powers to neighbourhoods. Councils appear to be expected to give neighbourhoods powers over new functions, yet there is no indication that central government intends to devolve powers over new functions to local authorities. Double devolution, by linking the two changes together, implies an equivalence that might not emerge in practice.

It seems more likely that the Government is planning to reduce controls over local authorities' existing functions. That would be welcome but is not equivalent to what local authorities are expected to devolve to neighbourhoods. The word devolution itself is ambiguous in this context: does it mean that local authorities give up all responsibility for a function, or does it mean delegation, or can it mean either?

There are also questions about which level functions should be devolved to. The neighbourhood will not always be appropriate, because what happens in one can affect others. Transport policy, for example, could not be devolved down to this level.

In other cases, the neighbourhood might not encompass the relevant community. It is too readily assumed that there is a community of interest in each neighbourhood, although in practice they vary greatly in composition and social life. For many issues, the relevant community might be one sharing a particular concern, background or interest, which comprises a relatively small minority of people in any one neighbourhood. An over-emphasis on neighbourhoods might overlook more relevant communities.

It is also unclear exactly what a neighbourhood is. It has been suggested that the government would not expect one to exceed 5,000 people, and by implication most would be smaller. If that were the case, many neighbourhoods would not contain – and therefore would not have responsibility for – important local facilities such as libraries or leisure centres. Other functions already have their own forms of devolution, of which education is the clearest example.

Given all these considerations, one is left wondering which functions will be devolved. Some suggest neighbourhoods will be given the right to trigger scrutiny or investigations into issues affecting their areas. But what will this mean in practice? Should one neighbourhood be able to trigger an investigation into an aspect of the work of a hospital trust that is of concern to the whole area? It might prove necessary to have limitations on such triggers, and there is always the problem of whether scrutiny and investigation will lead to action. Expectations that are unfulfilled can too easily lead to frustration.

In many parts of the country, neighbourhoods might not be the natural unit for expressing a sense of community. For example, few parishes see themselves as neighbourhoods. A town with a population of 10,000, with its own town council, might not wish to be divided into neighbourhoods. Although there are signs that the Government recognises the need for diversity, the implications have still to be worked through.

An important issue is what devolution would mean for the governance of an area. Four main possibilities have been put forward, but more could be considered, including combinations of these:

- A **parish council** with its statutory status, its powers and its right to raise revenues through the council tax;
- An **elected neighbourhood council** to which the council devolves (or delegates) powers and to which it allocates resources;
- A **neighbourhood forum** composed of representatives of community groups with the right to be consulted, make representations and to trigger investigations and scrutiny;
- An **area committee** of the local authority composed of councillors for the area, with delegated powers and resources allocated by the council.

The strength of the parish council compared to the elected neighbourhood council is that the former has a defined status, powers in its own right, and powers of taxation. The elected neighbourhood council is dependent on the local authority for resources.

Neighbourhood forums have value as sounding boards for local people, but they are unlikely to maintain their vitality if they cannot be assured their views will have an impact. Frustration will soon kill enthusiasm and leave participation restricted to a few people speaking on behalf of sectional interests.

Area committees established within the constitution of the council have a valuable role. These are growing in number and scope as councils recognise the need to balance centralisation within the new political structures with decentralisation in the working of the council. Area committees tend to operate on a larger scale than that envisaged for neighbourhood governance. If neighbourhood governance is created separately from area committees, the relationship between these two needs to be clear, since it raises the issue of how elected councillors for an area are to relate to the different structures.

The councillor as the elected representative for an area is an asset that should be built on. Whatever approach to neighbourhood governance is adopted, the councillors' position should be strengthened. Many are frustrated by the limitations of their role in the new political structures. They should play a central role in developments in neighbourhood governance, which are closely related to their representative role, providing a potentially important link between those developments and the council. For that to develop, there must be means to ensure that action follows representation.

The danger is that, whatever triggers are given to the new forms of neighbourhood governance, action might not follow investigation or scrutiny, and decisions might not follow representation. Representative democracy is not just about making representations; it is about decisions being made by elected representatives. Developments in neighbourhood governance can strengthen or weaken representative democracy by enhancing or bypassing the elected representative. The test is whether they do the first or the second.

One issue that is rarely discussed is the role of political parties. One senses that many people welcome neighbourhood governance because it might be free of political parties, but is that realistic where elections are involved? The experience of urban parish councils is that political parties often control them. The implications of political parties contesting neighbourhood elections, either officially or informally, have to be taken into account in any serious discussion.

There is also a danger wherever there is small-scale governance with access to significant resources. Vibrant neighbourhoods might not have any problems. But if the structure falls into the hands of a few individuals with limited public interest, which is always a possibility with a small population, issues of public probity can arise. Safeguards will have to be carefully designed to provide the necessary controls without imposing an overgrown series of bureaucratic controls.

Various other matters need to be tackled, including the nature of the officer support to be given. The White Paper must move beyond broad concepts to the problems of practice. What is clear, however, is that there can be no one answer to these issues. The diversity faced requires a diversity of responses.

Only in time will answers be found to these questions and we will then learn what double devolution means in practice. At present, we believe nobody knows, something Ruth Kelly will have to change. That is why we need exploration not imposition.

**In 2008, John and George revisited the debate about elected Mayors**

**Directly elected mayors [DEMs] are back on the agenda. The think-tanks, the IPPR and the NLGN<sup>9</sup>, are urging more of them, and the Government is planning a new drive for more. Yet the evidence is clear. Generally, the public and local authorities do not want them.**

If the public want them, they can have them now. If 5% of the electorate – hardly a high target – demand a referendum by signing a petition, and a majority says yes, a DEM is introduced. Under the Act of 2000, a referendum had to be held if the local authority wanted a DEM, and the Government could itself call for a referendum. These provisions were examples of community empowerment.

Local people could have a DEM if they wished, but could not have one imposed on them. It is strange that the IPPR, advocate of community empowerment, argues that DEMs should be imposed not merely on local authorities but also on their citizens. The Government is considering imposing referendums<sup>10</sup>, even when there has been no petition. It is also contemplating favourable financial resources or additional powers for authorities which adopt the model.

Such an approach is wrong, in principle, treating local authorities differently according to their decisions on internal management – best described as bribery – to get what the Government wants. Why is minister Hazel Blears<sup>11</sup> retreating from community empowerment on this issue? There is only one answer. Community empowerment has not generally come up with the answer the Government wants.

Of the 35 referendums held so far, all but 12 have rejected the proposal<sup>12</sup>, including the referendum imposed by the Government on Southwark, which also had the lowest turnout. Not a surprising outcome in a referendum imposed by Whitehall. In Birmingham, with a campaign launched by the leading evening newspaper, which printed petition forms each evening over a prolonged period, the petition fell far short of the required 5%. There is no widespread public demand for DEMs.

The main argument against the DEM model is its concentration of power in a single person. The assumption of the advocates of DEMs is that there must be individual leadership rather than collective or team leadership. But collective leadership can explore policy from different perspectives, and consider possible impacts of policy in a variety of contexts,

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<sup>9</sup> The Institute for Public Policy Research – self-described as the UK's leading progressive think tank; the New Local Government Network – an independent think tank with 'a mission to unlock community power ... and help renew local government'.

<sup>10</sup> Which the 2010 Conservative Government would do, requiring 10 councils outside London to hold referendums in May 2012, all but one (Bristol) rejecting at the time a directly elected mayoralty.

<sup>11</sup> Labour Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, 2007-09.

<sup>12</sup> The 12 were Watford, Doncaster, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Middlesbrough, N Tyneside (2001); Newham, Bedford, Hackney, Mansfield, Stockton-on-Tees (2002); Torbay (2005). Hartlepool and Stockton have since voted to scrap the post. There are currently 24 Directly Elected Mayors in total.

spotting pitfalls ahead and the consequences for different people and groups. Adapting a phrase of the academic, [Sir] Geoff Mulgan: 'All of us are smarter than any one of us.'<sup>13</sup>

Another major objection is the lack of a power of recall for a new election by public petition for a new election, or by a council's vote of no-confidence where a DEM has proved bad or ineffective during the four-year term. The British model does not allow for the removal of a DEM until the next election. Many states in the US and Germany and other countries have a power of recall leading to a new election, either through a petition from the people or a council vote of no-confidence with a special majority. Advocates of community empowerment should give councils the vote of no-confidence and enable the people to petition to submit the DEM to a new election.

The call to Impose DEMs everywhere has been stimulated by the campaign for London's DEM, the attention paid by the media, and the national interest generated. The turnout in London of 45.3% is said to clinch the argument in favour, even though it is only just above the 44% turnout in the 1981 elections for the Greater London Council.

The proper comparison is not with a GLA drenched in national publicity but with the 12 local authorities with DEM systems. The national media have paid little attention to them. Their turnout has, on average, been no greater and no less than in other equivalent local authorities. The Electoral Reform Society, in 2007, reported that DEM elections 'did not raise turnout much from that attained in normal local elections, and when an entirely separate election [was held], turnout was abysmal'.

Another argument used to justify spreading DEMs is that it gives prominence to the holder of the office, whose name is likely to be known to more people than is the name of the leader of the authority. This observation is probably true, although not to the extent commonly implied. However, it is not a necessary benefit. It is unlikely that a single person could represent the diverse complexities of large urban areas better than collective leadership.

Advocates assert that DEMs lead to better performance than other authorities but produce no evidence comparing them. DEMs vary in their impact on the performance of authorities. There will be more or less effective authorities as there are more or less effective DEMs. Comparison of the CPA scores<sup>14</sup> of London, metropolitan and unitary authorities shows that three of the nine authorities with DEMs are four star – 33% – while the other authorities without DEMs have 35% with four stars. There is nothing special about performance in DEM authorities.

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<sup>13</sup> Sir Geoff Mulgan CBE was Director of Tony Blair's PM's Strategy Unit.

<sup>14</sup> Comprehensive Performance Assessment – the system introduced by the Audit Commission in 2002 for assessing the performance of each local authority and the services they provided.

Advocates also think a DEM will produce more innovation than in leader/cabinet systems but again, produce no evidence comparing DEMs with other authorities. The way to encourage innovation by local authorities is for central government to adopt a new mind-set and not seek to impose its solutions everywhere. It should recognise local authorities as social laboratories through which society can learn about policy successes and failures.

From the above, it might be thought we are totally against DEMs. We do not oppose DEMs, only their imposition. It is one option open to local authorities. We favour local choice on how authorities are run. One of us (George Jones) was the chair of constitutional commissions in Hackney and Brent, exploring different models. Hackney chose a DEM and Brent the leader/cabinet model.

Hackney's choice arose because there was no chance of a stable, single-party majority or stable coalition, so a DEM was needed to enable governing to be carried on. Its key local conditions were the bitter inter and intra-party fighting. It needed one person to cut through the intense factionalism and paralysis. Brent rejected the DEM because its parties were more evenly balanced and not as internally divided, so all could look forward to becoming a majority.

Some champions of DEMs praise other European countries for having DEMs. They often say that France and Spain have DEMs. They do not. They have executive mayors, who are elected, together with the other councillors, on a list system of PR, and the mayor is chosen by the council at its first meeting after the election. In the Netherlands and Belgium, the mayor is chosen by central government. Scandinavia operates the leader/cabinet model. Italy and Germany do have DEMs.

We favour greater choice than at present, not merely in the range of options but within options. In DEM systems, we favour the right of recall and of greater powers for the council. Such an approach would be a commitment to devolution to local authorities and empowerment to local communities.

To impose DEMs or referendums where the public have not sought them would be a move away from devolution and community empowerment, and should be rejected by a Secretary of State who believes in those aims. She should oppose financial and other inducements for local authorities and local citizens to adopt proposals they have previously turned down. And she should support local decision-making.

Devolution to local government means accepting that local councils and local citizens make their own choices, and that those choices may not be the ones central government wants.

[Then and Now, and The Future](#) (Jones and Stewart, 2008)

**Alan Bennett's first West End play, in 1968, was entitled '40 Years On', set in a British public school, Albion House, and in part noting the changes that had happened to the country since the end of the 1914-18 War. His biographer, Peter Wolfe, described the play as 'nostalgic and astringent, elegiac and unsettling' - rather like this 40-year reflection. (CG)**

As we enter a new year, after more than 40 years of studying local government, we have been reflecting on: (a) has local government a future? and (b) why should anyone now want to be a councillor?

Sometimes, our answers have been pessimistic. Sometimes, optimistic. On black days, we feel local government has become so enfeebled that there is no worthwhile role. People have better things to do with that scarcest resource of all – their time – than become a councillor.

But, perhaps there are new, challenging tasks for councillors – shaping the development of their localities, and improving the wellbeing of the communities and people they represent.

In our quest for answers, we want to look at what has been happening to local government over the past 40 years, contrasting then and now. There are six aspects:

### **The words**

In the past, we talked of local government. Now, the word is local governance. This switch signifies a reduction in the status and power of the elected council. Once it was seen as the clear government of a local area. Now it is as about one governmental institution among many varied kinds at the local level.

### **The agenda**

In the past, the local authority had a distinct, separate organisational identity, with a clear set of responsibilities, mainly about providing services. This agenda was simple – service delivery through its own employees. Now the local authority is not separate. It is tied up with others in partnerships. The key word is 'interdependence'.

There are pathfinder partnerships, local strategic partnerships (LSPs), local area agreements (LAAs), multi-area agreements (MAAs), and many others. There is now no clear set of responsibilities, but an amorphous fluid range, involving leadership and exercising influence, but not deciding.

Some of the old services remain, but new tasks have been taken on – economic development, place-shaping, sustainable services, climate change, social cohesion, and promoting democracy. The agenda is more complex, tackling the intractable wicked issues normally involving other organisations.

### **The focus**

In the past, the local council had a clear focus on its own area and responsibilities. Now, the local council has to look wider. It becomes entangled with others in partnerships – with other local authorities, even sharing staff, and with LSPs to other public bodies, the arms of central government, quangos, private firms and to voluntary and independent organisations.

These other entities often have different boundaries and lack a commitment to the local council's familiar territory.

### **The recognition**

In the past, the local authority and its area were widely recognised by the public. The county, city, town and village had clear public identities, coinciding with localities which people understood and to which they felt a loyalty.

This sense of belonging to an area was seriously undermined by the 1972 reorganisation, which brought about many artificial local authorities. There is even less public awareness of the new unitaries, sub-regions and regions that central government urges local government to embrace.

### **The roles**

In the past, councillors felt they were responsible to the public for the services of their local authority, which were their services about which they made decisions in committee and full council. They felt responsible and the public held them responsible. The council's own staff, officers and work people, carried out many of the tasks of the authority. The authorities were self-sufficient.

But now, others provide and deliver what the council used to itself. Contracting out and outsourcing to others have left councillors with the roles of commissioning and collaborating, feeling they can no longer decide for local people and uncertain about the outcome.

Within councils, a formal two-tier distinction has arisen between those councillors with executive roles, who do decide, and the rest, often called the 'back-benchers', although that word is being replaced by the term 'front-liners', to make councillors feel more important.

Their new role of 'overview and scrutiny' usually involves monitoring and criticising others, after action and decisions have been taken, although some authorities have sought to concentrate overview and scrutiny not on the negative of criticism but on the positive of policy development. The Government still sees councillors as having a representative role, which seems to mean acting as a channel for the views of others. But that concept of the role is not as satisfying as the traditional role.

And councillors lack the powers and resources to exercise real leverage over the others they are supposed to be influencing. The public once knew where to pin responsibility for what went on in their localities, but now they do not understand this new governance.

### **The responsibility**

In the past, a councillor was a public person with real status in the locality – someone who mattered because he or she took decisions which affected the development of the area and the lives of its inhabitants, and was held accountable for them.

Local government was an example of representative democracy, respected and valued. Now there are advocates of participatory democracy, who urge 'double devolution' – devolving powers to 'communities and individuals'.

Communities Secretary, Hazel Blears, is an enthusiast for this approach – and the new Comprehensive Area Assessments<sup>15</sup> will judge councils on their participatory mechanisms. Ms Blears always says participatory democracy is not to replace representative democracy but to be a supplement. However, she does not make clear how this happy fusion is to be achieved.

### **The history**

Why have these changes occurred? Some might say because of events, pressures and forces beyond our control, economic, social and cultural. They are right, but only to some extent. Such explanations play down the role of central government. It has driven the changes with its policies and legislation, preferring to focus on local government rather than deal with its own weaknesses.

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<sup>15</sup> Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) constituted the final, and short-lived, phase of a decade of evolving attempts by the Blair/Brown Labour Governments and the Audit Commission to measure and compare the performance, management, leadership, etc. of local authorities and other public bodies. First, from 2002, there was Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), carried out every three years and producing an overall 0-4 star rating. Then from 2008/9 an intended 'harder test' (CAA) that was so much more comprehensive, intensive, and expensive that the incoming Coalition Government relieved councils of their frustration by abolishing it.

The start can be seen in 1975, when, in the face of another financial crisis, the Labour Secretary of State, Tony Crosland, told local government that, ‘for the time being at least, the party is over. We are not calling for a headlong retreat, but we are calling for a standstill.’

Margaret Thatcher’s Government brought in controls over local government expenditure and taxation, introducing ‘rate capping’ – the first time since the establishment of rates in the days of Queen Elizabeth I that central government had decided to fix the rate of the local tax. It imposed on local government Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), to diminish the use of direct labour by local councils<sup>16</sup>. Her successor, John Major, carried on with her approach, widening CCT.

Labour PM, Tony Blair, intensified Thatcherism, and added more rigorous inspection and targets. By the early 2000s, the New Labour Government, recognising its centralising had gone too far and was not delivering the expected outcomes, relaxed a few of its controls, but rejected the proposals of the Lyons’ Report<sup>17</sup> to update and make fairer the council tax and maintained rate capping.

