

Perspectives on
Multi-Member Ward
working:
Learning from
experiences in Wales,
England, Ireland
and New Zealand

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March 2007



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Foreword

On 3 May 2007, the local government elections in Scotland will, for the first time, be contested using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. In Scotland, STV will result in the creation of larger three or four member electoral wards across the country, replacing the smaller, single-member wards that exist at present. This report examines how multi-member wards operate in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. The research is based on interviews with 45 councillors, officials and local government stakeholders across the four countries.

The research reveals that if we do nothing in preparation for multi-member wards the system will encourage elected members to focus on fighting for profile and electoral advantage, both within and between political parties, often to the detriment of serving the community. However, this is by no means inevitable - councillors and councils have the opportunity to take measures to support successful multi-member ward working.

The key to successful multi-member ward working lies in ensuring that elected members collaborate by focusing on serving their community rather than constantly electioneering. This focus on the community is evident in close-knit communities in Ireland and Wales where councillors are well known to each another, and is the norm in New Zealand where political parties play little part in local government. In addition the research suggests that where wards are given a clear purpose and role ward members will be in a better position to rally together for the good of their community.

To give purpose to multi-member wards councils could exploit a range of possible roles for the multi-member ward. Possibilities include:

- A scrutiny function where performance information and reporting is directed at the ward level and the ward becomes a focal point for public challenge of officers, potentially enhancing local democracy, encouraging greater public awareness and engagement in local government.
- A range of council services could be delivered and organised around the ward, or groups of wards, and the ward could be the focus of community planning at the local level.

These possibilities highlight that the multi-member ward could play a significant role in re-energising local communities and acting as a focal point for community leadership. By decentralising power in these ways the multi-member ward may provide clear roles for elected members, which is particularly important due to the likelihood of increasing public expectations of salaried councillors.

The scenarios presented above for the role of the multi-member ward highlight that some form of area based decentralisation of power to the ward, area or locality may encourage effective multi-member ward working. It is up to councils to decide whether this is appropriate, and if so what form any decentralisation should take. However, the option of decentralisation raises the issue of how best to support this new structure, perhaps introducing ward, area or locality managers, serving members of a ward or groups of wards. It also raises issues of accountability for elected members, who may want to consider collaborating with their ward colleagues to explain what they have done as a team to serve the ward, perhaps through the production of joint annual reports and joint ward websites.

The research undertaken for this study identified the possibility that multi-member wards can increase the workload of elected members. This may arise from the greater level of electioneering encouraged by the system or from duplication of casework resulting from constituents going to each ward member in an attempt to get a quicker or better response. As mentioned above, by giving the ward a clear role in council decision-making the constant electioneering evident in some experiences of multi-member ward working can be reduced. It also appears that customer relationship management (CRM) software may have an important role to play in two key ways. Firstly, CRM software can ensure that council officials deal with routine enquiries, enabling the councillor to focus on difficult or controversial cases. Secondly, the software can allow councillors to see where an issue is already being dealt with by one of their ward colleagues.

Overall, therefore, the research highlights that there is a choice post May 2007. Councils can choose to do nothing to support and develop multi-member ward working, thereby risking a greater emphasis on political “competition”, both within and between political parties. Alternatively, councils can decide to carve out clear decision-making and scrutiny roles for the ward, encouraging elected members to work together for their constituents. In an era of increasing public expectations of government in general, and the likelihood, specifically, of greater expectations of salaried elected members in Scotland, it may be a missed opportunity if councils fail to respond to the introduction of multi-member wards by decentralising power to the ward level, potentially re-energising local communities and enhancing local democracy.



Executive Summary

This research report explores what the introduction of multi-member wards might mean for the day-to-day work of councillors and officials in Scotland by examining how multi-member wards operate in Wales, England, Ireland and New Zealand. The research is based on a review of the relevant literature and face-to-face or telephone interviews with 45 interviewees from 10 councils across the four countries. Interviews were conducted between September and December 2006.

KEY FINDINGS

- Where political parties are a feature of local government, STV can create intra as well as inter-party competition at the ward level, which results in a significant increase in councillors' workload.
- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Decentralised political management structures seem to facilitate increased co-operation within and between wards, by giving a clear purpose and role for the ward.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.
- No evidence of formal procedures and protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards was uncovered.
- Workload can be split both geographically and by specialism within the same ward.
- Where strategies for caseload sharing between ward members exist they tend to have been developed on an informal and ad hoc basis, and in England, Ireland and Wales caseload sharing tends only to be done within political parties.
- Where councillors work closely together there is evidence to suggest that they reduce duplication of case work, which can also result in a reduction in workload.
- Evidence from New Zealand also highlights that multi-member working can benefit both members and constituents
- The ability to be flexible and to build and maintain good working relationships is important in multi-member wards.

Introduction

This report explores what the introduction of multi-member wards might mean for the day-to-day work of councillors and officials in Scotland. It does so by examining how multi-member wards operate in other countries, identifying how elected members and officials have supported multi-member ward working elsewhere and offering some suggestions that might make for an easier transition to multi-member ward working in Scotland.

Multi-Member Wards

Multi-member wards exist in a variety of political and electoral systems. In Scotland multi-member wards are being introduced as the result of a new electoral system, STV. STV is a form of Proportional Representation (PR) that can be defined as:

a preferential system in which the voter ranks the candidates in a multi-member district and the candidates that surpass a specified quota of first-preference votes are immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are redistributed from least successful candidates, who are eliminated, and votes surplus to the quota are redistributed from successful candidates, until sufficient candidates are declared elected

(International IDEA, 2005, p. 76)

STV is only used in a small number of countries for legislative elections; in the Republic of Ireland since 1921, in Malta since 1947, and was adopted for the 1990 election in Estonia (International IDEA Handbook, 2005, p. 71). STV is also used in the Australian Federal Senate and in several Australian states. In local government elections the use of STV is rare, though is used by some local authorities in New Zealand, has been adopted for local government elections in Northern Ireland since 1973 and has been used in the Republic of Ireland since the foundation of the state. The existence of STV, however, does not guarantee multi-member wards, nor does the existence of multi-member wards signify an STV electoral system. This report also explores multi-member ward working in first past the post (FPTP) electoral systems, by exploring the operation of multi-member wards in Wales and England.

Research methodology

Initial literature searches revealed that little research has been conducted on how multi-member wards operate in practice. Therefore, the research team at the Improvement Service attempted to plug this gap by conducting primary research on multi-member ward working in four different countries. This research is not meant to be a statistically representative study of multi-member ward working. Instead it aims to explore issues that arise out of multi-member ward working, examine some of the problems and benefits of multi-member wards, and examine what measures we can take in Scotland to support this new way of working.

As a result qualitative research was conducted on multi-member working in Wales, England, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand. A decision was taken to explore multi-member ward working in England and Wales because in many respects they operate within a similar political system to Scotland, so it was considered that some of the issues they face and mechanisms they adopt as a result of multi-member ward working may be useful for us to consider in Scotland. However, it was also considered important to explore multi-member ward working within an STV electoral system, so Ireland and New Zealand were also identified as case studies. These represent an interesting comparison, as multi-member ward working is relatively new in New Zealand but well established in Ireland.