Gordon Brown’s current Government continues along the path set out by the Blair administration’s phase two approach. A key question now is whether the current global financial crisis and the onset of economic recession will provoke further centralisation or decentralisation.

### **Our pessimism**

In a pessimistic mood, we cannot see central government letting go. Local government has few friends in Whitehall. Only in the DCLG<sup>18</sup> are there civil servants and ministers who recognise the value of local government. In the rest of central government, the spending departments want to operate through their own regional and local arms, doing things their way, while the Treasury wants to control all taxes and expenditure.

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<sup>16</sup> CCT is a radical way of changing a culture of institutionalised public monopoly, the Thatcher Government being probably the first to require it for certain local government services. The 1980 Local Government, Planning & Land Act introduced it for highways and building maintenance and minor building work. In 1988 it was extended to most manual services – refuse collection, buildings cleaning, school and welfare catering, grounds maintenance – and the 1992 Local Government Act added professional, financial and technical services. A 1993 INLOGOV survey – led, shortly before his distressingly early death in 1995, by the late Prof. Kieron Walsh, by then an acknowledged expert on the subject – found that each local authority at the time was letting an average of 15 contracts.

<sup>17</sup> The Lyons Inquiry, referenced elsewhere in these extracts, was a comprehensive independent inquiry, appointed by the Labour Government in 2004, into the form, function and funding of local government in England. Chaired by Sir Michael Lyons, it produced in fact several reports, culminating the Final Report in 2007 – *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*.

<sup>18</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – created in May 2006, replacing the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, with a remit to promote community cohesion and equality, as well as responsibility for housing, urban regeneration, planning and local government. Lasted until 2018, when it was renamed the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which in September 2021 became the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

The Labour Party and its Government will continue to see local authorities as agents to deliver national policies. The Conservatives promise to freeze council tax and keep local government dependent on national funding determined by the Government, but allocated through an independent quango. The Liberal-Democrats would replace council tax, but not local government's dependence on grant, with a local income tax.

All would, therefore, keep local authorities dependent, like drug addicts, on their national fix of grant. Our crystal ball shows that local government will not obtain the powers, discretion and its own resources, to be genuine local self-government.

### **Our optimism**

Our optimism bubbles up when we look at the Local Government Act 2000. It gave local authorities the role of community leadership, with the duty to draw up a community strategy or plan, and the powers to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas and in their partnerships.

Scrutiny has been extended so local authorities can question other public bodies, which have to take account of the decisions of partnerships, where local authorities, as the only directly-elected bodies, have the potential to be in the driving seat.

### **The choice**

There are three distinct paths for councillors to take. They are:

- to engage romantically in nostalgia for the good old days.
- to do exactly what central government wants, to seek to maximise whatever grants and favours are flowing down for good behaviour – the detached behaviour of practical, if narrowly-focused people, content to be agents of central government.
- to recognise the limitations imposed by central government, but not accept the need for them, and at every opportunity, seek to do what the council judges to be in the interest of its locality – and keep the flag of genuine local self-government flying by speaking out for local authorities 'to be left to get on with it'. The behaviour of responsible, but visionary, people.

This last recommendation would have local councils deciding what areas and boundaries most suited their communities; forging voluntary alliances with partners they choose; deciding with whom to pool their budgets; drawing the lion's share of their resources from their own taxpayers; devising their own internal political management structures; and being held accountable for their spending and taxing decisions not to central government but to their own local voters.

Learning the Major Lessons from Abroad: Are These Lessons too Foreign for Us? (Jones and Stewart, 2010)

**As illustrated in this tribute's section on John's extraordinary record (in both senses) of local authority visits, he was anything but a reluctant traveller – at least across the length and breadth of GB. But abroad, perhaps not quite the same enthusiasm – trickier getting back to Selly Wick Road for the night. However, his and George Jones' shared interest in learning about, and from, how other countries 'did' local government was much the same, as is at least summarily reflected in these two linked MJ articles – which could also have been titled: 'If only we'd called it Community Self-Government'. (CG)**

In the rest of Europe, local government is the local community governing itself. The UK, on the other hand, has a technocratic, not a communitarian approach. Local government is for delivering services directly or indirectly – a justification leaving little room for local choice, and leading central government to treat local authorities as agents for the delivery of its policies.

Elsewhere, services are important, but as a means for the community to govern itself. So European local government has retained much smaller units of local government, reflecting history and a sense of community, while the UK has reorganised local government into ever larger authorities on the unproven grounds that 'bigger is better' for the delivery of services.

**The lack of a basis in community** is reflected in the names of some districts which do not refer to any place with which one can identify. Instead, there are artificial, made-up names, to avoid offending communities being amalgamated, such as Three Rivers, Waverley, and Gravesham DCs<sup>19</sup>.

A change in the UK's attitude was implied in the Government's recognition of the role of local government in community leadership, but policy falls short of the words. Local government should advocate a community self-government role, expressing local choice about the services provided and the development of the locality. What should be the relationship between central and local government?

The Layfield Report, in 1976, expressed the crucial question about local government:

'Whether all-important governmental decisions affecting people's lives and livelihoods should be taken in one place on the basis of national policies? Or whether many of the decisions could not as well, or better, be taken in different places, by people of diverse experience, associations, background and political persuasion' (p.299, para.63).

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<sup>19</sup> These were three 1972/4 creations. Hertfordshire's generally Lib Dem **Three Rivers DC** merged Rickmansworth and Chorley Wood UDCs and parts of Watford RDC. The three rivers: the Colne, Chess and Gade. Surrey's **Waverley BC** merged Godalming MBC, Farnham and Haslemere UDCs, and Hambledon RDC – based in Godalming, traditionally Conservative, but controlled since 2019 by a Farnham Residents/Lib Dem partnership. Waverley, slightly more of a place than Sir Walter Scott's fictional hero, today comprises the remains of the Cistercian Waverley Abbey. Kent's generally Labour **Gravesham BC** merged Gravesend MBC with Northfleet UDC and part of Strood RDC. Gravesham derives from the Domesday Book.

Central government has never explicitly faced up to the choice, speaking the rhetoric of localism but implicitly choosing centralism, spreading confusion and blurring responsibility. Other countries recognise the need for decentralisation to local government, and are not so obsessed with uniform national standards and avoiding 'post code lotteries', but let local government get on with it, and welcome differences as reflecting 'post code choices' by local people.

The Government should face up to the need to choose and not muddle on. And, if it believes in decentralisation, choose the local not the central responsibility model.

**Should local government rely on central government for most of its resources?** Few other countries limit local government's own resources to one tax, and one which finances only around 20% of its expenditure. Other countries' local authorities have a wider range of taxes, whose rates they can decide. The UK has only one tax, on domestic property – the Council Tax – which is capped by central government. Overseas, there are taxes on income, sales, and many other goods and services – which make them less dependent on government grant, and they can vary the rate of their taxes.

Successive governments since 1976 have ignored the messages of the Layfield Committee on the choice between central and local responsibility, and its preference for local government being responsible and accountable for both expenditure and taxation. If the community self-government role is chosen, there is a need to reduce local government's dependence on high grant.

**Can local authorities have a wider range of discretion over their functions?** Local authorities in some other countries do less, and some more. In Sweden, hospitals. In France, a role in social welfare. And in Germany, a number of utilities. But local authorities have considerable discretion because of the legal position of local government. They have 'general competence' – they can do for their communities what they want, as long as it has not been expressly forbidden or handed to some other entity.

UK local authorities are constrained by *ultra vires* [beyond their legal powers] – they can do only what is expressly allowed. This legal concept still applies, although the *vires* were widened in the Local Government Act 2000 by the Well-being power<sup>20</sup>. The Government complains that local authorities are not using their new freedoms. Local authorities respond by saying they must be cautious, because they face challenge in the courts.

If the local self-government model is chosen, local authorities must have the assured discretion of 'general competence'.

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<sup>20</sup> Introduced in the Local Government Act 2000, it permitted local authorities to do anything – subject to all applicable legal restrictions – that they considered likely to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. Was replaced for English local authorities in the 2011 Localism Act by a General Power of Competence, allowing councils to do anything an individual can do, unless prohibited by law.

As we showed in our article ‘Learning the major lessons from abroad’, British local government has much to learn from experience abroad about how political and administrative structures operate.

Foreign experience had an impact on the Government in transforming the traditional committee system in the Local Government Act 2000, with the creation of a political executive separate from the council. The Government favours **directly elected mayors**<sup>21</sup>, and drew on examples in other countries.

The weakness was that it considered the role of the mayor in these countries in isolation from other aspects of local government modernisation. The Government failed to analyse the different forms of directly elected mayors. The system introduced in the UK involves a mayor elected directly and separately from the council, and with the powers of a political executive.

The Government’s examination of foreign experience paid too little attention to the fact that these two features were not necessarily linked. France and Spain, often spoken of as if they had directly elected mayors, had executive mayors who were elected together with other councillors, and were appointed as mayors by the council. On the other hand, the mayor in New Zealand was directly elected, but was not an executive mayor.

The Netherlands has sometimes been quoted as having a directly elected mayor, and once one was invited to speak to a conference, only to reveal when he spoke that he was appointed by the Queen, although now the council submits two names for consideration by the national government<sup>22</sup>.

The US exhibits a variety of models, including some described as strong-mayor systems, and others, unfortunately, characterised as weak-mayor systems rather than as, more accurately, strong-council systems.

The US also has council manager and commission systems. In other countries, such as in Scandinavia, there are committee systems with central committees similar to the former policy and resources committee in the UK. In Germany and Italy there are now directly elected mayors with executive powers. The Government’s failure to examine other systems in detail meant important features were ignored.

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<sup>21</sup> The 2000 Act ended English and Welsh councils’ longstanding committee-based system, requiring them (initially) to review their executive arrangements and consider the option of a directly elected mayor. The first was elected in Greater London in 2000, others gradually followed, mostly as outcomes of successful local referendums, and from 2017 Combined Authority (‘Metro’) Mayors without the hurdle of elections. In 2022 there were 16 single local authority and 10 combined authority mayors.

<sup>22</sup> It’s quite a bit more complicated, but certainly the King’s Commissioner is very actively involved in discussions with a municipal council’s leaders and in drawing up a shortlist of candidates. The council’s preferred candidate is then ‘vetted’ by the Minister of the Interior and appointed by the King.

In many countries with a directly elected mayor, there are provisions for the removal of the mayor. They are designed to ensure the mayor can be deposed, but only when there is a serious problem, enabling removal of a mayor who has proved incompetent. Accountability does not have to wait until the next election. The provisions include a vote of no-confidence in the council requiring a special majority, normally of two-thirds – in at least one country, this provision is tied to the daunting prospect of dissolution of the council – or petitions from a specified percentage of citizens for a new election<sup>23</sup>.

Such provisions do not appear to have been seriously considered, as they would have been if foreign experience had been comprehensively analysed in depth. One further danger from the focus of the Government on directly elected mayors was its failure to emphasise the role of the council and councillors in mayoral systems, and the extent of variation in the balance of powers between political executives and councils, even in different states within Germany. The consequence is that too few local authorities have developed the powers of the council to determine policy and revitalise their council meetings.

There is a lack of research by the Government or, indeed, by academics and think-tanks into the work of councils and councillors in other countries. The result is that we know little about their role in mayoral or other systems with a political executive, giving a distorted view of how such systems operate.

In some countries with executive mayors, the council meets much more frequently than is normal in this country. In the US, most authorities of a size similar to those in the UK meet fortnightly, some even weekly, suggesting councils play a bigger role than is thought of in this country.

Research is required to show how systems elsewhere operate to help resolve problems faced by our councils. In the UK, the section of the Local Government Act 2000 which causes most irritation is on the role of **non-executive councillors**, now no longer called ‘backbenchers’, but ‘frontline councillors’.

The modernisers envisaged these councillors would perform the role of ‘scrutiny’ of the executive, later revised to be ‘overview and scrutiny’, as their central role, and seen by John Denham as the chief role of councillors. But that does not appear to be the key role in other countries. Councillors elsewhere, when asked about the scrutiny role, look puzzled. If, as we believe, the role of councils and councillors is a major unresolved issue, not merely in mayoral authorities but in leader and cabinet systems, we should learn more about what councillors do elsewhere.

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<sup>23</sup> There was a failed attempt in the 2014/15 Parliament to pass a Recall of Elected Representatives Bill, which would have systematised a recall system of elected representatives in England, including elected mayors. And in 2017 a citizens’ petition to remove London Mayor Sadiq Khan for alleged, and vaguely defined, treason attracted over 20,000 (of a required 100,000) signatures before petering out.

**The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement was a policy document drawn up following the 2010 General Election, outlining what had been agreed in 31 policy areas in order to form the two-party Coalition Government. Reflecting the views of the (Conservative) Minister of State for Devolution, Greg Clark, the Communities and Local Government section outlined the principles shaping what would eventually become the 2011 Localism Act. ‘The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.’**

**Nearly 40 more specific pledges were listed, but the one that became a core part of the legislation and probably prompted this column was at that stage the sole reference to referendums: ‘We will create directly elected mayors in the 12 largest English cities, subject to confirmatory referendums and full scrutiny by elected councillors.’ The first version of the Localism Bill would additionally have required councils to hold a non-binding referendum on any ‘local matter’ (defined by the Secretary of State) if a petition of 5% of residents was submitted – but it was fiercely opposed, particularly by the Local Government Association, and eventually removed. The final Act, however, required a council tax billing authority to hold a referendum if it proposed a basic level of council tax for the coming year that the principles deployed by the Secretary of State deemed ‘excessive’. (CG)**

The past is a foreign country, full of strange, forgotten practices. In the past of local government, there were important differences from today. So, can we learn lessons from the different ways of operating in the past?

**Local referendums** were once much more common than now. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under a series of Public Library Acts, local authorities proposing to provide public libraries first had to hold a public meeting and a local poll, where a two-thirds majority, later reduced to a simple majority, had to be obtained for the proposal to go ahead.

Laws introduced in 1932, but abandoned in 1972, provided for cinemas to open on Sunday, if approved at a public meeting, and for a poll to be held if 100 electors or a 20<sup>th</sup> of the electorate demanded it.

Until 1974, the procedures for Private Bill legislation required local authorities promoting a Bill to hold a public meeting. If the proposal was rejected, the authority could itself call a poll. The authority had to hold a poll if demanded by a petition signed by the same numbers as for Sunday cinemas.

But statutory referendums were never used to determine the budget. That was always the statutory responsibility of the council, although a few authorities made use of the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2003 to hold advisory polls on proposed levels of council tax, such as Milton Keynes in 1999, Bristol in 2001, and Coventry in 2006<sup>24</sup>.

Statutory public meetings, often called town meetings, have largely been forgotten, although they are an early example of public participation. There was a danger that both the town meeting and the referendum could be dominated by sectional interests because often only small numbers took part. Some polls had less than 5% of the electorate voting.

The local referendums introduced in the Localism Bill could face similar problems, particularly if held, as they may have to be, when no local or national elections are taking place.

**Elected auditors** were provided by the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act and lasted until the 1972 Local Government Act abolished them. Borough councils could, if they wished, use three non-professional auditors they chose for themselves. The mayor selected one from within the council each year, and two others were elected in annual elections by voters of the borough. Each voter could vote for only one auditor.

The qualification to be an auditor was being qualified for holding the position of councillor or alderman. These elections were held separately from the council elections, producing very low turnouts.

The role of these auditors was far from clear, and any failed to establish a meaningful way of working. For these reasons, and because the district audit service was more efficient and trusted, the position was abolished.

Yet, as the Government is seeking to encourage citizens to hold councils to account for their expenditure, it might consider whether an elected auditor could have a role on local audit committees, as a spokesperson for citizens in the council.

In Scotland, before reorganisation in 1975, county councils consisted of two groups of councillors – those from the burghs, who were appointed by the councils, and councillors from outwith [outside, non-burgh] areas where the councillors were directly elected.

A council's responsibilities varied with the area, and within the burghs too, between large and small burghs. Councillors were not allowed to vote on services for which the county council as not responsible in their area.

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<sup>24</sup> By far the most dramatic of these was the first: Milton Keynes' 'People's Poll' in February 1999. Against a background of Labour Government 'advice' that Council Tax rises should average 4.5%, MK voters were presented with the prospect of deep cuts in schools, libraries and home help budgets, the consequential threat of redundancies, and in a postal ballot with a 45% turnout three budgetary options: council tax increases of 15%, 9.8% and 5%. Almost 24% voted for the 15% rise, 46% for the Council's recommended 9.8%, and 30% for 5%. Probably unsurprisingly, it proved a 'one-off'.

The model of varying the right to vote in parliamentary divisions according to responsibility is a talked-about solution to the [West] Lothian Question<sup>25</sup> at national level. Past local government experience in Scotland, including the Lothian counties themselves, shows the difficulty of that solution in party systems.

**Direct representation of outside interests on councils** has been practised in various ways. Until 1974, certain councillors in Oxford and Cambridge were elected by the respective universities.

In Aldershot – and later in Rushmoor, the successor authority, until the introduction of the leader-and-cabinet model – there was a convention which gave the army the right to appoint non-voting representatives on each committee.

In other authorities, co-option has been used to represent interests on specific committees. This practice in some cases was to meet statutory requirements which still apply to certain church representatives on education overview and scrutiny committees.

Until 1948, in both local and national elections, there were business-premises votes for certain individuals in addition to the normal individual franchise. This business vote was abolished in 1950 to secure the principle of one-person-one-vote.

Interest representation continues in partnerships, which play an increasing role in local government. Perhaps business rate reform will see an expansion of the representation of business interests in council decision-making processes – with potential dangers for local democracy, if carried too far.

**Electoral systems** varied, and still vary. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the Single Transferable Vote (STV) is used – as it was once used in Parliament in the university seats.

Mayoral authorities use the Supplementary Vote, which could be described as a truncated Alternative Vote. The Greater London Assembly uses a two-ballot Additional Member System – one for electing Constituency Assembly Members on a first-past-the-post basis, and, to ensure a more proportional representation, one for London-wide Members allocated by a mathematical formula.

There have been other arrangements. The separate education committees created in 1870 gave electors as many votes as there were members to be elected for the school board as a whole. Electors could distribute their votes as they wished, through cumulative voting or ‘plumping’ – giving all their votes to one candidate – or distributing them between favoured

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<sup>25</sup> The ‘West Lothian Question’ was named after West Lothian’s Labour MP (1962-83), Tam Dalyell, who initially in 1977, long before Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had their own parliaments, questioned why these regions’ MPs were permitted to vote – in Scotland’s case potentially decisively with Labour, until 2015, having substantially the most Scottish MPs – on issues affecting only England, but not the other way round. Following the 2015 Scottish independence referendum, the Conservative Government introduced ‘EVEL’ – English votes for English laws – but abolished it in 2021.

candidates. It ensured representation of minorities and was a form of proportional representation.

In some Parliamentary elections a few three-member seats were created, but electors were given only two votes, and 'plumping' was not allowed. A minority party could secure election if it had the support of one-third of the electorate.

One side effect of this system was the creation of effective local party organisation, which meant that in Birmingham the Liberals were able to secure all three seats in a ward by specifying to supportive electors which two candidates they should vote for.

**Local political leaders** were prominent in the past. Although there were never directly elected mayors, in the late C19th and early C20th borough councils sometimes reappointed as mayor each year the same leading figure from the council.

County and district councils too often chose the same chairmen for many years. Two striking examples are the Earl of Macclesfield, Chairman of Oxfordshire CC for 36 years from 1934 to 1970, and Sir Offley Wakeman, Chairman of Shropshire CC from 1943 to 1963.

These mayors and chairmen acted, in effect, as political executives for their authorities, such as Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham from 1873-76.

Exploring the past discovers other practices, including the appointment of aldermen by councillors, not citizens. They composed a quarter of the council and served for six-year terms. The post was abolished in the 1974 reorganisation, but the name lives on in honorary appointments for eminent service to the locality.

For most of the C19th and C20th the councillor's term of office was three, not four, years. Also in the C19th, the offices of Clerk and Treasurer were often contracted out to a local solicitor or bank manager.

We do not suggest that all or any of these practices be reintroduced, but discussion of the past can stimulate thought about possible changes in the future.

[A Constitutional Settlement \(Jones and Stewart, 2013\)](#)

**As the authors note, pointedly, this summary of the case for and possible shape of a constitutional settlement governing relationships between central and local government was far from its first airing. This version was chosen partly because of its appropriate length, but also as a kind of tribute to its commissioners and audience: the cross-party Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee and its outstanding elected Chairman – nowadays 'Professor' Graham Allen, but for the two decades until 2017 Labour MP for Nottingham North and member of successive Labour Governments. Allen had a mission: to turn the UK into a modern democracy, and the all too short-lived P&CR Committee was for its duration his vehicle, culminating in 2015 in producing the first ever written *UK Constitution* to be published by Parliament. (CG)**

1. We have advocated a constitutional settlement governing relationships between central and local government before three recent parliamentary committee inquiries<sup>26</sup>. The UK has no written constitution where such a settlement could be inserted, setting out the principles that should govern the role of local government and its relations with central government. We have advocated a quasi-constitutional statute.

2. A statute commands attention in central government departments, and, if necessary, in the courts, but more is required to ensure the principles are applied. A unit at the heart of central government, possibly the Cabinet Office, should monitor whether the principles are being embodied in government policies and oversee whether actions taken by departments are consistent with them. Even more important is a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament to monitor the application of the principles, reporting both annually to Parliament on the relationship between central and local government and on specific proposals, judging them against the requirements of the statute. Similar proposals were put forward by the Communities & Local Government Select Committee in its 2009 report on *The Balance of Power: Central and Local Government*.

3. These proposals would give recognition to the constitutional position of local government as an elected institution. It would provide a guide for central and local government and a measuring rod against which government proposals and actions could be assessed. Despite previous statements by both Conservative and Labour Governments of the importance of local government and the need for decentralisation, the last three decades have seen continuing centralisation. It has happened step-by-step as departments have put forward proposals, each being promoted on its departmental merits without consideration of the cumulative impact of all the changes on local government. The central-local relationship has been changed gradually without any decision to do so or even awareness of the scale of the change. The proposals made above could ensure that central government in its policy-making respects the constitutional position of local government and its role in the system of government.

4. The Localism Bill gives a new importance to these issues. The Government has stated its commitment to localism and decentralisation, but the Bill does not recognize that the main obstacles to localism are rooted in the attitudes and practices of central government departments. The panoply of regulations and prescriptions are there because central government has little respect for local government and knows no other way of working than through command and control.

5. We have devised a formal statement in the form of a Code as a basis for a constitutional settlement that could be included in legislation. As a constitutional statement it does not set out the present position, but the position necessary to ensure the principles of localism are

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<sup>26</sup> Which explains why this paper, produced for those inquiries, refers to what became the Localism Act 2011 as the 'Localism Bill'. The Act aimed to devolve more decision-making powers – new 'freedoms and flexibilities' - from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils, with a particular focus on the general power of competence, community rights, neighbourhood planning and housing.

secured and the full potential of local government realized. It should be promoted by local government.

6. The Code draws on the framework of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, but goes beyond it. The proposed Code is set out as a basis for discussion. We would be interested in comments and suggested improvements as well as how MPs can be persuaded to support it.

### **Article 1 - Concept of Local Government**

1. The primary role of local government, exercised by local elected councils, is the government of local communities, enabling their well-being.

2. Local government needs the powers and resources under their own responsibility to carry out that primary role.

3. The primary accountability of local authorities for the exercise of their responsibilities is to their local citizens.

### **Article 2 - Scope of Local Government**

1. The basic duties and powers of local authorities shall be prescribed by statute.

2. Local authorities will be responsible for developing the involvement and empowerment of their communities and citizens in public affairs.

3. Local authorities shall have full discretion to exercise their initiative on any matter not assigned by statute to any other public authority.

4. Public responsibilities shall be exercised by those authorities closest to the citizen.

5. Local authorities shall provide leadership to public bodies in its area who will be accountable to local people through the local authorities.

6. Powers given to local authorities shall be full and exclusive. They may not be undermined or limited by any central or other authority.

7. Local authorities shall be consulted in due time in the planning and decision-making processes of central government for all matters which concern them directly.

### **Article 3 - Protection of Local Authority Boundaries**

1. Changes in local authority boundaries shall not be made without prior consultation of the local communities concerned.

#### **Article 4 - Appropriate Management Structures of Local Authorities**

1. Local authorities shall be able to determine their own internal management and political structures.
2. The conditions of service of local government employees shall ensure the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence, and adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.

#### **Article 5—Conditions under which Councillor Responsibilities are Exercised**

1. The conditions of office of local elected representatives shall provide for free exercise of their functions.
2. They shall allow for appropriate financial compensation for expenses incurred and remuneration for their role and responsibilities.

#### **Article 6—External Supervision of Local Authorities' Activities**

1. Any external supervision of the activities of local authorities shall aim only at ensuring compliance with the law.
2. External inspection and assessment should be initiated by and reported to local authorities and their citizens.

#### **Article 7—Financial Resources of Local Authorities**

1. Local authorities shall be entitled to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their statutory powers.
2. Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with their responsibilities.
3. All the financial resources of local authorities shall derive from local taxes and charges over which they shall have the power to determine the rate. The only exceptions should be grants designed to correct the effects of the unequal distribution of potential sources of finance and of the financial burdens they must support.
4. The financial systems on which resources available to local authorities are based shall be of a sufficiently diversified and buoyant nature to enable them to keep pace with the cost of carrying out their tasks.
5. For the purpose of borrowing for capital investment, local authorities shall have access to the national capital market.

#### **Article 8—Legal Protection of Local Self-Government**

1. Local authorities shall have the right of recourse to a judicial remedy in order to secure free exercise of their powers and respect for the principles of local government.

**In this article, John and George reflect on developments in local government in the four decades since they were involved in the Layfield Committee. They argue that local devolution is doomed unless national politicians recognise the principles the committee developed. (JL)**

Forty years ago, the Layfield Committee on Local Government Finance reported. We were both members of it, serving from 1974 to 1976. There had been no major review of local government finance since the Kempe Committee inquiry of 1911 to 1914.

We were told to report by the end of 1975. We met for 49 full days, plus 33 days to hear oral evidence in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh. In total, 1,012 items of written evidence were submitted. We visited the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and West Germany to see at first hand how different systems of local government operated. Our report was submitted to the Government in March 1976, and went to Parliament in May 1976. Forty years on, it is hard to find, expensive to buy, and has never been digitised.

Its terms of reference were: ‘To review the whole system of local government finance in England, Scotland and Wales and to make recommendations.’ The then Secretary of State for the Environment, Tony Crosland, told us these terms were so wide in order to enable us to consider any aspect of finance we thought relevant. He said we should not be concerned just with the short-term problem but cover long-term issues and the whole nature of the system.

Why was it set up? The immediate crisis was the huge number of public complaints about the size of increase in the rates and their unfairness. The Government felt local authorities were extravagant and wasteful, and that local-government spending was out of control.

### **The central message of Layfield**

Our report was not a technical treatise on rates and grants, but a document of considerable constitutional importance, focusing on political accountability. It posed a choice between two alternative directions the country could take: either to move more to a system based mainly on central responsibility or to one based mainly on local. There was strong support in the committee for a choice based on local accountability.

Sir Michael Lyons<sup>27</sup>, in his 2007 report on local government, said he followed ‘firmly in the footsteps of Sir Frank Layfield’, and quoted the key passage from our report about the question that had to be faced before making recommendations about local government

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<sup>27</sup> Chief Executive of Wolverhampton BC (1985-90), Nottinghamshire CC (1990-94), and Birmingham City Council (1994-2001), then Head of INLOGOV (2001-6). In March 2007 he published the final report and recommendations of a three-year independent inquiry into the future role, function and funding of local government - *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*.

finance: 'whether all important governmental decisions affecting people's lives and livelihoods should be taken in one place on the basis of national policies; or whether many of the decisions could not as well, or better, be taken in different places, by people of diverse experience, associations, background and political persuasion.'

Layfield argued that no system of local government finance would be wholly satisfactory unless it supported in an unambiguous way the desired pattern of relations between central and local government.

We sought to promote responsible and accountable government. Responsible government meant that whoever is responsible for deciding to spend more or less money on providing a service should be responsible for deciding to raise more or less taxation. Accountable government meant that those who make those decisions are accountable to those to whom they are responsible – in the case of local authorities their citizens.

We argued local government had become too dependent on grant. Domestic rates, while a perfectly good tax for local government, had reached its limits, and needed to be supplemented by another tax that bore on local voters – local income tax. Grant should be reduced to the level required for equalisation. A high level of grant, however, was acceptable, if the main responsibility for local government expenditure and its financing were to lie with central government.

The opponents of Layfield, in both central and local government, deliberately distorted its message. They accused us of adopting a sharp distinction of a choice between two polar opposites, a centralist and a localist approach. They urged a middle way.

But we made sure the words 'centralist' and 'localist' never appear in the report. We said there could never be absolute clarity of responsibility but there could be less confusion. The key issue was where to locate the 'main responsibility' for local expenditure and taxation. It was about moving more towards the one rather than to the other – which offered scope for negotiation – a more flexible system than the economists' middle way with minimum standards set and paid for by central government, which would be unstable, centralising and impractical.

How was it implemented? It wasn't implemented. It never has been. The Government set up a series of working parties, jointly with local government, to review what it saw as the issues raised by Layfield – audit, grants, rates, fees and charges and alternative sources of revenue, but not the basic issues of central/local relationships and how to promote responsible and accountable government. The Layfield package, indeed its central message, was ignored.

How was it received? The response of local government was a disappointment to us. It did not welcome Layfield. It was lukewarm and niggling. This attitude of local government left the way open for those in central government who were opposed to the proposals.

Lessons to be learned for the future. A report which said good things about local government and offered a way for it to have a great future should have been enthusiastically embraced. Only in recent years have the world of local government and think-tanks reported favourably on the Layfield approach – that the country is too centralised and needs devolution to local government, not just of expenditure and functions, but also of taxation.

Central government came down for the middle way, but not the middle way of Layfield's minority, the two economists, [Alan Day and Gordon Cameron]; rather, the civil service's middle way of partnership or shared responsibility in the 1977 White Paper *Local Government Finance* (Cmnd. 6813). It was the muddle way, which did not locate where the main responsibility for local government finance was to lie.

Successive governments have remained opposed to devolving to local government taxation that bore on local voters. Despite George Osborne's Treasury support for devolving functions and expenditure powers to local government, it resisted devolving taxing powers that bore on local voters. Returning business rates to local government is irrelevant, since they do not bear on local voters and local authorities will not have power to determine the rate of the tax.

Both central and local government were, and still are, embarrassed by Layfield. It raised fundamental questions they did not want to answer – constitutional and political about the relationship between central and local government and the distribution of power in society and where the main responsibility for huge sums of public money was to lie.

Central government was not willing to confront these issues, but it is essential to do so before a sensible system of local government finance can be established. It has become all the more important over the 40 years since the report was published, because responsibilities and accountabilities for local government have been changed and changed again. Accountability has become ever more confused, as is illustrated in the uncertain and confused accountabilities imposed on combined authorities and by the tendency of government to hold local authorities accountable even when their powers to act have been diminished.

The Government prefers to centralise while accountability remains local. Theresa May, Philip Hammond and Sajid Javid are likely to continue the same policies of centralising without regard to the issues raised by the Layfield Report of the need to accept the responsibilities and accountabilities which should be involved. Unless there is a fundamental change in the Government's policies so that they are based on the principles set out in the Layfield Report, local devolution is doomed.

## Part 5: The council visits programme

From 1983 until the late 1990s, the Local Government Training Board (later Local Government Management Board) commissioned John to deliver an informal assessment of the training needs of each council in the country. John greatly enjoyed his travels around the UK, visiting almost every local authority (by train, for he did not drive), and then, after each visit, preparing and circulating a summary paper of all that he had learned and reflected upon as good and less good practice and about the key issues for further consideration and reflection. A selection of these notes is provided here, together with an introductory note on each council from Chris. The notes themselves have been lightly edited.

### Nottingham District Council (Paper A7, November 1983)

*'A great city, deprived of its powers, but conscious of its history'  
... still seeing itself as 'the basic unit of community government'*

**Created in 1888 as an all-purpose county borough, the city of Nottingham found itself – along with some 40 other county boroughs – downgraded in the Heath Conservative Government's 1972 Local Government Act to a non-metropolitan district council within the new non-metropolitan county of Nottingham. This 'untoward event', as John describes it in one of his first LGTB/LGMB visits, left the Council with no longer any direct responsibility for, *inter alia*, education and careers guidance, social services and social work, the police and fire services.**

**This situation would last until the creation of the large 'first generation' of unitary authorities in the 1990s, with Nottingham City Council's turn coming in 1998. John's visit came therefore around the middle of the painful 'role adjustment' period that no one then knew would be relatively short-lived.**

**In contrast to the delicately balanced council John encountered, Labour has controlled the City Council since 1991 – overwhelmingly in recent years, greatly assisted by our non-proportional electoral system. Currently the main opposition 'party' are the three Nottingham Independents.**

**The future is anyone's guess. In 2018 Conservative-led Nottinghamshire CC produced a plan to abolish all seven district and borough councils, and itself, and replace them with a single whole-county unitary. Predictably unpopular, it was soon shelved, to be succeeded during 2020 by an 'informally' Ministerially approved plan for an East Midlands Combined Authority, incorporating the 3 Conservative-controlled County Council areas of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire plus the unitary Leicester, Nottingham and Derby City Councils – conceived, it was suggested, out of resentment at 'always losing out to the West Midlands CA and Mayor Andy Street'. (CG)**

Nottingham was, is, feels, and knows it was and is a great city. It remains a county borough deprived of its powers, but conscious of its history. So it is with councillors and officers. There is a continuity that stretches over 1972/74. Experience is described without regard to that untoward event.

Nottingham has a Labour majority of one over the Conservatives (28 to 27). The Labour group is a traditional one, but is responding to changing politics and contains a New Left element. Nottingham City Labour Party is deeply involved in decision-making with the group. There is much consultation.

Older group members have responded to the new councillors and to party pressure, not in conflict, but in **building a new consensus**. The new Leader, Mrs Betty Higgins<sup>28</sup>, an ex-teacher, has been on the council many years and belonged to the older left. The Labour majority [of 1!] is therefore giving emphasis to equal opportunities for the ethnic minorities, for women, for the disabled, and for gays and lesbians ... but equal priority to economic development.

These policies (with the exception of the emphasis on gays and lesbians) have a remarkable degree of support from the opposition. The Labour group, however, has not pursued some of the more controversial policies associated with the left. There has been no resistance to the council housing sales, nor any major emphasis on decentralisation. Indeed, inter-party conflict seems relatively subdued, given the numerical situation.

This lack of conflict may be helped by the relatively favourable financial position in which Nottingham finds itself, as a result of interest-earning reserves built up in the late 1970s, enabling it to spend well above target without incurring penalties<sup>29</sup>. The situation, however, is vulnerable, and could be altered by changes in the rules governing grant.

The **delicacy of the financial position** has led to unusually close co-operation between the Treasurer and Secretary in preparing financial resolution – a cooperation that has extended to other matters, such as the use of Section 137 powers on the ‘free 2p’<sup>30</sup>. I found this an interesting development of the role of the solicitor in local government.