The research was largely based on face-to-face and telephone interviews that were conducted between September and December 2006. While it is evident that there are a number of differences between local government in Scotland and each of these countries, it is our belief that lessons can still be learned from those who have experience of working in multi-member environments.

In total, 45 people were interviewed for this research, mainly elected members with experience of multi-member ward working and officials who worked closely with these members. Interviewees were based in a total of 10 Councils. Councils were targeted for this research based on political control and composition, geographical and democratic profiles. Particular wards were chosen to ensure relationships between members from various political parties, and independents, were examined.

Country	Number of Councils studied	Total Number of Interviewees	Interviewees		
			Councillors	Council officials	Others
England	3	16	11	4	1
Wales	3	21	10	7	4
Ireland	2	4	4	-	-
New Zealand	2	4	4	-	-
Total	10	45	29	11	5

Multi-Member Wards in Wales

KEY FINDINGS

- Inter-party co-operation at ward level is possible, but this becomes difficult in tense political situations.
- Personal differences can be a major hindrance to the development of co-operative relationships in multi-member wards.
- Interaction between members seems to be easier in close-knit communities, where longer-standing relationships have often developed.
- Officers are generally positive about multi-member working. They do not feel that these impact negatively on the work of councils.
- Protocols do exist to govern officer-member interaction in a multi-member environment, however, informal common practice is more likely to shape relations.

Introduction

This case study briefly outlines the local government system in Wales and provides background information about the local authority areas studied for this research before considering how multi-member wards are organised and managed in Wales. Issues considered include relationships between councillors in single and multi-party settings, methods of workload sharing, relationships with the electorate, and procedures and protocols used to assist ward management.

This chapter is largely based on information gleaned from interviews with 21 people, interviewees were:

- councillors and officials from three Welsh local authorities; Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Cardiff,
- representatives from the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association
- an academic from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University.

Local Government in Wales

Local councillors represent one of the five layers of government that exist in Wales. The Welsh electorate are also served by community or town councillors, Assembly Members from the National Assembly for Wales (AMs), Members of Parliament from the UK Parliament (MPs), and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The present local government structure in Wales was established in 1996 as a result of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. This replaced the two-tier structure of counties and districts (which had existed since 1974) with new unitary authorities. There are now twenty-two unitary authorities: three cities, nine counties and ten county boroughs. These 22 authorities are served by 1264 councillors, who are elected every four years using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system.

Generally speaking, in a FPTP electoral system, electors have one vote in an electoral area that is represented by one candidate. However, in Wales a large number of local government electoral districts are multi-member electoral areas. For instance, in the 1999 Welsh local government elections 675 councillors (53%) were elected from 275 multi-member divisions, which returned two, three, four or five members to their respective councils (Sunderland Commission, 2002, p. 13). In these districts, electors can have as many votes as there are seats to be filled. Thus, if there are three seats to be filled, electors can cast up to three votes for three different candidates and the three candidates with the most votes are elected. Under this system voters are not obliged to use all three of their votes and cannot allocate all their votes to one candidate. It is not a proportional electoral system because ‘the percentage of votes won by a candidate in [a] ballot has no direct bearing on the allocation of...seats’ (Sunderland Commission, 2002, p.15).

The Study Councils

Interviews were conducted in three Welsh councils; Cardiff, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly. The table below indicates that almost half of the wards in these councils had either three or four members. As three or four member wards will be introduced in Scotland in 2007, it is easy to see why a study of multi-member wards in Wales might be beneficial.

Fig 1: Electoral wards in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Cardiff

COUNCIL	WARD COMPOSITION				TOTAL NO. WARDS
	ONE MEMBER	TWO MEMBERS	THREE MEMBERS	FOUR MEMBERS	
Blaenau Gwent	0	7	8	1	16
Caerphilly	7	14	10	2	33
Cardiff	5	7	12	5	29
TOTAL NO. WARDS (%)	12 (15)	28 (36)	30 (39)	8 (10)	78 (100)

1. Cardiff Council

Cardiff, the biggest city in Wales and the country’s capital, has a population of over 300,000 people. Unsurprisingly, Cardiff Council is also the largest in Wales. It operates under an Executive system that, at present, is controlled as a minority administration by the Liberal Democrat Party. The Liberal Democrats hold thirty-two of the council’s seventy-five seats, Labour have twenty-seven, the Conservatives ten, Plaid Cymru four and Independents two. The seventy-five local councillors represent a total of twenty-nine electoral wards. The seven interviewees from Cardiff Council included five councillors, all of whom served in a multi-member ward, and two officials.

2. Blaenau Gwent Council

Blaenau Gwent is the smallest of the councils studied in Wales, with a population of 68,400. It is a relatively close-knit community in the heart of the Welsh Valleys which has experienced major socio-economic problems in recent years due to the demise of their largest industry, coal mining. Blaenau Gwent is served by forty-two councillors in sixteen wards, all of which have between two and four members. Thirty-one members are from the Labour Party, three are from the Liberal Democrat Party and eight are Independents. The council is therefore Labour controlled and operates under an executive system. The five interviewees from Blaenau Gwent Council consisted of three councillors, all of whom served in multi-member wards, and two officials.

3. Caerphilly County Borough Council

Caerphilly County Borough Council is situated in South Wales, close to Cardiff. The County Borough has a population of 171,000 and has seventy-three councillors. Caerphilly has thirty-three electoral wards and these wards are served by between one and four members. Caerphilly is also run by a Labour executive and the party split is as follows: Labour has thirty-nine members, Plaid Cymru has twenty-six and the remaining eight seats are held by Independents. The five interviewees from Caerphilly County Borough consisted of two councillors, all of whom served in multi-member wards, and three officials.

Opinions about Multi-Member Wards

Across Wales there seemed to be significant differences in councillor opinions of multi-member ward working. In Cardiff the councillors interviewed were the most negative about multi-member working, although this is not necessarily representative of councillors in Cardiff. Several interviewees in Cardiff were selected because it was known that they were facing difficult political situations in their wards and it was felt that interviewing them could provide particularly interesting lessons that might be transferable to the Scottish context. Additionally all Cardiff interviewees were serving in split wards (wards in which more than one party was represented). As such, each was working in an environment that was more likely to have problems associated with it and so we should be careful about drawing wider conclusions based on their experiences. In contrast, in both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly the general impression amongst councillors was that multi-member wards worked reasonably well, both for the councillors concerned and for the electorate. This seemed to be particularly evident in Blaenau Gwent where the close-knit nature of the community meant that members tended to know each other fairly well outwith the context of the council.

Officers in all three councils did not view multi-member working as problematic. Indeed, Caerphilly's Chief Executive did not think they fundamentally affected the work of the council, or its broader strategies. While he did acknowledge that they could cause local conflicts, especially in relation to issues that had a strong political dimension, he stated that tensions in this regard were "few and far between".

Political Conflict

In Cardiff political difficulties were particularly evident in one two-member ward that was served by councillors from two of the larger parties on the Council. Both councillors in this ward were interviewed separately and it was clear that they found themselves in an unusually pressured situation. As one of them put it, the marginal nature of the ward meant that they were “constantly set up as sparring partners”. Consequently, neither felt that they could “sit back” in case one member gained some political advantage over the other. What is more, one of them also suggested that they sometimes adopted oppositional views just for the sake of it, as it was felt that political gains could only be made if they fought each other over even the smallest of issues.

Strangely, the difficult relationship that the two councillors in this ward had did not necessarily impact on the electorate in a negative way. Indeed, one of the councillors suggested that, because they were both working very hard to gain a political advantage over each other, the general public were benefiting from an improved service because both councillors were highly motivated to get things done! Notwithstanding this significant side benefit, both councillors would still have preferred to serve in a single member setting as they found their present working environment to be a particularly unhealthy one.

The example cited above can perhaps be viewed as a worst case scenario, however, other councillors also faced difficulties with multi-member ward working. One interviewee in Caerphilly stated that he did not feel that co-operation was possible in his ward because he did not trust one of the councillors from an opposing party that shared the ward with him. A Cardiff councillor claimed that she had no idea about what her fellow ward member did, other than steal her casework! She went on to say that she would prefer to work in a single member ward or, at the very least, with someone she could trust! Similarly, a councillor in Blaenau Gwent stated that there was “no co-operation whatsoever” in her ward because the two members from an opposing party she shared her ward with made no effort whatsoever to involve her in any ward work that they did.

Co-operative relationships

Notwithstanding the difficulties mentioned above, there were also examples of cooperation, even across political parties. In both Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent members from opposing parties, in most cases, did communicate with each other to some extent, although examples of extensive cross party cooperation were not to be found amongst the councillors interviewed at these councils.

In Cardiff, however, there was one three-member ward where a deeper level of inter-party cooperation was achieved. In this three-member ward the members managed to avoid conflict, even although the two parties involved were “always at each other’s throats” at council and national level. Indeed, a councillor interviewed from this ward suggested that a culture of mutual respect existed between the three of them and that they had made a real effort to work together for the good of

their ward. This was indicated by instances of cross-party caseload sharing between the members and that the members would give advice to, and seek advice from, each other. However, it must be pointed out that such cooperation still did not take place as a rule. Rather, the two members from the same party tended to be the ones that did most sharing of workload and ideas. Furthermore, when politicised issues emerged, particularly around election time, niceties were put to one side. As the councillor interviewed put it, “the gloves are off” at election time.

Despite the absence of inter-party co-operation the potential for members from the same party to work together in the ward still exists. This was the case for a Cardiff member who served in a three-member ward with a party colleague and a member from another party. While there was little co-operation or communication with the third ward member, the two colleagues did do a great deal of ward work together. For instance, they held joint surgeries and supported each other with their casework. The caseload sharing tended to be organised on a relatively informal basis and they would simply pass cases on to each other based on their areas of expertise. This arrangement seemed to work fairly well for them and the interviewee felt that they were able to provide a good service to the public notwithstanding their lack of contact with the third ward councillor. Further, while it was acknowledged that duplication took place due to their lack of contact with the other member, it would seem that officers were able to pick up on this so that the relevant departments took appropriate action and did not duplicate the work that they conducted. A lack of co-operation at ward level did not, therefore, have a major impact on service delivery by the various council departments. However, in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly there were instances of members from the same party failing to communicate with their fellow ward members. As a result it is worth highlighting that whilst cooperation with a party member is more likely, shared party affiliations do not guarantee co-operation in Welsh multi-member wards.

Officer- Member Relations

In Wales formal protocols governing multi-member ward working were rare, with most councils working to ‘common practice’ rather than formally instituted procedures. In Blaenau Gwent relations between officials and members were particularly informal; the fact that the council had only forty-two members meant that the two secretaries who served them knew most if not all of them reasonably well. Nevertheless, unwritten protocols were still adhered to. For instance, Members Services would always provide the names of all the councillors in a ward if a member of the public asked for the contact details of their councillor. Similarly, all members in a given ward were supposed to be informed of any issue that related to their ward. However, there was the suggestion from one councillor that there was some favouritism in this regard (although this was qualified by the assertion that this was probably down to personalities rather than the politics of the officers concerned).

In Caerphilly there was one written protocol that dealt with the sharing of information between officers and members. This protocol had the following four conditions:

- i. When officers write to residents regarding matters of general concern in the area a copy should be forwarded to the local members e.g. traffic calming measures.
- ii. When officers write to residents regarding issues affecting one household the local member is not informed except as is mentioned in (iii) below.
- iii. Where a member of the Council has been involved in an issue affecting one household then the relevant officer(s) should keep the member informed of developments until the issue is finalised. In these circumstance officers do not copy the correspondence to the other ward members.
- iv. Where a member of the Council has been involved in an issue affecting more than one household then the relevant officer(s) should keep the member and all other local members informed of developments until the issue is finalised.

With this protocol in mind, a council official stated that Members Services were careful not to take sides on issues and attempted to be fair in information dissemination. However, as in Blaenau Gwent, there was suspicion that this wasn't always the case and concern was raised that independent councillors may be more likely to be ignored when it came to information sharing.

In Cardiff there are formalised procedures that relate to multi-member wards. For instance, council officials should keep all members in a ward informed of any matter that affects that ward. They should also only attend a meeting with a councillor or councillors if all members in the ward have been informed of the meeting (although, the members, having been informed, are then under no obligation to attend). In addition Members Services has a common practice of dealing with enquiries from the public: if a member of the public requests details of their ward councillors, Members Services provides a list in alphabetical order to ensure that there can be no accusation of bias on their part.

It would seem that both the informal procedures in the ward and the more formal protocols utilised by officers across wards have rather mixed outcomes in Cardiff. As in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly there is a suspicion from some that impartiality from officers cannot be taken for granted and can impact multi-member ward working. However, some councillors also acknowledged that officers have a difficult job to do keeping all members from all parties satisfied and, as such, they do their best in what are often difficult circumstances. What is more, as with ward level relationships, it must be noted that personalities will always play a part in how members and officers interact with each other.¹

¹ It should also be noted that Cardiff Council has had well-publicised problems with regard to officer bias in the past. In 2003, the South Wales Echo newspaper uncovered a letter from a senior official to a Labour Party activist, encouraging him to write a letter to the same paper praising the Labour Lord Mayor. This perhaps leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of some councillors and, as a result, officers may face more of a struggle to gain the confidence of members regarding the jobs that they do (for more on the so-called 'Echogate Scandal,' see, for instance BBC News, 2004 and O'Connor, 2006).

Multi-Member Wards in England

KEY FINDINGS

- Co-operation between members from the same party seems to be common at ward level under First Past the Post (FPTP).
- Inter-party relationships tend to be characterised by little more than co-existence.
- The degree of co-operation that takes place at ward level is highly dependent on the political and personal differences that exist between members.
- Any strategies for caseload sharing between ward members seem to be developed on an informal and ad hoc basis.
- In general, both members and officers seem to be comfortable with the existence of multi-member wards, notwithstanding the potential for conflict that may exist.
- No evidence of procedures and protocols governing relationships between councillors in multi-member wards was found. However, examples of protocols used to cement relationships between officers and members in such environments were uncovered.

Introduction

This case study provides a short introduction to the local government system in England, as well as some background information on each of the councils studied, before considering how multi-member wards are organised and managed in these councils. Issues considered include relationships between councillors in single and multi-party settings, methods of workload sharing, relationships with the electorate, and the procedures and protocols used in order to allow for the efficient organisation of wards.