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<sup>28</sup> Betty Higgins was the City Council's first woman Leader (1983-87 and 1991-93), while political control of the Council was narrowly balanced – her leadership resting for a time on the support of the sole Communist councillor. Her biggest leadership achievements were probably to set in motion the visionary plans for the city's now much valued tram network, and to agree the demolition of hundreds of 1960/70s system-built flats, and their replacement with conventional public housing. She died, aged 92, in 2019.

<sup>29</sup> The 1979 Thatcher Government was elected with the stated aim of controlling inflation through monetary policy – i.e. reducing and controlling all public expenditure, locally by imposing spending targets on individual local authorities and cutting the grants of any who exceeded their targets. Offending, ‘over-spending’ councils would then have to raise local rates/property tax bills, which in turn would lead to their being ‘rate-capped’.

<sup>30</sup> Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act authorised/‘freed’ a local council to spend money – limited to the product of a 2p rate – on things not permitted by other Acts but that were for the direct benefit of its area or its inhabitants.

Nottingham District Council, deprived of so many functions at the time of reorganisation, still sees itself as the 'basic unit of community government'. This has led it to emphasise roles other than the carrying out of its statutory function.

**Nottingham has pioneered** tourism development; taken important economic initiatives – as with the co-operation with Plessey in an Advanced Business Centre; used the Inner Area Programme to build a network of 33 community centres; combined conservation with commercial development in the Lace Market Development; built a new concert hall; started a major development in the Marcus Garvie Centre for the West Indian community; and organised a Canal Museum.

Nottingham has had the advantage of a substantial heritage of corporate property, giving it a very considerable influence on commercial and other development – probably of much greater importance than the traditional planning functions. This is recognised by the Planning Officer, who sees the need for new skills and approaches from planners (for which traditional professional education may not prepare them).

It has, however, pursued the path of the **New Entrepreneurialism**<sup>31</sup>, using inner area programme funds, urban development grants, historic building funds, capital receipts, etc. It has also seen itself as a catalyst, putting together sponsors/investors for leisure projects. Such projects involve many departments and clearly require considerable initiative and energy from chief officers. One senses that these issues are very much at the centre of the authority's interest.

Relatively little emphasis by comparison is placed on issues of management and organisation. The structure appears to have changed relatively little since reorganisation, reflecting a degree of continuity amongst chief officers.

**Changes have, however, have been introduced since 1974, including:**

- The splitting of a combined Directorate into Recreation Director and Arts Director
- The appointment of the City Treasurer, City Secretary, and Director of Technical Services as Deputy Chief Executives – reflecting an Executive Office concept – and meeting weekly, separately from and in addition to Management Team meetings.
- This was a response to and reaction against a proposal to appoint the Director of Technical Services as the only Deputy CE. The separate meetings have, however, not unnaturally caused some resentment amongst other COs.

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<sup>31</sup> A reference to the increasing focus of urban governance during the 1980s, in both academic literature and practice, on the exploration of new ways to encourage local development and employment growth – the entrepreneurial stance reinforcing/contrasting with the managerial practices of earlier decades, focusing heavily on the provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations.

- The accumulation under the CE of a series of separate units – often as a sign of the importance attached to a topic by members – e.g. economic development, equal opportunities.

One does not sense an emphasis on **training**. It was only highlighted in a couple of contexts:

- A compulsory 2-day course for 162 officers, up to and including COs, on racism and cultural awareness, plus a course for councillors.
- The use of the DMS [Development Management System??], with some issues being raised as to its relevance to local government ... (the content and relevance of the DMS to the management education needs of local government is an issue on which further work could be useful).
- Recognition of the continuing need for safety training.

[Islington London Borough Council](#) (Paper A35, Jan and May 1984)

*Radical, socialist, or 'loony left'? How to manage an effectively one-party council comprising entirely 'able', 'non-loony' councillors sharing 'the excitement of innovation' with an 'unusual recognition of the problems of implementation'*

**Google 'rate-capping' today and you're likely to encounter Ofgem energy prices and credit union rates before anything even loosely local governmenty. In the mid-1980s, though, it put at least some English councils into the national news headlines. The 'Rate-capping Rebellion' was a campaign mounted by a group of Labour-controlled London and metropolitan councils to challenge the legislative powers the Thatcher Government had given itself – and, of course, all future national governments – in its winning June 1983 Election manifesto and subsequent 1984 Rates Act, to limit or 'cap' the 'rates' (residential and commercial property taxes) and thereby the spending of English local councils.**

**John's Islington visits took place as the 1984 Act was passing, controversially, through Parliament, and while Left-led councils – particularly in London, headed by the already doomed GLC and including the 'Socialist Republic of Islington' – were in early discussions over whether to openly challenge the Government by following Militant-controlled Liverpool's lead and setting some form of illegal deficit 1985/6 budget, in defiance of the Government's imposed 'cap'.**

**In December 1984, Environment Secretary Patrick Jenkin would announce the list of 18 councils selected for capping and their provisional budget limitations – in Islington's case a budget limit of £85.5 million against a planned £94 million, and a 112p rate limit, or over one-third less than the 'desired rate' of 165p. Ensuing deliberations were protracted and frequently bitter, particularly in Lambeth and Liverpool, but Islington was one of 12 councils starting the 1985/6 financial year with no rate set. Eventually, though, with councillors facing disqualification from office and being required personally to repay their council's lost interest, all did eventually set a legal rate – and Governments' powers to restrict council budgets remain in place today. (CG)**

I visited Islington in late January and mid-May, met officers from several departments and had individual discussions with the Leader<sup>32</sup>, the present Chief Executive, the Treasurer/Chief Executive-Designate, and the Director of Social Services.

There are two images of Islington. The first is the dedicated authority of the Socialist Republic of Islington. The second is the 'Loony Left' authority, as portrayed in the *Sunday Times* article entitled 'Town Hall Follies', which appeared two days before my second visit.

It is hard to find the reality behind the conflicting images – especially on my second visit, when there was a natural reluctance to criticise an authority already so criticised. I can but record impressions.

Islington is, like so many London boroughs, a tight, densely packed area, not clearly distinguished from its neighbours. It shares with some of those neighbours acute urban deprivation. But, along with the areas of deprivation and of council housing, there are the areas of gentrification, giving a particular flavour to the borough and its politics.

The politics have been complex since the brief period of Conservative rule in the late 1960s – so unexpected that it brought to the Council a majority, none of whom had previously been councillors<sup>33</sup>. From 1971 to 1981 there was unchallenged Labour rule, distinguished by complex battle between left and right and factions within.

Eventually, there were gradual defections to the SDP<sup>34</sup> until they were able briefly to gain control before the 1982 borough elections. Those elections saw the defeat of every SDP councillor except one (Liberal Democrat) and the return of a Labour council, but comprising several new councillors, dedicated to changing things.

Strangely, given outside images, those 1982 elections are seen by at least one chief officer almost as the calm after the storm. One must remember that prior to the elections there had been extreme political uncertainty and political conflict.

The new council was seen as united on policy. They were able and intelligent. This was one of the few authorities I've visited whose officers spoke favourably not of 'a few good councillors', but of the whole body of councillors being able. Interestingly, as a result roles have been found for councillors apart from the committee role.

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret (now Dame Margaret) Hodge – Islington councillor 1973-94, when she became and currently remains MP for Barking. Leader, Islington Council 1982-92.

<sup>33</sup> The remarkable details are described by Lewis Baston in his April 2018 ConservativeHome blog: 'The Conservative Local Landslide of 1968'. Labour's rout followed Chancellor of the Exchequer Roy Jenkins' austere devaluation budget and Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in Birmingham. Labour failed to win a single Birmingham ward, and in Islington the Conservatives went from zero to 47 seats and a huge majority. Hackney, Camden, and Lambeth Councils also became Conservative-controlled. In 1971 every single Islington Conservative was defeated.

<sup>34</sup> Social Democratic Party – formed 1981 by disaffected leading Labour dissidents: Roy Jenkins et al.

Councillors are **designated to look after particular subjects**, either for the council as a whole or particular committees. Thus, councillors have been designated as having responsibilities for gypsies or for 'Brighter Islington'.

The group, however, insist on their pre-eminence, subject to the party. There is resistance to building up the leadership. There can be an anarchic quality about decision-making. There are, as always in such authorities, endless groups and panels. All councillors see themselves with roles and they will make contact with officers at all points in the structure.

The Chief Executive, who is retiring, seems calmly to accept all this. He has been genuinely excited by the ideas, particularly about decentralisation. Faced with the anarchic complex of decision-making, his response is that 'It's all sorted out – that's our job'. One other chief officer said: 'You mustn't get worried about councillors contacting staff rather than yourself. If you get worried, that's the end.'

There has, however, been an attempt to build up a **small Policy Review group** of three councillors – chaired by the former Chairman of Social Services, with the Leader and the Finance Chairman – to try and get some sense of priority into their policies. Anarchic decision making may suit the burgeoning forth of new initiatives and ideas. Choice between policies may require more structuring. It has been accepted with some reluctance by the group as a necessity.

The group's internal politics are confused. There are no longer the bitter Left vs right conflicts of past years, but there are disputes.

Are the policies being pursued socialist? There is a ferment of initiative and ideas, but the emphasis could be more on radicalism than socialism. The ferment contains excitement, but also the basis on which Islington is described as 'Loony Left'.

Over and above those initiatives attracting the press attention, there is another dimension to Islington. It is the working out of council policy and change in the structure and working out of management. The Director of Social Services stressed the authority was concentrating on producing 'implementable policies' covering the full range of social services. He also stressed, however, that he was receiving full support from councillors in working out financial and managerial systems. There is the excitement of innovation, but also an **unusual recognition by councillors of the problems of implementation**.

This has affected their approach to decentralisation. The emphasis has been on working out an implementable strategy: not the decentralisation of all and everything, but of appropriate decisions within a policy framework. Much work has gone into working out that framework.

The detailed working out of the limits of responsibility should not detract from the **genuine enthusiasm of many of the officers**, who appreciate the excitement of the ideas. The retiring CE accepted that he had never thought along these lines before, but now accepted

there was a new way of running services that could be much more responsive to those they served.

The decentralisation proposals are nearly ready to go ahead. The first four posts of neighbourhood officers have been advertised, with a high response. There will be about 20 neighbourhoods.

There is, however, an obstacle – one that the councillors have already encountered on other policy issues. There is union opposition. This reflects a genuine concern amongst NALGO members that they will have to bear a new and difficult responsibility in direct contact with the community.

There is also, however, a deeper issue, which the councillors probably never expected to face: ‘the conflict between syndicalism and socialism’, if socialism is what Islington is aiming at. Their political aims can be frustrated by union attitudes. The councillors remain uncertain and disappointed ... it is sad that this is the first authority visited in this project where **I’ve had to walk through picket lines** – in this case, about the Council’s nurseries policy (where the unions regard undue emphasis is being given to the voluntary sector).

BUT, over and above all the excitement and innovation, there is **the threat of rate-capping**. Up to now there has been the campaign. With its own enthusiasm – and the Leader has played an important part in that. The campaign is now coming to an end and the reality of rate-capping in July is near.

How Islington responds is uncertain for both councillors and officers. There are the temptations of Liverpool and the reality that that may lead to disaster. The rate-capping may require only limited cuts, which may be too easy to achieve in the first year, but early acceptance can legitimate further cuts. The mood, however, is fixed – or appears to be – against seeking redetermination. Whatever happens, Islington wants maximum control of its own budget, and once redetermination is sought<sup>35</sup>, new powers are open to central government. The debates are beginning in Islington.

One other factor must be borne in mind in the once-safe Labour stronghold of Islington. The councillors must recognise the possibility of defeat. The three by-elections, in which the SDP gained two seats from Labour, have made an impact. Some councillors, at least, have become much more concerned with the public’s view of their policies.

This can lead them to place perhaps too great a faith in decentralisation; it is emphasised that the neighbourhood maintenance approach has already had a major impact in improving repairs.

The Council is learning and changing. The suspicion of at least some chief officers has been lessened by their obvious response. They have been disappointed by the union response,

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<sup>35</sup> CG – None of the listed authorities did apply for redetermination.

and surprised by the degree of press hostility, even where they have invited it. They face great dilemmas.

There is not merely the new threat of electoral defeat, but also the threat of rate-capping. Islington will be rate-capped. Of that, there is little or no doubt. The authority's dilemma is the response. This will be argued out within the party, between the party and the group, and between authorities.

There is uncertainty about how great an expenditure cut rate-capping will be designed to enforce in Year 1. There is an awareness that in Year 1 the reduction may be acceptable, but as Year 1 succeeds to Years 2 and 3 the cuts will bite deeper. Some argue that resistance should be mounted now, but what is resistance, and how is it to be mounted?

These issues will dominate the next few months. The group's relative coherence could be seriously threatened. There will be those who would defy the Government, without necessarily being clear as to either the nature or consequences of the defiance; others who accept the apparently inevitable. The unanimity of the campaigning style may be replaced by bitter argument. Rate-capping is a reality whose consequences have to be faced.

#### [Kent County Council \(Paper A91, May 1987\)](#)

*'Cultural revolution in Kent? Can a new, hyperactive Chief Executive 'revolutionise' the style, culture, and thereby practice of a large, established, essentially one-party council? If so, does that herald CE 'control'?'*

**It so happened that, as John's literally hundreds of 'Visit', 'Topic' and other papers were being kind of sorted, the death was announced of Professor Michael Clarke CBE DL, a close colleague of John's over the latter part of his academic life and a good, influential friend of INLOGOV. The academic parts of Michael's obituaries tended naturally to start with roles as Pro-Vice-Chancellor, then Vice-Principal, of the University of Birmingham from 1998 to his retirement in 2008, and his contributions to the development of both the University and the city of Birmingham more broadly.**

**His INLOGOV links, however, dated back to the 1980s – first as Director of the Local Government Training Board, then from 1991 as the first Chief Executive of its successor, the LG Management Board, and from 1993 as Head of the University's School of Public Policy. In all three capacities he was closely involved not only in the funding of major parts of INLOGOV's work but as a contributor to that work. He and John co-authored publications on the 'Public Service Orientation', Community Governance, and – another favourite JDS aphorism – 'Handling the Wicked Issues' – also included in this Festschrift. It was natural, therefore, that Michael would on occasion accompany John on his local authority training assessment visits – one such being this visit to Kent.**

**Kent has had its own County Council since 1888, with the principal exception of Canterbury, a Borough Council until 1974. In 1998 KCC would lose the districts of Gillingham and Rochester-upon-Medway to the new unitary Medway Council. Since the 1973/4 reorganisation the Council has been continuously Conservative controlled. (CG)**

I visited Kent County Council with Michael Clarke and had discussions with the Chief Executive, County Personnel Officer, and members of the CE's staff, and later with the Deputy Leader and Chair of Planning and Transportation.

Kent CC sought a change of style and of culture. It has certainly achieved that change in the person of the Chief Executive<sup>36</sup>. He is 'hyperactive', moving rapidly from topic to topic. Starting issues, highlighting problems. He sees himself as close to the political leadership in seeking to bring about 'the revolution' in the Council's management. He is an involved CE.

The revolution is associated with a related set of ideas or words:

- **Strategic Management**
- **Consumerism**
- **Devolution**

It is the ideas associated with those words that represent the cultural change required.

The emphasis has now moved from changing culture to action. Talk of the need for change can over time become counterproductive. Expectations are built up. The moment has come when culture is more likely to be changed by action.

Much of the immediate action is focused on the **reorganisation of the centre**, which can be regarded as reinforcing messages about the scale of change envisaged and providing new instruments to enable new approaches to management to develop. Most of these changes have created a greater number of units or departments. The CE clearly welcomes the small, clear-function, units.

Since many of these units or departments have a 'special lines' relationship with himself, it could be argued to place on the CE an over-wide span of control. This probably disturbs others more than the CE, who sees himself as able to give strategic direction to a wide span without necessarily over-burdening himself. It is an issue to be reviewed in a year's time. Meanwhile, it is important to take action.

The three current reorganisations involve:

1. A review of **property services**, challenging the hasty fashion of recent years and leading to two departments: one based on building, the other on managing property. The key

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<sup>36</sup> This recently appointed Chief Executive was Paul Sabin, formerly CE of Birmingham City Council. Along with Michael Clarke's presence, it would have made for a very atypical visit. For John's wife, Theresa, though not present, had been a Birmingham City Councillor since 1970, and all three, therefore, in their differing capacities, would have known Sabin quite well personally, which is possibly why he goes unnamed in John's actual report.

question was asked: What business is property services in? The answer was that there are two businesses.

2. A division between **Information Systems** and **Technology Systems**, in the belief that their combination in the same department led to IS being technology-driven. The new Head of IS is expected to work with, rather than against, devolved Information Systems, securing necessary but limited integration.
3. The **Planning Department** is likely to be split into a separate Planning Department and an Economic Development Unit (which may take over the training functions of education).

In the end it is accepted that the management revolution succeeds or fails in the service departments. It could be argued there are ambiguities or uncertainties about what is being sought:

- a concern for strategic management by the CE, but also the needs for a hands-on CE;
- a concern with how the concept of a hands-on CE fits with an emphasis on management devolution?

The answers probably lie in the recognition that devolution does not remove either responsibility for carrying out the council's policy and accountability. Rather, it stresses it – and the leading councillors would give this answer.

There is too the apparent contradiction of carrying out from the centre management changes that are directed at devolution. Indeed, one can ask: what are the instruments to bring about the changes that are available to the CE? Messages are given by the CE throughout the organisation. COs are influenced. Support is given to officers who will work with the key ideas of consumerism and devolution.

Some of the key instruments being developed are:

- Medium-term planning, which is based on:
- Reviewing policies
- Policy options
- Resource allocation.

Where necessary, the CE's staff will work with the department on policy options.