This case study is largely based on information gleaned from 16 interviewees:

- Councillors and officials from three Councils; East Herts District Council, Waltham Forest Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council
- A Local Government Association representative

Given the differences that exist between the Scottish and English systems of local government, it was decided that various branches of English local government should be studied for this project. Therefore, a non-metropolitan district (East Herts District Council), a London Borough (Waltham Forest Borough Council) and a unitary authority (Bracknell Forest Borough Council) were selected for further research.

Local government in England

A rather complicated system of local government has evolved in England over the years. At present, the country is split into nine different regions, although, of these, only London has any substantial amount of devolved power. Below these regions, there are significant variations in modes of governance, illustrated in the table opposite.

Fig 2: Structure of English administrative divisions (since 1995)

Region	Region	Region	Region	Region
County	Metropolitan County	Shire County	Unitary Authority	Greater London
District	Metropolitan District	Shire District	N/A	London Borough

Adapted from table available at Wikipedia online encyclopaedia at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_borough (accessed 30/11/06).

As can be seen from this table, there are four different types of authority that exist immediately below regional level in England. First, there are the metropolitan counties covering England's main centres of population outside London. These have another major tier of government underneath them, the metropolitan districts and boroughs. Second, there are the non-metropolitan counties, or shire counties, as they are also known. Again, a lower tier of government serves these, the non-metropolitan, or shire, districts and boroughs. Third, there are the unitary authorities. These are single tier authorities, similar to their counterparts in Scotland. Finally, there is Greater London which operates within a two tier-structure: the thirty-two London Boroughs and the City of London make up what is known as the Greater London Authority.

All local authority elections in England are held under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. In England many electoral districts are multi-member electoral areas. In these districts electors can have as many votes as there are seats to be filled, meaning if there are three seats to be filled, electors can cast up to three votes for three different candidates, and the three candidates with the most votes are elected. Under this system voters do not have to use all their available votes, and cannot allocate more than one vote to any one candidate. Therefore, the electoral system is not a proportionally representative one, as the allocation of seats is not affected by the percentage of votes won by each candidate.

The Study Councils

1. East Herts District Council

East Herts District Council is a relatively wealthy commuter zone situated to the north of London in the English county of Hertfordshire. It is one of ten district and borough councils within the county. The council has fifty elected members serving in thirty wards containing one, two or three-members each. Forty-one councillors are from the Conservative Party, five are Liberal Democrats and four are Independents. The Council is controlled by a Conservative Executive, which consists of four cabinet members together with the Council Leader and his Deputy. The five interviewees from East Herts included four elected members and one official. Of the four elected members interviewed, two served in multi-member wards which were served by more than one party, one served in a single-party multi-member ward and one served in a single member ward.

2. London Borough of Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest is situated in north-east London and is one of the city's thirty-two boroughs. The council has a rather unusual make up in that it has a very different

profile in the north and south of the borough. The north of the borough is a mainly white, middle class area, which has five multi-member wards, each of which has three Conservative members. The southern half of the borough, on the other hand, is more diverse, not only with regard to ethnicity, but also in terms of voting patterns. Of the fifteen three member wards to be found in the area, seven are wholly Labour, three are wholly Liberal Democrat and the remaining five are split between the two parties.

Overall, the council has twenty electoral wards and a total of sixty councillors. There are twenty-six Labour members, nineteen Liberal Democrats and fifteen Conservatives. Consequently, there is no party with overall control of the council; instead, there is a joint Labour-Liberal Democrat administration. The ten-member Cabinet consists of a Labour Leader, a Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader, five Labour and three Liberal Democrat portfolio holders. Of the five interviewees from Waltham Forest three were elected members and two were council officials. Of the three elected members interviewed two served in split Labour-Liberal Democrat wards and one served in a ward containing three Labour members.

3. Bracknell Forest Borough Council

Bracknell Forest is a unitary authority situated to the west of London. In the main, the council serves a relatively wealthy area that is not only a commuter zone for London, but also a centre of major employment in its own right. It was granted borough status in 1988 and became a unitary authority when Berkshire County Council was abolished in 1998. It is led by a Conservative Executive and is served by forty-two councillors; thirty-three Conservatives, six Labour, two independents and one Liberal Democrat. All councillors serve in multi-member wards of between two and three members. The five interviewees from Bracknell Forest Borough Council included four councillors and one official from Member Services. The four councillors interviewed all served in two-member wards. Two of these wards had only one party represented, while the other two were split.

Opinions about Multi-Member Wards

In general, officials from England were positive about multi-member wards. Officials from East Herts felt that, on the whole, members working in multi-member wards were able to find a consensus on local issues, notwithstanding party affiliations. Officials from Waltham Forest, when asked whether single-member wards would be preferable, responded that it was “swings and roundabouts”. These officials felt that whilst single-member working may avoid personality clashes and squabbles at ward level, multi-member working can better allow members to work together for the good of their ward.

Elected members were also generally positive about multi-member ward working. Interestingly even where councillors had faced difficulties working in their multi-member ward many were still positive about the concept of multi-member wards. For instance, one councillor from Bracknell Forest who had faced difficulties working in a split ward with members from other political parties, supported multi-member wards because he believed they could offer the possibility of members

working together as a team for the good of their ward. As a result, he believed that councillors in such settings could provide a better service to the public than their counterparts in single-member wards. A councillor from Waltham Forest felt that even if competition existed between members this could result in a better service for the ward's constituents, and so competition did not indicate that multi-member wards were failing.

However, other councillors raised major concerns with multi-member ward working. Despite having a fairly good working relationship with his ward colleague from an opposing party, one Bracknell Forest councillor with experience of single ward working felt that single member working is preferable because it allows councillors to develop closer relationships with the electorate, and he does not believe he has been able to build similar relationships in the two-member ward he serves in at present. Another Bracknell Forest councillor felt that multi-member wards can work well when the members are from the same party. However, he believed that "it's a tragedy when wards get split" because councillors from opposing political parties will be unable to cover each other's backs. As the STV electoral system is likely to create a large number of split wards, he suggested that these will be very disruptive to the effective running of local councils and that introducing STV may be a mistake. However, evidence from Ireland and New Zealand presented in subsequent case studies suggests the experience of split wards under STV are quite different from those experienced in England under the FPTP electoral system.

Personalities

In England, as in Wales, no protocols were found to inform relations between members. It was widely considered that any attempts to formalise relations between members through protocols or codes of practice would be unwelcome by members, and council officials felt wary of imposing rules and procedures in such situations. As a result in England, as in Wales, how members interact with each other in their wards is down to themselves and the parties concerned.

Perhaps as a result of the lack of protocols or formal arrangements, officials and elected members in England tended to feel that personalities are the overriding factor governing the shape of relationships at ward level. An elected member from Waltham Forest noted that, not surprisingly, problems with multi-member ward working are most acute in split ward settings where councillors can be tempted to score political points over each other. However, single party affiliations do not guarantee harmony either. Thus, in his opinion, it is personalities that are the key to the success, or otherwise, of ward relationships. However, as an official from East Herts noted, even where personality clashes exist this does not necessarily mean multi-member wards are disadvantaging the wider public. He felt that, whether members work together or not, they are still able to work for the good of their ward.

Conflict, Co-operation or Co-existence

Overall it was felt that, while multi-member wards could sometimes be characterised by conflict, such cases were rare and co-existence was more common. However, when tensions did exist, it was often when councillors operated in a split ward. For instance, in Waltham Forest a councillor working in a split ward with a party colleague and a member from an opposing party, noted that tension arose when the three councillors had to get together for any reason, at public meetings for instance. He felt that tension arose because none of the members felt comfortable in situations where they were supposed to present a united front. Unsurprisingly, such tensions are most likely around election time, as members seek opportunities to gain an advantage over each other. However, as one councillor acknowledged this is “just politics” and there is not necessarily any malice involved.

As in Wales, where councillors shared their ward with others from the same party a greater degree of cooperation was likely in England. This cooperation ranged from keeping each other informed, discussing ideas and sharing workload. In Waltham Forest, one councillor who shared his ward with two councillors from the same political party, noted that they were involved in a range of cooperative activities, from keeping each other informed to sharing their workload depending on their different areas of expertise. An elected member in Bracknell who served in a two-member ward with a party colleague noted a similar level of cooperation existed in their ward. In this instance, caseload was shared, although this was organised on an ad hoc basis. Similarly, in his experience, when he had shared a ward with other colleagues from the same political party, work was shared on an informal basis, though they tended to “play to each others strengths”. For instance, if one member was particularly knowledgeable about housing matters, he or she would tackle cases of that nature, and so on. Additionally, a Waltham Forest councillor who had only been in post for around six months noted that multi-member ward working could be particularly helpful for new members. This Councillor served in a three-member ward with another member from his own party. He felt that he had benefited from having a supportive colleague to turn to within his ward, and was grateful not to work in a single member ward. However, whilst sharing a ward with members of the same political party makes co-operation more likely it is no guarantee of co-operation.

In split wards - wards with members from different political parties - the situation is different from those with representation solely from one political party. A councillor from Waltham Forest who works in a split ward with a colleague from his own political party and a member from an opposing party, works closely with his party colleague and these councillors take it in turns to run weekly surgeries. This level of cooperation does not, however, extend to the member of the opposing political party, however, there some cooperation with the ward member from the opposing party. For instance, after recent anti-terrorist raids in their ward, the three of them presented a united front, supported each other and political differences were superseded. However, this was an exception rather than the rule and such co-operation is not the norm. The interviewee felt that whilst there was

no personal animosity between himself and the member from the opposing party, their political differences meant that they were unwilling to “give an inch” in the political domain.

Similarly, a councillor from East Herts who shared her three-member ward with a fellow party-member and an Independent councillor, felt that she also had a good relationship with both of her ward colleagues. However, she noted that she would rather depend on party colleagues from other wards for help than turn to the Independent councillor in her ward. From the other perspective, a Bracknell Councillor who had served in a three-member ward with two members from an opposing party noted the situation meant he felt “cut out” as the other two members did not share any information with him. Whilst they did talk to him on a superficial level, because of the inter-party rivalry that existed, “there was no significant co-operation” and “absolutely no caseload sharing.” In addition, because the two members that he shared the ward with belonged to the ruling party, he felt that he was left “out of the loop” in that regard too. He commented that they seemed to be “in the know” about everything that was going on in the council and the ward, while he was always struggling to stay on top of issues.

Notwithstanding such experiences, more positive working relationships are still possible in split wards. For instance, one councillor from Bracknell Forest who served in a split ward felt that he had a good working relationship with his fellow ward member, even though they were from opposing parties. He stated that they often had discussions on what they felt was best for their ward. Additionally, they would also copy each other in to any correspondence that they had with council officers. Whilst these members clearly had major differences of opinion from a political point of view, the interviewee emphasised that these were differences rather than tensions and did not prevent them from working together. However, while co-operation is certainly possible between members from opposing parties, co-existence is often a more likely outcome. As one councillor in Waltham Forest explained, councillors in his ward co-exist “by ignoring each other”. This member accepted that ignoring fellow ward members meant that there was a duplication of workload that could be avoided if they each worked together. A similar example of this failure to cooperate was also found in Bracknell Forest. There, each member is provided with web space that allows them to have a self-managed website linked to the main council site. This offers the possibility of co-operation within wards because members can provide links to the websites of their ward colleagues. While this does occur in wards where members are from the same political party, there are no examples of this taking place in split wards. It is therefore clear that, while opportunities for cooperation may exist within multi-member wards, and split wards in particular, these are not necessarily exploited.

Protocols and Officer-Member Relations

In England, no examples of protocols governing relationships between members working in multi-member wards were identified. It was generally felt that formal arrangements would offer little as multi-member ward working was not seen as something that could be governed in such a manner. Instead, members tended to be left to negotiate and arrange their working practices amongst themselves. On

the other hand, it was fairly common for member development and induction programmes to include elements designed to prepare councillors for their ward work and multi-member ward working. However, where such induction did not exist, there seemed to be little concern over such an omission.

Protocols regarding officer-member relations are more common. In East Herts, although there are no formal arrangements in existence, it is commonly understood that council officials should disseminate information equally and fairly between members. In Waltham Forest a protocol on an aspect of multi-member ward working does exist, relating to media and publicity. Quite simply, this states that all local members should be informed of any photocalls or launches that take place in their ward. It also goes on to provide guidance on how the council should make reference to individual councillors:

It is appropriate for the Council to provide factual information (such as contact details) to the public about councillors acting in their ward councillor, representational role.

Both clauses in the protocol are in place to ensure that any favouritism towards particular ward members, or the parties that they represent, is avoided.

In Bracknell Forest a more general and high-level member-officer protocol has been introduced. This is based on a model document that arose from the Local Government Act 2000 and dictates how members and officers should interact with each other. For example, it discusses how all ward members should be kept informed of relevant council business:

It is important to all Members that they should be kept particularly informed of, and have an input into, matters of Council business which affect their Wards, including the Mayor's official engagements. Therefore, whenever a public meeting is arranged by the Council to consider an issue local to a Ward, or one or more Wards in a part of the Borough, the Ward Member(s) should normally be invited to attend the meeting. Similarly, whenever the Council undertakes any form of consultative exercise on an issue local to a Ward or particularly affecting a part of the Borough, the appropriate Officers should normally notify the Ward Members of the consultation and request their views on the matter in issue (Member and Officer Protocol, p. 5C – 10, 15.1).

It is worth noting, however, that the existence of protocols does not necessarily ensure smooth relationships between officers and members. For instance, one Bracknell Forest elected member felt that, in the past, he had not always received the same level of information from officers as the other two members in his ward.

Multi-member wards in the Republic of Ireland

KEY FINDINGS

- STV creates intra as well as inter-party competition at ward level. This seems to result in a significant increase in councillors' workload.
- The number of hung councils created under STV demands that some level of co-operation takes place between parties and this often translates to co-operation at ward level as well.
- Where councillors work closely together there is evidence to suggest that they reduce duplication. This could also result in a reduction in workload.
- Decentralised political management structures seem to facilitate increased co-operation within and between wards.
- There is no evidence of the use of protocols or procedures governing relationships within wards in Ireland. However, there is evidence of protocols governing how officers should deal with ward matters.