The authority is developing market research, starting with a general survey of public attitudes, but leading on to surveys of particular services. The CE interestingly sees customer monitoring as likely to be a more effective means of assessing departmental performance than many forms of output measures.

The Personnel Department is in the process of a major review of employment policy, covering performance-related pay, appraisal and assessment, employment contracts, fringe benefits, etc.

An emphasis is being placed on staff and management development policies. An Open Learning Centre is planned as an aid to staff development.

The leadership are committed to sets of ideas: 'strategic management', 'accountability', 'marketing', 'consumerism', 'a hands-on Chief Executive', 'devolution'. Some are drawn from Coopers & Lybrand [since 1998 PricewaterhouseCoopers], others from industrial experience.

The leadership are active. Executive Chairman has been the style since Grugeon<sup>37</sup> and is not likely to be abandoned. Whether and how the role of councillors fits in the cultural revolution remains unresolved, but there is no way it will mean anything but full involvement of a 'hands-on' Chairman.

Shetlands Islands Council (Paper A159, April 1990)

**Perhaps, at one and the same time, the most atypical of this 14-year series of 'A' visits on behalf of the LG Training and Management Boards, but also the most characteristic. No realistic possibilities of recruiting officers for West Hill training courses or one-day or even one-week seminars. No listing of lessons learned or good/bad practices to be recounted in lectures. Just pure interest in and fascination for all things Local Government – plus, of course, an excuse for an extra trip to Scotland. (CG)**

I visited Shetland Islands Council and had a group discussion with the Convenor of the Council, the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, and Director of Development.

The Shetlands lie 200 miles off the mainland of Scotland, almost as near to Norway as to Britain<sup>38</sup>. They have long felt their isolation and in it they have preserved their identity and even some of their Nordic tradition. It is a group of islands [about 100, 16 of which are populated], closer and more bound together than the Western Isles. They had been dependent on fishing, supplemented by crofting. Fishing had always given them an internationalism, as their waters and trade brought many nations, but in many ways their isolation remained.

Now for a brief period – perhaps no more than 30 years – they are living through the oil experience. Although Sullom Voe<sup>39</sup> is transformed from a rocky fjord into a great oil harbour, much remains unchanged about the islands. Fishing remains a staple industry. But

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<sup>37</sup> Sir John Grugeon – Leader, Kent CC (1973-82) and of the Assn. of County Councils (1984-87).

<sup>38</sup> Shetlanders like telling visitors that their nearest train station is Bergen! Not strictly true: 110 miles from mainland Scotland, 140 from Norway! Current population is about 23,000, Lerwick's about 7,000, with about half the archipelago's total population living within 10 miles of the town. Scalloway on the west coast, the capital until 1708, has a population of fewer than 1,000 people.

<sup>39</sup> An inlet of the North Sea and location of the Sullom Voe oil terminal and Shetland Gas Plant.

for the present there is a period of opportunity for the islands and for the authority. It is acknowledged to be a short period before – in 2000, 2015 or later – the oil is exhausted and the opportunity of financial resources is gone and isolation returns<sup>40</sup>. Already decline has set in. The Council is absorbed in the problem of using that opportunity.

The Council's role, its strategy and way of working are deeply conditioned by the oil. Much derives from the 1974 Zetland County Council Act, the vital piece of Private Bill legislation that laid the basis for the harbour powers of the Council and also gave them wide power to use the resources obtained for the general benefit of the islands (also powers over the 3-mile limit of the sea around the coasts, which has given them much greater control over fish farming than other Scottish authorities).

As well as the ZCC Act they secured agreed goodwill payments from the oil industry which has been used to set up trust funds. These are paid as a royalty up to 2000, which has never, however, reached the anticipated amount. Payment has always been at the minimum, although up to now index-linked. The trust fund has now reached £110 million. The authority has also benefited from the rateable value of the oil terminal, which, although there is now a fixed non-domestic rate in Scotland, is not redistributed according to population, but retained by Shetland. The council has used these resources to pay off debt and build up resources against future decline in rateable value.

The authority is only too aware how vulnerable its finances are. Only 3% of its income comes from the community charge<sup>41</sup>, so it is heavily dependent on other incomes, which are extremely vulnerable. The oil industry has reduced its rateable value by closing down part of its oil installation, a process likely to continue as the oil declines. It is believed the Secretary of State is under pressure to apply the UBR [Uniform Business Rates] arrangements. The agreements made with the oil industry expire in 2000 and few see the council being in a strong position then, when the oil industry faces decline. Indeed, already the authority is cautious in its financial dealings, lest the oil industry declines more rapidly – although it is now seeking an independent review of oil prospects to give it a firmer information base.

The council faces the tension of large present resources, many financial uncertainties, but long-term deterioration. There is naturally pressure to spend now and invest in the future, but also to conserve resources.

The council has clearly attempted to achieve a balance between improved services – the transport facilities so necessary to the islands, including the ferries it itself runs between the islands – and capital investment, much of it necessary for the increases in population which may or may not be temporary; between the development necessary for continuing economic success and maintaining reserves.

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<sup>40</sup> A slightly pessimistic projection – offshore production has certainly declined, but current estimates are that there's up to a further 20 years' worth.

<sup>41</sup> Aka the poll tax, the Thatcher Government's replacement for domestic rates, introduced in Scotland in 1989 and England & Wales in 1990.

It is a complex balancing act in an economy on the margin, which can so easily be overturned. Schools have been built for an anticipated expansion in air traffic that was frustrated by the development of helicopter flights from Aberdeen. The fishing industry is deeply affected by EEC quotas. Fish processing is being undermined by the greater interest in fresh fish. The financial balance could lead to a trebling of the community charge or more, with little impact on the council's financial position.

The council is a council of Independents, although five of the 25 belong to the Shetland Movement, including the Convenor. Each councillor sits on five of the nine committees and chooses which five, the size of the committee reflecting the choices. Thus the key Development Committee, focusing on the economic future, has 23 of the 25 members. There is no separate planning committee; rather, the full council meets monthly as the planning authority, as it does as the Shetland Island Trust responsible for the Trust Fund – which can only be used for charitable purposes, although that can involve community care – as well as meeting as a council every six weeks.

Most councillors are elected unopposed, although where there is a contest, there may be a turnout of 60% plus. There is a recognition of the need for balance between Lerwick and the rest of the islands, although councillors from Lerwick represent some areas outside the town.

No councillor or officer can be anonymous in the Shetlands. They are known and visible to the community. There are active community councils.

One of the most ambitious parts of the work of the council centres on the Development Department, which also has a research role. It has been responsible for the preparation of development strategies for agriculture, tourism, fisheries, knitwear, fish processing and fish farming, for which it has wide delegation powers in giving development grants. The department stimulated fish farming and provides a disease diagnostic service. It has a transport officer concerned with negotiations over communications to the island and EEC specialists. The department looks after two crofting estates, bought by the council to set standards.

*'An authority geared to crisis management, used to focussing on the immediate problem and to adjusting and changing ...'*

*'It is rightly recognised that to have 17 priorities may be to have none.'*

The 'A series' of John's papers – recounting relatively formal visits, for Training/Management Board purposes, involving both individual and small group meetings with leading members and officers – began with Wychavon in August 1983 and continued for over 13 years. The last appears to have been 'A 284', to Sunderland City Council, but the slightly earlier Haringey visit has been selected for several reasons, not least for the remarkable statistic that it was the last time the borough had any elected Conservative councillors at all. Which would be noteworthy – and a powerful argument for some form of Proportional Representation – in any circumstances, but particularly when, as relatively recently as 1968, the Conservatives had controlled the Council with a majority of 53 to 7.

It was in the mid-1980s, though, that the borough really started to make itself known (and increased the chances of having its name correctly spelt), when Bernie Grant became Council Leader and, records suggested, the first-ever black person to hold such a position in Europe. Haringey then became one of the few local authorities to develop policies increasing access for the disabled and attempting comprehensively to tackle discrimination. Grant, of course, would move on, becoming one of the first three black MPs in the Commons. (CG)

I visited Haringey and had individual discussions with the Chief Executive, Directors of Education, Housing, and Social Services, group discussions with the Management Team, the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Chief Whip, and with staff and councillors involved with public scrutiny and about community economic development.

Haringey in the later 1980s faced the reality of a difficult and dangerous situation. Since then, crisis has followed crisis, as the authority has come to terms with its financial position. It has been almost as if the organisation at senior level was structured for the management of crisis. Crisis became the norm and councillors became accustomed to its ways. It was almost as if crisis brought its own excitement as the adrenalin flowed. For many staff, of course, crisis brought its uncertainties and an expectation of disturbance and the fear of redundancy. The present Leader<sup>42</sup> became Leader after Bernie Grant's election to Parliament. He saw his role as bringing stability to the group, to enable it to cope with the difficult situation caused by the financial crisis. His political management skills have held the group together.

At the last election, to their own surprise, the Labour group increased to 57, with the Conservatives reduced from 17 to 2. Some Labour councillors were almost alarmed to be elected. The results were surprising because Haringey is an authority of two areas: the

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<sup>42</sup> Toby Harris (1987-99); later Lord Harris and 1st Chairman of the Association of London Government (1995-2000)

centre and East, both areas of severe deprivation and unemployment, and the West around Highgate – an area of affluence and prosperity. The size of majority has increased the problems of group management. It is, however, not fractured, but rather a mixture of various factions, which fits with the Leader's political skills.

The authority is now through the crisis period, as far as this can be said of any authority. It spent below cap last year, wanting to keep the council tax increase to the minimum, and knowing it was still among the very highest tax-rate authorities. It is likely again to spend below cap. Reserves have been built up, with funds available for the redevelopment of Alexandra Palace in partnership with the private sector<sup>43</sup>.

Normality has returned, but is difficult to accept. This is an authority geared to crisis management, used to focusing on the immediate problem and to adjusting and changing. It has proved difficult to change ways of working, to secure the development of longer-term strategies and the pursuit of corporate priorities. The Labour group will agree to corporate priorities and strategies, but they will soon be overturned in practice.

The authority has sought to develop processes centring on corporate and service plans. There is a 'Corporate Strategy 1996-2000', with 17 Corporate Priorities:

- Public service
- Service Improvement
- Equal Opportunities
- Workforce
- Information Management Technology
- Service Improvement
- Equal Opportunities
- Workforce
- Information Management Technology
- Communications and Marketing
- Environmental Sustainability
- Regeneration
- Raising Educational Standards
- Health of the Borough
- Anti-poverty
- Community Safety
- Cleanliness of the Borough.

The Corporate Strategy contains and reflects an economic and social assessment which shows clearly that Haringey:

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<sup>43</sup> Haringey Council had taken over the Alexandra Palace and Park trusteeship from the GLC in July 1980, literally months before a fire started during a jazz festival, destroying half the building. Long story short: the Council overspent on the repairs, tried unsuccessfully to sell it, but today (2023) remain the trustees.

- has suffered a sharp decline over the last decade in relation to the rest of the country;
- ranks, on various indicators, among the country's poorest districts;
- displays increasing inequalities within the borough between the poorest and better-off;
- demonstrates signs of a growing polarisation, producing concentrations of multiple deprivation in parts of the borough.

It contains, for each Corporate Priority, background information, the Council's aims for 1998, a statement of strategic objectives, and a set of strategic targets.

Within corporate planning, service planning and evaluation has been developed. It has the following principles<sup>44</sup>:

- An Annual Planning Framework within a Medium-term Service Strategy;
- A Commitment to Measuring Strategic Service Outcomes;
- A Corporate Flexible Framework;
- A Cyclical and Iterative Process;
- Integrated Council-wide Planning;
- A Participative Planning Process;
- An Integral Aspect of Performance Management and Review;
- A Commitment to User-based Planning;
- A Workable and Accessible Planning Process.

There are, therefore, developed processes for corporate planning and service planning. There is, however, a strange contrast between these developed and systematic processes and the reality of an authority that has not escaped from the culture of crisis management.

There is an awareness of this dilemma amongst both the Management Team and senior officers. A Strategic Planning Day was held last October, which identified the following issues:

- Poor linkage between the Corporate Plan and financial planning. This means that 'agreed' priorities are frequently overturned during the budgetary process.
- Lack of ownership of the Corporate Plan – some staff not knowing of its existence and others not perceiving it as relevant. This partly because much of the Council's business is not actually reflected in the Plan.
- The Plan is unfocussed and lacks proper balance. It is spread over too many areas and some aims are too cautious, while others are unattainable.
- It is unclear whom the Plan is actually addressing. It is not focused on Members, senior managers, the workforce, or the community, and this leads to confusion.
- Too much emphasis is placed on 'development' and 'planning' within the Council, insufficient recognition being given to the 'ordinary employee', who is not really involved in the planning process.

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<sup>44</sup> Abbreviated here to headings only.

Corporate plans and service plans have been 'passed on the nod'. There is little commitment to them, or perhaps little appreciation of what they mean in practice. They are easily overturned in the day-to-day working of the authority. It was agreed that a **Corporate Strategy** must be developed which does the following<sup>45</sup>:

- It must give a clear indication of needs. All of our planning and activities should be clearly geared to the needs of the community.
- It must set our priorities more clearly, and reduce their number, ideally to four or five areas. At the moment there is too much 'planning' and insufficient focus on 'implementation'. In other words, the Corporate Strategy should be 'fit for purpose' and we need to recognise that there are finite resources with which to implement it. Our most valued resource is the Council's workforce, which must be drawn into the planning process, but not to the detriment of undertaking the basic job.
- The Corporate Strategy, once agreed, must be consistently followed. There are too many instances where Members, perhaps responding to short-term pressures, make unreasonable demands on officers, thereby pulling resources away from the main priorities we have all previously agreed.
- Greater ownership is needed by Members and the workforce, with recognition by the local community. To this end, the core document needs to be 'translated' into forms comprehensible to different audiences.

The issue is how far this will be achieved. An attempt has been made to reduce the 17 priorities to 5, but this has been more by grouping than by choice. There is a recognition that the issues should be faced as the authority prepares both for a possible change of government and for the 1998 elections.

These dilemmas and issues should not hide Haringey's achievement in making the changes required to reach the present position. Hard decisions have been faced. A major departmental reorganisation has been achieved, creating five directorates, including a Housing and Social Services Directorate, in which attempts have been made to achieve integration, especially in care for the elderly. Procedures for corporate planning and service planning have been established, which would have been impossible some time ago.

In addition, there have been interesting developments in democratic processes. Because of the lack of opposition and awareness of the role of the authority in community leadership, new forms of council meeting have been introduced. Speakers are invited from appointed boards and outside bodies to discuss their policies.

Haringey has introduced procedures for public scrutiny. Topics are identified from opinion surveys and other sources. After preparation a public scrutiny meeting is held in the council, attended by:

- Service providers – the senior managers responsible.

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<sup>45</sup> Again significantly abbreviated

- Service users and members of the public, drawn from interested users, voluntary organisations, residents' associations.
- The public scrutiny panel of councillors.
- and in some cases an outside expert.

User representatives raise issues and make suggestions, and the panel ask questions of service providers. Later a scrutiny action plan will be prepared and presented to a later meeting. A wide range of subjects have been covered by this procedure, starting with housing benefits, but also including services for those with physical disabilities, prevention of dumped rubbish, and community care.

## Part 6: Appreciations

John nurtured, challenged and collaborated with a generation of academic scholars and local government leaders. This section presents some of the recollections submitted by these colleagues, often reflecting on John's contribution to their careers.

### Andrew Coulson

The key to INLOGOV's rapid growth in the 1970s, and John's greatest contribution, was the creation of '12-week courses' which morphed into the slightly shorter Advanced Management Development Programme (AMDP) - which was still running successfully when I joined INLOGOV in 1984.

John arrived in Birmingham in 1966. Larger and more effective borough councils in London, and the Greater London Council, had already been created. The 1972 Local Government Act established metropolitan county councils in 5 conurbations outside London, powerful county councils and larger district councils in England and Wales. The buzzword was 'Corporate Management' – strong council departments would work together under chief executives who could come from any part of local government - no longer only from legal or finance departments. John spotted a gap in the market. He created residential courses, held at West Hills House outside Birmingham, which had been given to the University by the Cadbury family. It was adapted as a residential facility with 25 bedrooms and a range of teaching rooms. These courses became the essential stepping stone for local government officers with ambitions to become chief executives. It had its own culture – everything was off the record, there was no assessment or exams, references were not given on the basis of the courses. The bedroom doors did not have locks and the rooms were not *en suite*. Through these courses John got to know personally a large proportion of the chief executives in England. Much of the work on the courses was in small groups, which led to many friendships between chief executives – which can be a very lonely existence when the going gets tough. Later, generous grants from the Local Government Training Board enabled John to visit almost every English local authority, and his iconic articles in the *Local Government Chronicle*, written with George Jones, made him the guru of British local government - facilitated by his charm, charisma and local knowledge. John usually wrote a first draft, in his terrible green-ink handwriting, George typed it up and improved it, and John then signed off the final version (or at least I think so - memory can be deceptive!) The results were almost always highly relevant and very clear.

INLOGOV had to make sufficient income to cover all its costs, including salaries. Much of this came from one-day courses for local government officers and councillors, which could be delivered in Birmingham or for individual local authorities. John Raine brought in loads of money from his 'Finance for Non-Financial Managers' day courses - basic introductions to the principles of local government finance. When it looked as if the books would not

balance, appeals went out for more courses. Some staff were brilliant at this - above all Kieron Walsh, who became a national specialist in contracting who recognised the limitations of what could be achieved through outsourcing and promoted a much broader view of 'best value'. John had him lined up as his successor, and the Institute never fully recovered from his sudden death from a heart attack in May 1995, aged 46.

When it comes to John's management of INLOGOV the story is more complex. He would float ideas with a few key friends and if they told him that most of the rest of the staff agreed then he would announce a change. This worked when the Institute was small, but less well when it reached 20 staff or more. Staff came from many backgrounds, but its foundation was Public Administration – then a discipline in its own right which had grown from the need to train public servants, in this country and the British colonies. This developed into the new public management, following books such as Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*. But the psychologists, economists, and political scientists in the Institute did not always get the recognition they deserved, and many moved on to distinguished careers elsewhere. It is great to see their tributes in this collection.

*Andrew Coulson is an Associate at INLOGOV.*

### Bob Hinings

I was a member of INLOGOV from September 1973 until January, 1983. I joined INLOGOV to head up a research team to study the major reorganisation of local government that came into effect on April 1, 1974. The focus was on the ways in which the organisation of local authorities changed, particularly as a result of the Bains Report with its focus on corporate planning. The eventual team was myself, Royston Greenwood, Stewart Ranson, and Kieron Walsh; all of us were significantly influenced by John. Indeed it was because of the very high profile of John Stewart and his work on corporate planning in local government that the research arose and was handsomely funded.

As someone who had worked in sociology departments, working at INLOGOV was a totally new experience for me and I needed the help and support of John Stewart, which I got in spades. While he was not directly a member of the team, he was very committed to what we were doing and full of enthusiasm and ideas. John believed passionately in local government and in an Institute that would carry out rigorous research that would have a positive impact on local authorities. It was under John's tutelage, with the generosity of his ideas and his time that I came to truly understand the link between research and practice. I worked with John in new ways in courses for senior local government officers and it was a revelation to see how he connected ideas to practice. I learnt so many things that have remained with me for the last 40 years and enhanced my own academic practice.

In so many ways, leaving INLOGOV was difficult, and particularly because of losing that relationship with John and the new ideas, excitement, and commitment that he brought to the work that we were involved in. He was a genuine 'one of a kind'!

*Bob Hinings is Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta*

Chris Skelcher

John Stewart's work consistently emphasises the nodal location of multi-functional and popularly elected local government within a system of other local public service agencies. The latter are part of the wider population of 'quangos' – quasi-governmental organisations created specifically so that public policy can be developed and implemented with considerable autonomy from elected political authority. These are typically single purpose bodies whose constitution is grounded in public, company or charitable law, and the members of whose governing board are appointed in various ways - by another organisation, and/or a government minister, and/or through voting by a restricted electorate, and/or because they are a senior official of that organisation.

John coined the phrase 'the new magistracy' to describe the way in which functions that were previously part of local government were from the 1980s gradually being transferred to these quasi-autonomous bodies. His argument was that this was creating a late twentieth-century version of the fragmented local public service world of the Victorian era. Then, many services were controlled by appointed magistrates or private companies and lacked accountability to local citizens. They also operated independently of each other, thus limiting the capacity of government to deal with the major problems arising from industrialisation and rapid urban growth.

The big nineteenth-century reforms of urban and rural local government were designed to improve accountability as the democratic mandate gradually extended to include non-property owners and latterly women, but also to create capacity to design policy and coordinate action in ways that could draw on the interconnections between public services and the greater resources available to multi-purpose local governments.

In the last quarter of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first, new agencies were created to undertake what had been local government functions, including running schools and further education colleges, undertaking urban regeneration and housing improvement, and overseeing the police and fire services. Besides the growth of the local-level quangos, John commented on the way in which the development of contracting-out also impacted local democratic accountability. Initially, contracting-out applied to basic municipal services such as refuse collection and street cleansing, but then extended into managing services such as leisure and latterly highly complex arrangements where-by the corporate functions of HR, IT, finance, property management and legal services were outsourced to large commercial organisations.

John was instrumental in drawing attention to these developments and highlighting their detrimental impact on democratic accountability and the capacity of local governments to deal with the 'wicked issues' communities faced. He argued that the narrative that users of public services should be treated as self-interested customers ignored their role as citizens with a wider interest in the welfare of their community.

His work struck a chord with the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee) in the 1990s, both of whose reports made recommendations designed to increase transparency of local quangos' governance, regulation of their board appointments, and accountability to local communities. Yet now, at the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, further fragmentation of local public services and severe fiscal constraint have continued to weaken the democratic ethos and problem-solving capacity that John so valued in local government.

*Chris Skelcher is Emeritus Professor of Public Governance at INLOGOV.*

### Colin Copus

It is rare academics have long-standing, lasting influence on their field stretching beyond academia into practice and policy. But, the contribution made to local government by the late and great John Stewart is one example of a rare such occurrence; one which will not be surpassed. Over a generation John's influence across local government was, and is, unmatched.

As a result of his sustained effort and dear affection for local government he leaves it a better place than when he founded the Institute of Local Government Studies. Local government is better because of his tireless work as a powerful and original thinker and as a man who could make those thoughts of relevance to local government. Local government always needs a friend and John was that friend; one who could back his friendship with high quality research, evidence and thinking.

As a young academic bursting with pride at having just received my PhD, I took the liberty of sending a copy to John; this was the days when printed copies had to be posted and it cost me a fortune. I wasn't expecting the great man to respond, just put in on the pile with all the others. But, no, not John. I received a touching letter, congratulating me on, in his words 'a well-deserved PhD', and containing suggestions for publications. He also, much to my shock, pointed out a few typos – to my shock because it meant that George Jones, my examiner, had missed them and that was unusual!

His response convinced me I needed to be at INLOGOV and it was my great privilege to work there with John and benefit first hand from his support, mentoring and advice. My recollection is of a man, a giant in his field, who also gave his time to support for junior colleagues and whose support was of immeasurable benefit to me over the years. My other

recollection is of John, sitting perched on the corner of a desk, while groups of wizened, cynical and hardnosed councillors and officers sat spellbound, hanging on his every word. He had this habit of tearing off strips of paper and rolling them into a ball while he spoke – there were piles under the table every time he finished!

His voice was always needed and still is, now more than ever. Finally, John was simply a gentleman and a bloody nice bloke, to boot.

*Colin Copus is Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University and visiting professor, Ghent University*

### Crispin Derby

John Stewart somehow managed to radiate his ideas throughout the local government universe and made his subtle influence empower all who loved local government and fought to make it affect so much. And this in the face of constant pressures from central government to limit it.

His wonderful insight helped so many people to be massively more effective than many of us thought possible. I was proud to publish the penetrative articles he wrote with the late Professor George Jones in LGC when I was Editor. We had some wonderful battles with central government and all in the pursuit of the greatest possible democracy.

*Crispin Derby was editor of the Local Government Chronicle*

### **John Stewart: The generous academic**

I was lucky enough to publish a Fabian pamphlet with John in 1988 called *From Local Administration to Community Government* which laid out a new vision (for the UK at least!) for the role of local government, as not about the administration of a set of services but rather the governance of a community. A year later at John's suggestion (as he was unwell) I got to develop some of these ideas at a government seminar attended by an ESRC representative who in turn asked me to pitch for a research programme picking up on some of the issues. This opportunity led eventually, with some very helpful intervention by Rod Rhodes, to the emergence of the Local Governance Programme funded by the ESRC that ran from 1992-97 and of which I was the director. (A more detailed account of these foundations to the research programme that greatly accelerated my career is provided by Rod in his foreword in one of the books that emerged from the project under the title of *The New Management of British Local Governance*).

This rather long-winded and mildly self-serving account is supposed to reveal a core feature of John Stewart, his ability to share ideas and opportunities with people. He was a generous man and an amazing academic mentor and support not just to me but so many. I wrote other things with John and we edited together two books. One of my favourite pieces of writing with him emerged as a chapter in an edited book and went under the title of 'The free local government experiments and the programme of public service reform in Scandinavia'. That chapter was fun to write as I got to visit Sweden for the first time ever and also captured our shared view that local government suitably reformed could provide a major social and economic benefit to our societies by governing more effectively than higher levels of government. I, like so many others, owe much of my early career advancement to John's engagement and care.

As others will testify, he was a tremendous influence on councillors and officers in local government, but unfortunately never came to have the same influence on civil servants and politicians at the national level. That was primarily as his message was so uncompromisingly pro-local government in an era when global economic and political trends meant that UK politicians had other ideas about how to secure change. Perhaps too, and this is where John and I parted ways to a degree, he was more willing to criticise and challenge local government managerial performance than its political failings. Although I am more than happy to admit that he had many ideas about how to improve the politics of local government.

Disagreeing with John though was always a pleasure. He was as thoughtful and helpful in the development of ideas and arguments he did not share, as well as those he himself supported. That for me is what marks him out as an outstanding academic and man. Yes, he had his own research agenda and a highly developed understanding of what local

government was and how it could be better, but that did not stop him helping others with their projects and ideas. He was, I think it's fair to say, a generally light user of references and citations in his own work, But whenever I discussed with him some idea that had taken my fancy - from post-Fordism to elected mayors - he had read all the research and asked good, hard, analytical questions. Weirdly, I can hardly remember much of what I wrote then but what I can recall is John's good humour, kindness and above all his instruction through parables and stories. I still recount several of them (with attribution) to this day. He was a remarkable man and the kind of academic that made a difference - both within the world of research and in changing people's lives and an understanding of their roles. In short, John did impact before it became fashionable.

Janet Newman

### *Crossing boundaries*

I worked with John for some 10 years at INLOGOV and recall his warmth and generosity as a colleague and informal mentor. We were very different: he was a staunch advocate of local government, I was quite critical of many of its traditions, its hierarchical structures and tendency towards cronyism. His focus was on talking with politicians, mine on the development of professionals, managers and staff. I was a young woman – one of, I think, only two – in a male-dominated and rather paternalistic department; he was a senior, almost mythical, figure. Yet he was very accessible and remarkably humble. I remember him strolling the corridors, chatting to people in the monk-like cells that we called offices, offering wisdom and advice. He was a culture builder, bringing people together and shaping the purpose of our work.

And he always looked out for me. I had come to INVLOGOV as an educator, with no publications to my name. Early on he asked me to review a book for the journal the Department edited. He looked at the result and said a resounding NO; it was, he said, too careful, too balanced, so was neither fish nor fowl. What did I really think of the book, he asked. I told him, and he said: 'write that!'. I never looked back as a writer.

Although we were very different in some ways, John and I shared an orientation to bridging the worlds of politics and practice, of the academy and government. This boundary work is difficult but can be highly productive. John offered a form of leadership that combined vision and purpose with an empathy with those he sought to influence. That inspired me – and many others – to think about the kind of academic we wanted to be.

*Janet Newman is Emeritus Professor at The Open University*

## John Benington

I had three separate phases of involvement with John Stewart and INLOGOV, stretching across several decades: first as a young student at INLOGOV in the early 1970s; second as a lecturer at INLOGOV in the mid-1980s; and third as an organisational ‘competitor’ and collaborator with John and INLOGOV when I transferred to Warwick University Business School in the late-1980s, working there for over 20 years before retiring as an Emeritus Professor around 2011.

Throughout this whole time I came to respect and admire John for his curiosity as an academic (especially about local government, public services, social justice and inequality); his collegiality (mentoring and encouraging irreverent young turks like me and others who’ve written in this collection); and his compassion (listening carefully and helping to ease pressures when we were going through tough times in our personal lives).

I first came to INLOGOV in 1971 as one of the youngest students on INLOGOV’s 12-week Advanced Management Development Programme (AMDP). I had been appointed in 1970 (aged 29) as the Director of the Community Development Project (CDP) for Coventry City Council – the pilot phase for a national programme involving the Home Office, 12 local authorities and 10 Universities (later to include INLOGOV). Coventry’s Chief Executive, Derrick Hender, the pioneer of corporate management in local government and of Planned Programming and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), nominated me to attend the second of the iconic 12-week residential courses held at Wast Hills House. John Stewart and INLOGOV were already seen as the national gurus for corporate management, and I was honoured to be inducted in these mysteries.

I was impressed there by John Stewart’s inspirational teaching, by his and other INLOGOV colleagues’ commitment to critical questioning, dialogue with managers, applying theory to practice, and welcoming a diversity of perspectives from sociology, psychology, politics, economics and organisation and management theory. I also welcomed the social life of a 12-week residential course (away from the public goldfish bowl of leading the high profile but controversial CDP programme in Coventry), and ended up spending too many evenings at the Opposite Lock Jazz Club in Birmingham’s Gas Street Basin (is it still there?) listening to Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s avant- garde saxophone playing [Yes, but it’s called Bobby Brown’s and no longer has a live music policy – ed.].

Many of us on the AMDP also reverted rapidly to rather delinquent student behaviour in the classroom. We were in awe of John Stewart’s charisma and breadth and depth of knowledge, but teased him for his delightful eccentricities. He was the first to enjoy the joke when we noticed his habit of twisting a paper clip while teaching, and gradually increased the size and strength of the paper clips on his lectern week by week, until he was eventually grappling with metal coat hangers and finally an un-twistable iron bar. We also noticed his endearing habit of walking backwards down the narrow corridors of the Muirhead Tower so he could continue a face-to-face conversation with a student or colleague. Some of us tried

to lure him to walk backwards into one of the open sided 'paternoster' lifts (a chain of open compartments that move slowly in a loop up and down inside the building so passengers can step on or off at any floor without the lift stopping). Mercifully John quickly cottoned on to our juvenile jape and avoided any accident.

One of John's PA's later told me that she was embarrassed when John arrived at INLOGOV one morning to meet an important government visitor, with only one side of his face shaved, the other left stubbled. It seemed likely that his attention had been diverted (mid-razoring) by something more interesting. I reassured her that John's capacity to be entranced by new thoughts and ideas was part of his attraction to people who loved the originality of his mind and his artistic creativity.

I came back to INLOGOV as a lecturer in 1985/6, after 5 years as Chief Officer of Sheffield City Council's new Department for Employment and Economic Development. David Blunkett was then the pioneering elected leader of Sheffield City Council, before he went on to become an MP and senior member of Tony Blair's Cabinet. I was a member of the Chief Officers Corporate Management team, and led and managed a new department with a staff of over 70. I made a lot of embarrassing mistakes, but learned a lot about corporate management, and its strengths and weaknesses in practice.

I left Sheffield for personal reasons (a painful divorce) and applied for a basic grade lecturing job at INLOGOV, halving my salary so that I could spend more time with my children who were still living in Coventry. Dr Andrew Coulson, who had also been part of the Sheffield experiment (and writes warmly, wittily and honestly about JDS in this volume) and I brought to the INLOGOV team our recent experience of the dilemmas of managing the relationships with councillors of all persuasions, with officials from key professions (e.g planning, law, finance), and with private firms and developers. We remember the warm welcome from John Stewart and colleagues, who were genuinely interested in what we had learned about the complexity of corporate management in practice, and about economic and social development.

JDS warmly encouraged me not only to teach on the latest version of the Advanced Management Development Programme (AMDP) at Wast Hills House, but also to research and publish with Judy White on the Future of Public Services; to teach and write with Professors Gerry Stoker and Stewart Ranson as part of the ESRC research programme on Local Governance; to develop an innovative cross-national Motor Industry Local Authorities Network (MILAN), and to accept an invitation from Prof Graham Room at Bath University to join the cross-national research team for the European Programme to Combat Poverty. John Stewart was always keen to discuss and read about these new expressions of networked multi-level, multi-nodal, multi-national governance.

Although not core to John's primary interests in corporate management and the public service ethos, he welcomed these wider initiatives and interests, and was not in any way threatened when I was invited in 1988 by the Dean of Warwick University's Business School to move there to set up first a Local Government Research Centre (LGC), and later the

Institute of Governance and Public Management (IGPM) and a series of modular residential Diploma and Masters programmes in different aspects of public leadership and management (the MPA).

So the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of my working relationship with John Stewart was as an organisational ‘competitor’ and collaborator, from 1988 till I retired in 2011. We were regularly guest lecturers on each other’s courses at Birmingham and Warwick, and at many national conferences and local government events. He was always a charismatic speaker, introducing fresh and imaginative ideas in a compelling thought-provoking way. He spoke as he wrote – in short phrases, linked together thread by thread, layer by layer, to build up his case. His rhetorical style was memorable; his voice was melodic; his ideas commanded attention.

John’s thinking and teaching, and his writing with key colleagues at INLGOV, helped to shape the world of local government and public services over many decades (as testified by many of the other contributions to this edited collection).

I will remember him warmly as ‘a man for all seasons’, a person of integrity, consistent values, and deep feelings; a life well lived indeed.

*John Benington is Emeritus Professor of Governance and Public Management at Warwick University, Coventry, UK*

### John Raine

My first encounter with John was in 1978 while I was working as a public finance researcher at the Department for the Environment’s Building Research Establishment. John had recently served as a member of the Layfield Committee on Local Government Finance, and was subsequently commissioned by the Department as one of four leading thinkers to prepare scenarios for the future of local government in England & Wales – John’s assigned subject being the future financing of local government. The four commissioned scenarios were then presented and discussed at a special conference that I was privileged to attend, and where John delivered one of the most fascinating and inspiring talks that I had ever heard. I followed up by reading a number of John’s academic and practitioner-oriented journal articles, all of which I found really thoughtful, elegantly written and refreshingly original.

So, when in Summer 1979 I happened to spot an advertisement for a lectureship in public policy at the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, (and knowing this to be the department of which John was Head, and with it now becoming clear that the future for public policy research within government would be more limited under the new Thatcher government at Westminster), I had no hesitation in preparing my application. I was pleased to be shortlisted and all the more so when, on entering the interview room, I

found that my Appointments Board would indeed be chaired by JDS. He led the interview process in his typically gentle, respectful but deeply interested and enquiring manner, and that evening I was absolutely delighted to be offered the post - one that seemed such a perfect fit for me – focused on the interface between theory and practice in public policy and administration, and particularly dedicated to the local level. Indeed, INLOGOV proved to be an institution in which I quickly felt much ‘at home’, and where I happily spent the succeeding thirty-six years of my career - including eight as head of department, (and where I continue to enjoy helping out on a part-time basis after formally retiring in 2015).