This case study explores the operation of multi-member wards in local government in the Republic of Ireland. It provides a short introduction to the local government electoral system in Ireland and basic information about the study councils before considering how multi-member wards are organised and managed in Ireland. Issues considered include relationships between councillors in single and multi-party settings, methods of workload sharing, relationships with the electorate, and the procedures and protocols used in order to allow for the efficient organisation of wards.

This case study is based on information gleaned from a review of relevant literature as well as primary data obtained from four telephone interviews with elected members conducted in October 2006.

Local government in the Republic of Ireland

There is a three-tier system of local government in Ireland. The top tier consists of eight regional authorities, which have a monitoring role regarding the use of EU funds and also co-ordinate some of the activities undertaken by sub-county authorities. Underneath these are the country's thirty-four local authorities, which are 'regarded as the primary units of local government in Ireland and the mainline providers of services' (Collins and Quinlivan, 2006, p.387). Of these, twenty-nine are county councils and five are city councils, both of which have equal standing. Finally, the third tier consists of seventy-five town and five borough councils that operate at sub-county level. These have a representational role for urban areas (Citizens Information, 2006, accessed 23/10/2006; Collins and Quinlivan, 2006).

Members of the regional authorities are not directly elected but county, city, town and borough councillors are all elected by means of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system of Proportional Representation (PR). There is no subdivision into wards at town and borough council level and, as a result, these have either nine or twelve elected members who serve together on their council. However, at city and

county level, there is a subdivision into wards, or Local Electoral Areas (LEAs), as they are also known. The number of wards in each jurisdiction is largely dependent on the population in that area. At present, there are a total of 883 county and city councillors in Ireland (Association of County and City Councils website, 2006, accessed 23/10/2006).

Perhaps the key difference between local government in Ireland and the UK is that Irish local government does not have as much power as its equivalent in Britain. Indeed, it is said that Ireland has weak local government when compared with the rest of the EU: it has strict central control, a lack of financial independence and a narrow functional range (Collins and Quinlivan, 2006). As a consequence of this, Ireland's TDs, the equivalent to MPs, do much of the local work that councillors in Scotland would do:

The upshot of the absence of significant sub-national government in Ireland is that national parliamentary representatives get requests for assistance with what in many other countries would be purely local matters

(Gallagher and Komito, 2006, p. 257)

However, that is not to say that local government is viewed as unimportant in Ireland, far from it! This is highlighted by the amount of interest that the main political parties show in it. As Collins and Quinlivan (2006) explain, 'the main political parties vigorously contest elections at local level' (p. 388), and this was certainly confirmed in the interviews conducted for this research. What is more, the Local Government Act of 1991 enhanced the socio-economic role of authorities and an increasingly influential relationship with the EU has also been developed.

The Study Councils

1. Dublin City Council

Dublin City Council has fifty-two councillors serving in thirteen electoral wards. Each ward has between three and five members. At present, the structure of each ward is as follows:



Ward	Total Members	Number of members in each party							
		FF	FG	LA	SF	GR	PD	CO	IN
Artane	4	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Ballyfermot	3	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-
Ballymun- Whitehall	3	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Cabra- Glasnevin	5	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Clontarf	5	2	2	-	-	1	-	-	-
Crumlin- Kimmage	5	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	1
Donaghmede	5	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	-
Finglas	4	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
North East Inner City	5	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	1
Pembroke	3	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-
Rathmines	4	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-
South East Inner City	3	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
South West Inner City	3	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	52	12	10	15	10	1	1	1	2

FF: Fianna Fáil FG: Fine Gael LA: Labour SF: Sinn Féin GR: Green
 PD: Progressive Democrats CO: Community Party IN: Independent

As can be seen from the table above, all thirteen wards in Dublin have more than one party represented, and no party holds more than two seats in any ward. Clearly, no party has overall control of the council either. However, at present, there is a loose coalition between Labour, Fine Gael, the Progressive Democrats and the Green Party.

Dublin City Council is divided into five geographical areas, each of which has its own Area Committee and its own Area Manager. These areas consist of two or three wards and are the focal points for the coordination of local services. Indeed, they have a significant amount of devolved power, to the extent that one councillor suggested that the full council meetings do little more than rubber stamp the large majority of decisions that have been made at these.

2. Kildare County Council

Kildare County Council consists of twenty-five councillors who are elected to serve in six wards. As with Dublin, each ward has split representation and the councillor / ward split in the county is as follows:

Ward	Total Members	Number of members in each party				
		FF	FG	LA	GR	IN
Athy	3	2	1	-	-	-
Celbridge	3	1	1	1	-	-
Clane	4	2	1	-	-	1
Kildare	6	3	2	1	-	-
Leixlip	4	1	1	1	-	1
Naas	5	1	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	25	10	7	4	1	3

FF: Fianna Fáil FG: Fine Gael LA: Labour GR: Green IN: Independent

No party has overall control of the council, instead, there is a coalition that includes each party except the one with the largest number of seats, Fianna Fáil. However that does not diminish the proportionality of the council organisation and, consequently, Fianna Fáil holds two of the five committee chairs. As with Dublin, Kildare operates an Area Committee system. There are a total of six Area Committees and these match the boundaries of the county's six wards.

Competition

Given the mixed party affiliations that exist in each of the wards in Dublin and Kildare, inter-party competition for seats is intense. Each of the councillors interviewed for this research talked at length concerning the amount of work they needed to do in their wards. Their workload was particularly intense when it came to campaigning and raising their profile in the community. For instance, one commented that he was constantly knocking on doors in order to secure votes - ordinarily, he would do this once a week, although he acknowledged that he had been out on the two nights previous to the day of the interview. Similarly, another councillor suggested that he, too, would be out canvassing two nights each week, while he would personally drop between four and five thousand publicity leaflets per week. This member also suggested that it was common practice in his ward for all of the councillors to send out Christmas cards. What is more, if one member “upped the ante” and employed a new technique for catching votes - for instance, he was planning to send out calendars to all households in the New Year - other members would often follow suit for fear that they would lose even the slightest advantage by failing to act. Thus, in the opinion of all councillors, intense campaigning was vital if they wished to be re-elected. There are clear benefits for the electorate in this regard though, as such competition seems to result in more engagement with citizens and has the potential to improve the quality of service that they receive.

While inter-party competition for votes is undoubtedly intense, intra-party rivalries can be equally so. This, it would seem, is the ‘nature of the beast’ as far as the STV voting system is concerned. As Gallagher and Komito put it:

PR-STV puts candidates of the same party in competition with each other and thereby forces them to establish an edge over their so-called running mates. Running mates are a definite danger

(Gallagher and Komito, 2006, pp. 257-258)

Thus, one Dublin councillor who shared his ward with another member from the same party, admitted that there was very little co-operation between the two of them. He suggested that, while they “pretend to work together” and do work together on some bigger issues where they must tow the party line, in reality, there is very little co-operation. And, when it comes to election time, as he put it, it's “dog eat dog” at that stage. However, the councillor in question did not bemoan this intra-party rivalry; it was simply accepted as the way in which politics operates in Ireland. As he put it, when politicians from different parties sit opposite each other in council chambers in Ireland, their enemies are beside and behind them rather than on the other side of the room!