Very shortly after my induction at INLOGOV came the new Conservative Government’s ‘Local Government, Planning and Land Bill, 1980’, a huge piece of legislation and one which heralded a number of significant changes to the financial arrangements for local government, though sadly not those that John and the Layfield Committee had so carefully advocated. Instead, the new Parliamentary Bill sought to introduce a raft of new strictures and restrictions on local authorities, including on council direct labour organisations, their town and country planning powers, their financial powers and much more besides. Being the new member of staff, John asked if I might organise and lead a series of seminars and conferences on the new legislation around the country. And this I did, commencing with a major conference in London, with the then Secretary of State, Rt Hon. Michael Heseltine, as the key-note speaker. Undoubtedly, however, the high note of the conference was the contribution made by John himself, who delivered a masterly critique of the Bill’s proposals, greatly appreciated by the packed conference hall, and surely providing the Secretary of State with a very clear message about the reaction of local government to the changes he was intending to make.

Thereafter, and once the Bill had become an Act of Parliament, INLOGOV became hectically busy running courses and seminars on the new legislative requirements and providing consultancy support around the country as local authorities began instituting the various changes now expected of them. It was, for INLOGOV both an exciting, and financially very positive, time, although for local government it could only be seen as a significant lurch in the direction of a new, more centralist, era. John, however, remained characteristically cheerful and positive – continuing to present the case for localism, and with an increasingly large evidence-base that he was now accumulating from all his visits to local authorities around the country and further afield.

John was always very proud of the Institute he had founded at Birmingham and cared deeply about its fortunes, his staff and their work. His office door was rarely shut, and he walked the corridors on a daily basis engaging in depth with everyone whose door happened to be open or whom he encountered in the corridors or in the kitchen area. He actively encouraged staff to drop into his office for chats and to stay and talk with him for as long as they could. He maintained a deep interest in all the work of staff and in their welfare, and he was always able to make helpful suggestions as to policy issues on which they might wish to pick up, about papers they might like to write, or seminars they might perhaps take a lead in arranging. In my experience, so often his conversations would begin

with him asking ‘Well, how’s John?’ and then followed on with ‘And how’s the Institute?’ – genuine questions that reflected his on-going affection and care for the organisation he had founded and for the team he had brought together to share in his mission.

He was indeed an inspiration not only to all his staff but to the thousands of individuals in local (and central) government with whom he interacted, whether as teacher, researcher, consultant, adviser or simply friend. For his lectures he would typically position himself on the corner of a desk at the front of the room, with his script invariably comprising a single sheet of A4 with perhaps just three or four key words scribbled in one corner as his prompt. His time management was immaculate. He always managed to pitch his talks superbly for his different audiences, always leaving plenty of time for discussion and debate – for his responses to questions were always as inspiring and thought-provoking as the preceding input.

He also greatly enjoyed his travels around the UK, visiting almost every local authority (by train, for he did not drive), and then, after each visit, preparing and circulating to all Institute staff as well as his visit hosts a summary paper of all that he had learned and reflected upon as good and less good practice and about the key issues for further consideration and reflection. Moreover, his productivity in writing for publication (often as co-author with his longstanding academic colleague, Professor George Jones at LSE) was hugely impressive, with regard to both the scholarly and professional journals, as well as through his considerable output of single and joint-authored books. Indeed, he provided a model for us all at INLOGOV in balancing so effectively his commitment to the pursuit of scholarship in public administration with the other important role for the department in promoting better practices and increased effectiveness within our public service organisations.

At a personal level, I was also especially appreciative of all John’s support and encouragement when, at a time of crisis for the Institute, in 1995 - following the sudden and untimely death of Professor Kieron Walsh, who had only very recently assumed the Directorship of INLOGOV - I was invited to take his place as Director of this most special of Institutes. In the subsequent five years, John was a wonderfully inspiring mentor for me, and someone to whom I often turned for his wise counsel and judgement on organisational leadership issues. May he rest in peace and may INLOGOV continue to flourish and cherish his legacy.

*John Raine is Emeritus Professor at INLOGOV.*

## Mirza Ahmad

I became aware of Professor John Stewart earlier on in my career in local government legal services from around the end of the 1980's. Since then, I have followed with great interest his nationally recognised work on local government. In particular, his short publications in the early 1990's on local government services were immensely influential to me, as I was also able to use the same for my part-time MBA studies.

Since joining Birmingham City Council in 2000, I was able to meet and get to know Professor Stewart in a wholly different and more informal light – as the consort to the then Lord Mayor of Birmingham and the former Leader of Birmingham City Council, Councillor Theresa Stewart. Both being great inspirational leaders and role models, in their respective careers.

The humanity of both, along with their ability to relate and empathise with all of the people that they met, along with good humour and wit, made it a great pleasure for me to serve them both, in my role - at the time - as Chief Legal Officer of Birmingham City Council. Meeting them provided me with exceptionally good learning experiences and helped me to do even better for Birmingham.

I owe both of them a great debt of gratitude for their positive influence and encouragement of me.

*Dr Mirza Ahmad LL.D is a barrister in Birmingham.*

## Norman Flynn

John Stewart's extensive academic work and consistent pro-local government stance are well known. I was fortunate to work at INLOGOV from 1978-1984 under John. He was an inspiring person to work with. He was very present up and down the corridors of the J.G.Smith building, INLOGOV's home when I was there, knocking on doors, telling us all about what he had just found out and encouraging us to be curious researchers and teachers. The most negative thing I ever heard him say about an idea was 'I don't think we can make that a priority.'

He was also generous. There were occasional parties at home, hosted by John and Theresa, where we got to meet their contacts in an informal setting and always had good fun. He always encouraged us to get to know the leading figures in local government.

Those of us who worked on the senior management course for local government benefitted from his knowledge, enthusiasm and contacts, while never feeling bullied into what the boss wanted us to do. He encouraged us younger staff to have confidence in our encounters with senior officers, based on our education and research experience.

After INLOGOV I had another 30 years in academic life and can honestly say that John Stewart was the most inspiring head of department I had the privilege to work with.

*Norman Flynn worked at INLOGOV from 1978 to 1984*

### Paul Joyce

I only met John once, back in the early 1990s, I came to visit him for a conversation about decentralisation and other things when I was working at the London Borough of Islington. I travelled up from London and met him here in INLOGOV. He was one of my big influences early on when I was doing my PhD on local government, especially regarding the relationship of local government to the community/public/service users.

My impression in the 1980s was that he was an outstanding intellectual leader who provided an amazing amount of inspiration and encouragement to the practitioners I knew in local government.

*Paul Joyce is an INLOGOV Associate. His latest book is Strategic Management and Governance: Strategy Execution Around the World (Routledge, 6 June 2022).*

### Peter Watt

I have great gratitude to Professor John Stewart. Before joining INLOGOV I had worked as an economics researcher at the universities of Hull, Sheffield and York. John Stewart offered me a job as a one-year temporary lecturer at INLOGOV, a considerable step up. The Department was offering a two-year temporary lectureship and a one-year temporary lectureship. The two-year lectureship went to Norman Flynn (a better candidate) and I was offered the one-year post. John Stewart assured me there was, 'actually no difference between the posts'. When I mentioned this to my old boss my old boss said I should have replied, 'In that case I'll have the two-year one'. But it turned out that John was correct about both jobs being equally good, as both were quite soon converted into permanent lectureships.

That was a relief, as working for INLOGOV was for me a big stretch, and I was painfully aware that I wasn't very good at it. Previously, I had trained and worked in pure economics departments. Although that world is quite technically demanding, in real world terms it is pretty blinkered. Before working at INLOGOV I had not been aware of that. If one wanted to be rude about economics academics one could say that they are incentivized to construct and solve complicated puzzles for each other, with little real-world relevance. At INLOGOV, the emphasis was on having a message that local government chief officers would find to be of value and which was preferably of direct relevance to their day-to-day job.

Saying something to real experts in real jobs was no easy task, but colleagues at INLOGOV managed to do that far better than me. I now realise that this fertile and challenging environment was very much created by John Stewart. INLOGOV opened my eyes to a whole range of new ways of seeing the world. For example, I got to hear about 'hidden agendas' and the necessity of 'stroking' colleagues. Economists tend to specialise in doing the opposite of stroking their colleagues and tend to want to consider questions like, 'Are you doing the right thing?'. Thinking like that is not necessarily welcomed by chief-officer customers in contrast with, say, organisational psychologists advising on 'how to get on with colleagues', or 'how to relax from stress'. As John Stewart pointed out, I therefore needed to do plenty of thinking to find messages that could be attractive and useful for our customers.

Over time I did learn to improve, and one of the most useful learning tools were the feedback forms distributed and gathered at INLOGOV after every lecture. These feedback forms, 'yellow perils' as some called them, gave a good indication of what the audience thought. All too clear an indication at times. The feedback forms covered four aspects of one's presentation: 1. Interest for Me, 2. Relevance to My Job, 3. Standard of Presentation and 4. Quality of Handout. They were marked out of five for each category. The worst feedback form I ever received gave me zero for each of the categories, with a helpful note of clarification: 'Incidentally, I don't think that Peter Watt was 'merely having a bad day''.

In contrast, John Stewart was the absolute champion of feedback scores, normally getting five out of five in every category from every member of his audience. I know this because he often kindly spoke on one-day seminars that I ran, and I used to gather up the forms after his talk.

Over time I managed to learn to get reasonably good scores, but I could never get up to John's standard.

I remember John Stewart had a good joke on me once. As it happens my political views are somewhat on the right, not really an advantage in the INLOGOV world. John of course was the very paragon of Labour values. On one occasion he asked me to come to his office to discuss a matter of concern. He told me he had received a serious complaint about my lecturing from a senior local government course member. He said that the complaint was

that my teaching exhibited, 'Strong left-wing bias'. He then burst out laughing and said that I might be over-egging my efforts effort to present a neutral view.

From an economics point-of-view, one of John's major contributions was his clear thinking on accountability. He argued strongly that local governments should be accountable to local people and that central government should not be interfering with that. He argued that when central government provided a high proportion of local funding, as it does, local accountability is greatly impaired. 'The centre would feel responsible for the expenditure of such a huge amount of the national taxpayers' money. They would insist on following up how it had been spent ... Ministers, MPs and national auditors would not let local authorities spend it as they wanted. Central control would increase' (Jones, Stewart and Travers, 1986, p. 62). John's view was that it was the high proportion of local spending that was centrally financed that was the problem. His solution would be to give local government a local income tax, cut grant and reduce central income tax accordingly. His view that the problem was the high proportion of central funding was challenged by an economics view that it was only finance at the *margin* that was important. As local authorities are 100% responsible for financing *extra* spending (as they are, when allowed) all is well (Jackman, 1986). That argument is analogous the teenager's saying that their parents should not interfere with the teenager's decision about a mobile phone, 'Because I'm buying it out of my own paper-round money'. The parents' response would be, 'OK, then you will want to pay for your food and accommodation too'.

Other things I remember about John – he was an enthusiastic and fiercely competitive table tennis player with a good eye for the ball. He was typically the first to get a round in at the bar and drank beer with gusto. He was outstanding in reading any paper you were writing and unfailingly positive and supporting with his comments.

One can see with hindsight that running a Department like INLOGOV which truly spanned the academic and local government worlds was a very difficult task requiring inspirational leadership which John provided. He was a great leader and a great champion of localism.

Jackman, R. (1986) 'Paying for local government', *Local Government Studies*, July/August, pp. 51-57.

Jones, G., Stewart, J. and Travers, T. (1986) 'A rejoinder to Jackman', *Local Government Studies*, July/August, pp. 60-64.

*Peter Watt is Honorary Reader in Public Sector Economics at INLOGOV.*

## Rodney Brooke

John Stewart was the most significant British thinker on local government in the last half of the twentieth century. He was the key influence on several generations of local government workers.

He first developed his interest in local government in 1958 when he turned his PhD thesis into a book: *British Pressure Groups*. In it he wrote 'There are other views on local government, besides those of the [local government] associations, besides those of local authorities'. John Stewart had an opportunity to develop those views when in 1966 he joined the Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University. The Institute had been founded in 1963 with start-up money from the Ministry of Overseas Development to provide training courses in developing countries.

John Stewart was recruited to develop management training courses for British local government. His arrival coincided with the introduction of a compulsory training levy by the then Labour Government. The levy could be avoided if an equivalent amount was spent on training. The immediate consequence was to kick start the management courses which John was to lead. Every aspiring local government officer attended John's courses.

In 1967, the Maud and Mallaby reports on management and staffing in local government were published. The Mallaby report pointed out that in a typical local authority 'there may be unity in the parts, but there is disunity in the whole'. Local government departments functioned as independent entities.

The reports were grist to John's mill. He had a clear view of the local authority as the community governing itself, not just as a collection of services which happened to be run by a council. He expounded the gospel of corporate management – the local authority should take a synoptic view of its community. He preached the need for a public service orientation and the development of community governance, deploring the growth of the appointed state and the resulting fragmentation of services.

Then a Deputy Town Clerk, I attended one of John's early courses. His teachings had the most profound influence on me, as on local government as a whole. His reputation procured his appointment to the Committee on Local Government Finance, chaired by Sir Frank Layfield, which reported in 1976. Also serving on the Layfield Committee was George Jones, Professor of Government at the London School of Economics.

John and George formed a partnership whose writings proclaimed the case for local government for almost forty years. They were doomed, like Cassandra, to have their warnings ignored. But John's influence on the management of local authorities endures.

*Sir Rodney Brooke CBE DL was Chief Executive of West Yorkshire County Council, Westminster City Council and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.*

## Rob Rhodes

I was a lecturer at the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) between 1970-75. It was the unofficial staff college for senior officers in local government. It had two sides – development studies and British local government. I was in development studies for no better reason than they advertised the job. My research was on British local government. I had never taken a course in development studies, let alone taught such a course to others.

That start might seem inauspicious. It got worse. The staff of development studies had many former members of the Colonial Civil Service. The Service was a breed apart. They were ‘expats’ or expatriates, and they were more English than the English. They remembered an England that never was. They displayed an unflinching effortless superiority over the natives. I am a Yorkshireman by birth from a dying mill town where the ducks fly backwards to keep the muck out of their eyes. I have an obvious Yorkshire accent. I fear the expats saw me as a native. I did not fit in.

The head of division was Ken Pickering who specialised in rural development. He was a talented and elegant cricketer, and an amusing raconteur. Unfortunately, he ran the division as if he was still a District Commissioner. The flash point was a patronage appointment to a lecturing post. I protested, politely at first, and suggested we advertise. He refused and told me to mind my own business. I became bolshy and appealed his decision to Henry Maddick, head of INLOGOV. It transpired that Henry agreed with me, although he never said so to my face. The job was advertised. Ken summoned me to his office for some name-calling. I was ‘a snake in the grass’. I was on a two-year contract. He would not renew it. I had opened my mouth to change feet. I was both furious and shattered. Enter John Stewart. He may not have been riding a white horse, but he was my saviour because he offered me a post on the British local government side of INLOGOV.

There’s more. While shooting myself in the foot for a contract renewal, I was also mastering the futile art of ‘how to fail your PhD’. I have told this story elsewhere (Rhodes 2021). The details matter less than the simple fact that, as I stared into the abyss of my vanishing career, John Stewart was a stalwart supporter who got me through the dark months. In today’s world, the university would not renew my contract because you must have a PhD. In 1975, it was preferable, but not compulsory. John had faith in my ability and encouraged me to soldier on determined. I did not let the expats get me down.

INLOGOV provided a distinctive academic experience because it ran various, specialised short courses for local government officers and a 10-week residential management course. Most of the short courses were held either at the university or at Wast Hills House on the outskirts of Birmingham in Kings Norton, but we ran in-house courses local authority courses as well. I taught on the Master’s degree, short courses, in-house courses and, in my final year, on the 10-week course. I did not teach undergraduates, only postgraduates and local government officers. The latter were a daunting group for a 28-year-old who had never worked in local government. Most of them, most of the time, were kind – they listened. INLOGOV colleagues who were former local government officers were less kind. I was criticised vigorously for talking too quickly and being too academic. Their points were

accurate, but I was not convinced they were criticisms. I thought the audience liked my enthusiasm and welcomed my academic approach as a change from their usual fare. Watching my boss, John Stewart, strengthened this conviction.

John was an idiosyncratic and inspiring speaker. He held his local government audiences in the palm of his hand as he talked about such potentially uninspiring subjects as corporate management. In part, it was his appearance.

He threw on his suits and missed.

He walked with a limp, a hangover from polio in his youth.

He shaved but random patches of stubble would remain.

He would twist and break biro and paper clips in his fingers as he talked.

He would pace the floor, then twist himself around a chair or a table.

Svengali-like, he mesmerised his audience. I have been on teaching courses, which advised me either on how to present to live audiences or on TV. No course recommended John's style or anything near to it. How could it? The man was the style. Like it or loathe it, it was distinctive, and it worked. I learned that lecturing was about having your own presence. Universities have templates for appraising staff. At best, they set a minimum standard. To command an audience, to communicate your enthusiasm and love of your subject, you must project yourself. In a small way, you are an actor. John showed me by example how to lecture, and his lesson stood me in good stead.

The research lessons I learnt from John were a mixed blessing and a challenge. INLOGOV marketed its wares to local government, so we had to write for the local government magazines. They were many and various. The *Local Government Chronicle* and *Municipal Journal* survive to this day. The advantage of publishing in these journals is that I learnt to write for a local government audience. The magazines had copy editors. My colleagues from local government offered advice. INLOGOV encouraged me to practice the art of translating one's research for practitioners. The problem was that such translations counted for nought on my academic CV. To move to another university, to gain promotion at my existing university, I had to publish in academic journals. The academic tradition and the search for relevance to practitioners posed a dilemma for me.

I had a supermarket trolley of topics and ideas but, essentially, I was floundering around, trying to find my academic voice. Some articles came out in decent academic journals. Mainly, my work was practitioner-oriented, and the worst practical project was about the impact of European Community regulations on British local government. The pamphlet I wrote sold literally tens of thousands of copies to local authorities, many of whom bought it in bulk (Rhodes 1973). It was worse than useless on my CV. John was aware of the dilemma confronting all his younger colleagues, not just me, and sought to change the intellectual ethos of INLOGOV.

He recruited Bob Hinings from the University of Aston who was a member of the (then) hugely influential 'Aston Group'. This group pioneered the quantitative analysis of the structure and functions of organisations. With my INLOGOV colleague, Royston Greenwood, Chris was 'translating' the Aston Group's approach to the study of local government. Chris's arrival was important less for the specific research project and more for his presence as an academic heavyweight who legitimised the aspirations of Royston and me. John was the guru of local government who addressed an academic audience on occasions. Chris was a successful, mainstream academic and a modest, encouraging colleague to boot.

Encouraged by these developments, I decided to play with organisation theory and see what that could tell us about central-local relations. The immediate impetus for my work was a commission from the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Finance (Layfield) to look broadly at the relationship between central and local government. It was a turning point in my career, and I was indebted yet again to John Stewart, who was a member of the Committee. He kept faith in me. I did not know it but this commission was a decisive shift in my career.

Most of my report to the Layfield Committee was a review of the literature but it contained one novel idea. I suggested that central government-local government relations should be seen as a set the actors embedded in complex networks of administrative politics. This notion of policy networks was to inform my work for the next ten years. I was looking for my own voice and John Stewart and Bob Hinings pointed me in the right direction. John gave me the opportunity to write about intergovernmental relations. Bob suggested I look for inspiration in the theories about organisations. I am struck by the happenstance of it all. There is a great temptation to suggest that your career had a logic; that it unfolded according to a plan, in a linear way. In practice, it was a case of grasping opportunities that others presented to me. I was lucky to have John Stewart as a mentor actively seeking out opportunities for me.

I left INLOGOV in 1975 for the University of Strathclyde and, I regret, my departure was marred by a disagreement. John asked me to run the short course programme. I was pleased he asked, but the workload was such that I would write little. That meant I would not be promoted for at least another three years. I told John I would accept if I was promoted to senior lecturer. He agreed. I betrayed my naiveté. I am sure John promised in all good faith. I am sure he supported me. The gift was not within his power. The University made decisions about promotion, not INLOGOV, and the University said 'no'. With the benefit of hindsight, I know the University was right. My CV was not good enough. But I was furious and displaying my usual lack of judgement, I resigned in a tiff and went to the University of Strathclyde.

John supported my academic endeavours, and, on occasion, he too would write for an academic audience. But his heart lay with local government, with defending and improving it. As I look back, I do not think the academic community ever gave him due credit for this work. The local government community was more discerning. In 1992, I was invited to contribute to a conference and subsequent book celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John's

appointment at INLOGOV. Our tiff was in the past. All was forgiven. I revisited his seminal book, *Management in Local Government: a viewpoint* (1972). I argued that it was less a book about management and more a political theory of local government with equality and the redistribution of power and resources at its heart. I concluded he was a son of the Fabian tradition. Of course, his work had an important impact on the management of local government but equally it was a stirring defence of local democracy. INLOGOV remains as a monument to his contribution, and we need it to carry on his teachings. We need a voice defending local democracy as much today as we ever did.

I must have been a pain for John, but he was too kind ever to tell me. He could see I had talent, but it was without direction. I was a provincial lad looking for somewhere to fit in. *I was young, gauche with a chip on my shoulder*. I had yet to learn restraint and judgement. John was patience personified, steering not directing, displaying the judgement I strikingly lacked. He helped me to find my feet in academia and was an admirable role model. I owe him a great debt and I will always be grateful for his guiding hand. I was well and truly nurtured.

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*Rod Rhodes is Professor of Government at the University of Southampton.*

## Royston Greenwood

I met John Stewart when in 1967 I joined the recently formed Institute of Local Government Studies as a research assistant. I really knew very little but was fortunate to be working in the same place as John. He was an incredible influence. Local government authorities back then were an aggregation of services each delivered with little serious co-ordination. John Stewart became an influential champion of a more co-ordinated approach – ‘corporate planning’ as it was called. Listening to him speaking to local government officers was really inspiring and I was delighted when he asked me to help him collect and publish materials from local authorities who were applying his ideas. It was my initial move into studying organizations and of trying to understand how organizational change might be attempted.

Looking back, I realise that John quietly appreciated the irrelevance of my undergraduate training and that I didn’t really know much about organizations. So, he (easily) persuaded me to attend a course being given by Bob Hinings in the (then) College of Advanced Technology (now the University of Aston). That was a major move for me.

John wasn’t simply a career advisor – he was an inspiring mentor because of his easy collegiality, his gentle sense of humour and charm, and his thoughtfulness. I can’t remember ever seeing him in a bad mood. He always spoke warmly of and to his colleagues (even the senior administrators in the University!) He was always able to pull ideas together and question taken for granted stuff. And, he completely rubbished my ideas when they were daft, but in a way that I enjoyed.

Let’s be clear – John Stewart was first and foremost a really nice person and treated everyone with warmth and consideration. He was always ready to share time with you and (unlike many of us academics) actually listened to, and heard, what people were saying. I was astoundingly lucky to meet such a person so early in my career.

To John – I owe you so much.

*Royston Greenwood is Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta, Canada and Professorial Fellow at the University of Edinburgh.*

## Simon Baddeley

John Stewart is one who always stood at an acute angle to my limited understanding of the world. What force of fate gave me the good fortune to have him as my mentor and 'boss' for most of my working life? He was one in whom the power he exercised - through his smiling influence, intellect and civility - was never a source of the tendencies associated with power. I've not known such intellect, such tolerance, generosity and encouragement from a mentor. This must have been the same for many who've come under his giant but gentle wings. He was inspirational; a worn paean but true.

John led INLOGOV through a few key friends while doing a wonderful job of consulting, prompting and enthusing staff and simultaneously defending the Institute's campus standing in ways beyond my ken. He told me once he treated such work as a hobby. Not in his circle, I enjoyed the inestimable benefit of being trusted to be left alone to pursue my interest in how government emerges from the quality and genius of political-administrative relations - a fascination that possesses me to this day.

I know colleagues who regretted John had not published more, and done more basic research and risen to some highly esteemed academic summit. That wasn't his destiny. Like a subversive painter who has already shown mastery of the precise artistry of 'draughtsmanship' required for a brilliant PhD on 'interest groups', he ploughed a richer furrow. His polio limp suits that metaphor. I wish JDS had had an amanuensis like James Boswell to capture the erudite magic of his table talk, giving wit to the practice of democracy and the 'wicked' challenges of government.

[The ploughman limp, as countrymen know, comes from the characteristic hobble of ploughman through long walking with one leg in the furrow and the other on the ridge].

*Simon Baddeley worked at Birmingham University, then as an Associate at INLOGOV.*

John Stewart was a unique figure in the world of British local government between 1966 when he first joined INLOGOV until he retired in the late 1990s, after which his writing and influence continued until the late 2010s. He was unique in that he straddled the worlds of academia and local government practice, and within local government, the worlds of politics and management, with an ability to inspire local politicians, managers and academics alike, whose respect and affection he earned over a period of more than fifty years.

John was able to do this because he cared deeply about the institution of local government, as an accountable political process for making decisions which benefitted local communities and as a counterweight to the power of the centre, which increased steadily over his time. His emphasis on the importance of the political dimension of local government was influenced by the career of his wife, Theresa, who became the first female leader of Birmingham City Council in 1993. His enthusiasm and commitment were infectious; he made local government exciting, a rare gift which has become even rarer since his retirement.

But John's passion for and advocacy on behalf of local government were by no means uncritical. He was always ready to challenge aspects of local politics (such as the dismissal of the value of public participation) and managerial practice (such as the dominance in the 1970s of 'departmentalism'). His most vehement criticism was however reserved for the mindset of politicians and civil servants in Westminster and Whitehall, whom he rightly saw as making decisions with a totally inadequate knowledge of the infinite variety of local authorities, geographically, economically and socially.

John's major academic contribution was in his understanding of the subtle processes of decision making in local government and the interplay of politicians and managers in contributing to them. His two major single-authored books; *Local Government: The Conditions of Local Choice* (1986) and *The Nature of British Local Government* (2000) demonstrate this understanding and remain highly relevant today. John understood, at a deep level, how local authorities really worked.

His emphasis on process would not have been to the liking of those favouring the correlation coefficient-juggling branch of political science, but that would not have worried him in the slightest. His approach made sense to the legions of local government practitioners and councillors who heard him speak and read his books and articles, and to a group of academic disciples including Vivien Lowndes, Kieron Walsh, Chris Game, Chris Skelcher, Colin Copus and myself who shared his perspective.

John was a profound influence on my own academic career and indeed those of many others. In 1976, inspired by his writing, I gave up a lectureship in town planning at what was then Liverpool Polytechnic to enrol on the masters course at INLOGOV. During that year, I became convinced that John was someone under whose guidance and tutelage I wanted to

work for the foreseeable future. This I was fortunately enabled to do and twenty demanding but intensely stimulating years at INLOGOV followed.

I was privileged to be a co-author of John's last book *Centralisation, Devolution and the Future of Local Government*, published by Routledge in 2018. Appropriately, the other co-author was George Jones, whose collaboration with John had played such an important part in their lives since their involvement in the Layfield Committee in 1976. George sadly died just before the book was published. We have lost over a period of four years the two towering figures of the academic world of local government, both of whom also played a huge part in its world of practice.

One final memory. I was at some event where John was the main speaker early in the 1990s. As usual he held the full attention of his audience for an hour. At the end of his session, I glanced at his notes, which he had left on the stage. They comprised a single sheet of paper. On one side there was a list of headings - finance, culture, structure etc. - which was all John had needed as a prompt for a fluent and coherent presentation. On the other side was another list – potatoes, peas, bread, apples. John was clearly tasked with doing the family shopping on his way home. A symbol of the human side of a devoted family man, who was revered by all who got to know him.

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## Stewart Ranson

John was a remarkable man, his life an inspiration to all of us.

He was the national leader in three respects:

First and foremost, he was the intellectual leader:

(i) rethinking the nature and purpose of local government in, for and by the community, encouraging the development of corporate management in the late 1970s to counter the divisive specialisation of departments,

(ii) then in the 1990s, promoting the value of the public good through public service management to counter the culture of competition and self interest in public services.

(iii) later came his work on democratic community governance through participation, voice, deliberation and collective choice based on consent.

Second, John was the nation's teacher on local government creating the leading management development programme for officers aspiring to become chief executives: no

one became a CEO who had not first sat at the feet of John Stewart on his ten-week course at West Hills House. John created a generation of leaders.

Third, he was the national leader in nurturing and inspiring a young generation of public policy researchers who became leaders themselves, nationally and internationally: Royston Greenwood, Rod Rhodes, Gerry Stoker, Kieron Walsh, Vivien Lowndes, Janet Newman, Chris Skelcher, Helen Sullivan, John Benington, Barbara Webster, Steve Leach, Chris Game and many more - sorry, a bit of a roll call, but it makes the point!

John was the formative influence in my own career, helping me to find a voice. He and I were strolling to Staff House for lunch one day and I asked him, rather provocatively, why the Institute had no courses or research on education? (This was at the time of the Bains Report, challenging the tradition of departmentalism and the domination of education.)

His response was immediate: 'you develop a programme and I will support you'. He advised on course design and for over a decade, if I invited him to speak on my courses, he never once let me down. Later, when I sought to forge a partnership between the SEO and DES for a senior education management programme, John used his networks of influence in Whitehall to help.

John was always a favourite with audiences, entralling them with trenchant insights and amusing them with his wit and humour as well as by tearing at the corner of his notes!

John's style of management was collaborative. The morning was given over to administration as he demolished a vast pile of correspondence. Then, following a drink at the bar for lunch with a few colleagues, he would wander the corridors, popping in and out of offices, listening to the emerging ideas and proposing developments of practice. Suggestions for joint writing would emerge in this process, perhaps with Gerry on politics, or Kieron on the new business style of management.

John and I had been working separately on public management and accountability, but came together to write *The Challenge for Management in the Public Domain* (Wiley, 1989) – for which John did a great deal of original research on the American literature on public management, theoretical and practical.

John was a generous critical friend over three decades. If I sent him a paper or a chapter, it would return the next day covered with forensic notes, its strengths and weaknesses laid bare in a paragraph. No one else brought the same trenchant analysis. I have missed that intellectual companionship. His speed of thought and analysis was quite unique.

So how do we assess the stature of this inspiring man?

John was self-effacing, unpretentious, there was no arrogance, no self-aggrandisement. He eschewed celebrity (nervousness before speaking).

But John was the real thing, the voice of authority, intellectually profound. He was a giant.

Who were his peers in the field of public governance and policy, those who achieved an impact on the reform of public institutions for a modern society?

From an earlier generation I can only think of (Lord) Lionel Robbins (higher education) or Lady Plowden; and, from his contemporaries, Richard Titmuss (social policy) and A.H. 'Chelly' Halsey (education policy). But they were specialists.

Only John possessed the intellectual imagination to articulate an expansive vision of reform for a democratic public domain.

John's loss is incalculable for family and friends, for professionals and researchers who learned from him, as well as for the wider reform movement for progressive government. From all of us, thank you.

FROM JOHN'S FUNERAL ON 23 DECEMBER 2022

*Stewart Ranson is Professor Emeritus at the University of Warwick*

Tony Bovaird

I probably owe my academic career to John Stewart, so it is a privilege and a pleasure to be able to appreciate his memory in this way.

I first met John in 1974, when I was coming to the end of a temporary lectureship in one of the economics departments (don't ask!) at Birmingham University. I had applied for a job in a sister department of INLOGOV and had spotted, just before the interview, the list of interviewees – there were five internal candidates. I therefore knew I didn't have a chance, so I relaxed and apparently came across very well at interview. Some months later, I applied for a lectureship at INLOGOV and wanted the job badly, so predictably was terrible at the interview. However, I was offered the job, based on that previous interview, and John's belief that it was the more reliable indicator. I'm sure that wouldn't happen nowadays but John never allowed himself to be hidebound by following dysfunctional bureaucratic procedure. This meant that he often had a hard time with 'administrators', not only in the Faculty but also in INLOGOV!

John was one of the two greatest leaders for whom I had the pleasure to work in my career. His passion for the value of elected local government was infectious, his conviction that systems could be (and must be) made better was inspiring and his belief that all of his colleagues (and indeed the participants on our courses) were the right people, with the right talents, to bring about the necessary changes was enormously motivating. Moreover, he mixed with the 'troops', which made a big impression on a junior member of staff like me – it was common to look up and find him leaning against the doorpost of my room, with a smile and question on which he pretended to want advice.

However, the two aspects of John's approach which had the greatest influence on me were his capacity for synthesis and his respect for (and determination to change) professional and political practice.

John was capable of acute analysis of complex and uncertain issues. However, I think what kept his audiences spellbound (apart from the range of idiosyncratic mannerisms which others have mentioned!) was the way in which he could move from analysis to synthesis – building up a set of propositions for what might be done differently. He usually posed these as questions to the audience but I think this was done in such a way that nearly everyone present would be thinking 'Yes, you're right, I ought to try that ...'. I believe that's why he was so revered in British local government for over 30 years. Of course, the corollary was that many academics in the field ignored him, as they focused purely on technocratic analysis and saw the construction of alternative approaches in management and governance as 'consultancy'. This also required him to adopt multi-disciplinary approaches, eschewing narrow disciplinary models and lines of thought, long before that became fashionable. For this reason, I think that John was never properly valued in the academic profession. (And this suggests lessons for us today, as the bias towards analysis rather than synthesis still sabotages university management studies, both in business and public administration).

John was also remarkable for the clarity and vividness with which he showed his respect for the knowledge and ability of local government practitioners – both officers and politicians. (And this respect for politicians, perhaps not unassociated with his being married to the wonderful Theresa! – was especially unusual in an academic). This was particularly evident, for example, in his sly way of insinuating that, however daunting his challenge might seem to his audience – and he was often very challenging indeed – he understood that much of what he was saying was already obvious to them, and that he was only vocalising what they already knew but hadn't dared yet to acknowledge. This respect was based, I believe, on a very highly developed belief in the importance of tacit knowledge, and his consequent belief that everyone in the room knew stuff that the others in the room – including himself – would benefit from learning. This made people much more confident in talking about their own experience and also in taking away and trying out, 'back at base', the ideas they picked up at INLOGOV. Much of John's best work – writing and teaching - resulted, I believe, not just from how good a listener he was, but from how expert he was at convincing people that he desperately wanted to hear what they had to tell him.

There were other lessons which John taught us, of course – for example, that brilliant leadership is very different from organisational management. However, the final image which the name 'John Stewart' conjures up in my mind, nearly 50 years after our first meeting, is of a driven, intense man who really cared and who changed the lives of everyone who worked with him.

## Conclusion

John Stewart was the father of INLOGOV, the nation's teacher on local democracy, a tireless advocate for local community leadership, and a well-loved mentor to a generation of scholars and chief executives. He and his co-authors often led the thinking in key areas over five decades. Always championing the learning that comes from diversity, he supported the transformation of local government – the place where government most closely touches citizens.

It is immensely humbling to inherit the guardianship of one of John's creations, INLOGOV. We close with a quotation from Emeritus Professor John Raine:

His legacy in shaping the policy and practice agenda of local government in the UK, as well as on the development and sustainment of INLOGOV as the premier research and teaching centre for local governance, will surely endure.

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