Intra-party rivalry helps to explain why holding joint surgeries is not common practice across Ireland. For instance, in one ward in Kildare all three councillors in the ward hold separate surgeries, notwithstanding the fact that two of them are from the same party. However, it is common for councillors to hold joint surgeries with their local constituency TD if he or she is from the same party. Quite simply, TDs do not pose the same sort of threat as fellow councillors, even those from the same party, who they will be running against at the next election. Thus, even in wards containing members from the same political party, co-operation can only go so far; inter and intra-party competition is an inevitable consequence of the voting system.

Co-operation

As discussed above, co-operation is not guaranteed when councillors from the same party share a ward with each other. Indeed, in Ireland it seems that cross-party co-operation is almost as common as it is between members of the same party. For instance, one Dublin councillor discussed the relatively positive relationship that he had with his fellow ward councillors, notwithstanding the fact that they represented other parties. He suggested that all of the members in his ward spoke to each other relatively frequently and were able to liaise on certain issues. However, he did qualify this by commenting that there was still a sense that they were keeping an eye on each other in order that they could keep “ahead of the game”. Furthermore, he commented that he served in a relatively affluent ward that did not suffer from the acute social and economic problems that plagued wards in other parts of the city. Consequently, he believed that a degree of co-operation was perhaps easier to achieve in his ward in comparison to others that might have been fraught with more difficulties and tensions. Challenging this perception, however, a councillor who served in a ward that, historically, was one of the most deprived in Dublin, was also positive about the relationship that he had with his fellow ward members. Despite being the only member of his party in the ward, the councillor said that there was “tremendous co-operation” between all councillors in the ward. In his view, they all worked together for the good of their constituents and, while they obviously had political differences - differences that were accentuated at election time - they generally worked very well together. What is more, he suggested that cooperation in this case even stretched to their discussing of casework with each other and their frequent attendance at public meetings to present a united voice on important issues.

In addition councillors were also often willing to co-operate with each other on the “nitty-gritty” day-to-day issues that emerged and work together to present a united voice to the public. For instance, in Kildare, a councillor said that all three members of his ward had recently attended a meeting with parents at a school to discuss traffic issues in the area. In this instance, they worked together to try and find a suitable solution for all the families involved despite one of the members being from a different political party. Interestingly, in this case, the parents contacted the three councillors separately, thus backing up findings discussed in the next section that the public often play councillors off against each other in an attempt to achieve the best outcome. However, on this occasion, duplication of workload was avoided because the councillors were willing to work together to find a solution.

One of the key mechanisms in which co-operation is supported within Irish local government is the decentralised structure of the local government system. The existence of Area Committees in Dublin and Kildare encourage councillors from different parties and wards to come together to discuss issues relating to their area. It appears that they facilitate at least a degree of inter and cross party co-operation as members have a significant responsibility to work together for the good of their area. It seems that where the ward is given a focus and purpose ward members are able to work together for the good of the community and move beyond the focus on electoral competition found elsewhere. Therefore, in Scotland decentralisation of power by the council to the ward, or area, level and giving ward members greater responsibility for their ward could be a key way of supporting collaboration. This form of decentralisation appears to encourage a focus on serving the community rather than on electioneering and conflict. However, one concern is that such a decentralised structure may make councillors too focussed on their own area, to the extent that they no longer see the ‘bigger picture’ concerning the council area as a whole.

Thus, it would seem that council working in Irish multi-member wards involves a balancing act between co-operation and competition. Co-operation is possible, but only as long as it does not have an adverse effect on the number of votes a councillor can win at election time. What is more, such a degree of co-operation does not prevent councillors from trying to ‘get one up’ on their ward colleagues. For instance, one councillor discussed attendance by ward members at public meetings. Such was the intensity of competition in his ward, that all members would attend virtually every meeting that was called. However, if one of them did not turn up, the other councillors would make sure that the public were aware of this ‘slip up’ – any opportunity for political gain had to be jumped upon. Despite this, co-operation does take place and interviews revealed that councillors were willing and able to work together for the good of the community. Additionally there is also the sense that co-operation is absolutely essential under STV, given that so many councils end up being run without overall majorities. As a consequence of this, there is a general acceptance of the need to co-operate in Irish local government, and whilst this co-operation is most common at area and council level, it is also evident within the ward.

Workload management

Given that competition is seemingly inherent in multi-member wards, there is, almost inevitably, duplication of casework. One interviewee seemed surprised that a question about this was even asked of him – “of course duplication takes place!” And, it would appear that there is little done to control this. For instance, the councillors that were interviewed for this research generally do not divide their duties geographically or by area of expertise – again, they all wish to maximise their exposure to the electorate. Thus, they prefer to ‘go it alone’ to a large extent and deal with casework on an individual basis. However, there are wards where a loose geographical split in casework exists. For instance, one Kildare councillor noted that he ordinarily deals with more issues in the small town where he lives, while his ward members tend to deal with more cases from the surrounding area.

However, rather than being based on any consensus or formal agreements between members about caseload management, councillors simply tend to focus on the areas that they live in.

As a result of a lack of cooperation over workload management, officers in Ireland often have to deal with communication from a number of councillors over the same issue. Similarly, it would seem that members of the public who are aware of this situation, often play councillors off against each other, seeing which member will deal with their issue in a way that they deem satisfactory. This was also found to be the case by a delegation from East Lothian Council that made a research trip to Wicklow County Council in March 2006:

It was established that it is commonplace for members of the public to trail round more than one, if not all councillors in a ward seeking resolution of their particular issue. There did not appear to be any established protocols in place that might guide members and officers in such cases although County Wicklow councillors did not appear to think this was a significant difficulty
(East Lothian Council, 2006, Point 3.7)

As with Wicklow, this was not perceived to be a problem in Dublin either, particularly as with modern technology it was easy for officers to send out the same response to multiple recipients if necessary.

Additionally, there is overlap in terms of the meetings that councillors attend at ward level. Because they are competing with each other for votes, they will, in the words of one member, “be racing round to residents meetings all over the place, not knowing which colleagues will be there.” This member also suggested that the public plays on this and call a large number of meetings regarding particular causes or issues, as they know that, if their issue has attracted any publicity, all of the councillors in the ward will be in attendance trying to gain an edge over those other members present or, perhaps more importantly, those members who have not turned up. Whilst this member did acknowledge that, occasionally, there is cross-party agreement between members and they all decide that it will be in none of their interests to attend certain meetings, the competitive nature of the Irish system means that workloads and duplication is high. It is also clear that in Ireland the electorate are sophisticated at using the multi-member ward system to their advantage, holding many public meetings or contacting all ward members in an attempt to induce one of their members to support their position.

Officer-member relations

Relationships between officers and members in Ireland, as elsewhere, can clearly be affected by the personalities of the individuals concerned. In Dublin there was the suggestion that some members perceived a slight bias from certain officers due to party affiliations. However, the councillors interviewed for this research did not express any concerns in this regard and this was not thought to be a major problem. In Dublin there was also a protocol in place to ensure that each member was treated fairly when it came to officer-member contact.

Protocol in relation to meetings with officials requested by Councillors or TDs (other than a purely personal meeting between the public representative and an individual official)

The protocol means that if a Councillor requests a meeting, with Dublin City Council officials to be in attendance, then the other Councillors in the area should be informed of the meeting in advance either by letter, email or telephone. If a TD (a Member of Parliament) requests a meeting then all the councillors should be informed and invited to attend as well as the other TD's for the area.

Multi-Member wards in New Zealand

KEY FINDINGS

- Cooperation between ward councillors can be beneficial to both constituents and elected members.
- Cooperation may be easier in wards with less members
- Multi-member wards can work better for the public and for councillors than single member wards.
- Constituents going to more than one councillor with a specific issue can be positive as it allows for a range of views etc.
- Workload can be split both geographically and by specialism within the same ward.
- There is no evidence of formal protocols or procedures governing multi-member ward working. In fact, opinion suggests that these could be unworkable and unhelpful.
- The ability to be flexible and to build and maintain good working relationships is important in multi-member wards.

This case study explores the operation of multi-member wards in local government in New Zealand. It provides a short introduction to local government in New Zealand and provides basic information about the study councils before considering how multi-member wards are organised and managed in New Zealand. Issues considered in this case study include councillor opinions of multi-member ward working, relationships between councillors in single and multi-party settings, methods of workload sharing, relationships with the electorate, and officer-member relations.

This case study is based on a literature review and telephone interviews with three councillors and one ex-councillor. Interviews were conducted in December 2006.

Local government in New Zealand

Local government in New Zealand is a two-tier system made up of regional councils and territorial authorities (either city or district councils), which sit geographically within one of the regional council areas. Four of the territorial authorities are unitary authorities combining the powers of a territorial authority with those of regional councils.

In 1989 New Zealand local government went through a major reorganisation that dramatically reduced the number of councils. There are currently:

- 12 regional councils
- 73 territorial authorities made up of
 - 16 city councils (urban populations over 50,000)
 - 57 district councils

There are also elected Community Boards, which sit beneath the territorial authorities. These are only present in some authorities and for specific areas. Territorial authorities have the right to appoint a small number of councillors to these Boards to represent the council and to give the council officers access to community opinion.

The regional councils are led by a council chairperson who is elected by the councillors. The city and district councils are led by mayors who are directly elected by the public. Individual councils are free to determine their own governance structure. In practice, this means that most operate a committee system with meetings every 4-6 weeks which then reports to full council for a final vote.

New Zealand is similar to Scotland in that it has a mix of a few sizeable urban populations and large sparsely populated rural areas. The population of New Zealand is 4.1 million and the regional councils cover populations ranging from 1.2 million down to 31,100. The size of district and city councils ranges from populations of 367,734 for Auckland City to 3,456 for Kaikoura District Council situated on the north-east coast of South Island. In relation to population size, regional councils are closest to Scottish councils. However, because they cover large geographical areas and have such a limited range of responsibilities, a comparison with the territorial authorities seems more useful for our purposes.

Electoral System

Prior to the introduction of the Local Electoral Act in 2001, local elections in New Zealand were conducted under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. For election purposes, district and city councils were divided into wards with a mixture of single and multi-member wards being contested. The Local Electoral Act gave individual councils and their constituents the right to decide whether they would continue to use FPTP or whether they would move to a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. Ten local authorities changed from FPTP to STV for the 2004 elections, retaining the structure of both single and multi-member wards.

Local Government Responsibilities

Local government responsibilities in New Zealand are more limited than in Scotland as social services, including education, policing and health, are primarily the responsibility of central government.

Regional councils cover cross-cutting issues such as regional transport. They bring together territorial councils within the region to reach an agreement on these for example via regional transport committees. On some issues it is agreed amongst territorial councils and the regional council where an issue sits. For example, in Wellington, economic development used to sit at territorial council level and has now been moved to the regional council.

Local Authority Responsibilities	
Regional Councils	Territorial Councils
Environmental management	Planning
Transport planning	Utilities
Harbour control	Regulation
Civil defence	Community improvement
	Nuisance control
	Social wellbeing (limited areas only)

The Study Councils

1. Wellington City Council

The population of Wellington is approximately 185,000 and it elects 14 councillors and a mayor to the City Council every three years. In 2004 elections were held under the STV system for the first time. Under FPTP in 2001 the turnout was 48% and under STV in 2004 the turnout was 42%. Wellington City Council is divided into 5 different wards which are all multi-member wards with either 3 or 4 councillors. In the 2001 elections 8 of the 14 elected councillors stood as independents. Two stood as Labour Party candidates, 3 stood under a local 'Three 4 North' banner, one for Independent Citizens and one for the Alliance Party. Of these, only the Labour Party is represented in the national parliament in New Zealand.

2. Marlborough District Council

Marlborough District Council is one of four unitary authorities in New Zealand, combining the responsibilities of both a regional and a territorial authority. It is a largely rural area with the largest town of Blenheim having a population of 21,000 and the total population being approximately 40,000. They elect 13 councillors and a mayor and the council employs 180 staff. The district is divided into four wards; one with 7 councillors, one with 3 councillors, one with 2 councillors and one single member ward.

Opinions of Multi-Member Ward Working

All of the councillors interviewed from Wellington City Council believed that multi-member wards had advantages over single member wards for both the councillors and the constituents.

“I think a multi member ward has strengths. It has strengths in that a constituent can lobby 2 or 3 different people in the ward. It has strengths in that you can share the work between you...I think it is better than a single member ward...”

“...I think that there are so many cases where the constituents have different views on things within the community that it is nice for them to have a bit of choice who they contact on issues”

The following is a list of advantages as described by the different councillors.

1. Ability to share workload between councillors.
2. Ability to fulfil both work commitments and council commitments as other ward councillors can deal with business in your absence.
3. There is more than one advocate for your area at full council.
4. It gives you somebody else to discuss issues with and share ideas.
5. Enables constituents to access more than one councillor. On contentious issues constituents have more chance of having at least one councillor on their side of the argument.

In rural areas there is some suggestion that multi-member wards and STV can favour the urban areas and because the urban areas contain the majority of the population that their interests are more widely represented. Out of the 13 councillors in Marlborough District Council only 3 are rural councillors even though the area would be described as predominantly rural.

“Single member wards is much better because you can elect somebody from your area...they have local knowledge and personally know a lot of the people and I think that lends for a much better representation...Potentially if we had multi wards we could end up with all the representatives coming from the town area where all the votes are”

Co-operation and Competition

Evidence from both Wellington City Council and Marlborough District Council suggests that, overall, there is a considerable amount of cooperation at the ward level between councillors in New Zealand. Where cooperation exists this is viewed as a positive for both elected members and the public.

There is a vast spectrum of cooperation, ranging from councillors who do not work with other ward members to those who work very closely with their fellow councillors. The level of cooperation depends on the ward, the different personalities and viewpoints of the councillors. In addition, of course, the level of cooperation depends on the particular situation, and so within any ward cooperation is not necessarily constant. In one ward the relationship between the councillors was characterised as cooperation, coexistence and competition at different times. In another ward where relationships were described as cooperative this did not exclude disagreements or ‘robust discussions’. Even where the interactions were described as competition, the relationship was still described as ‘cordial’ and on some key issues, where they had similar opinions, they did work more closely together. Competition is certainly evident in multi-member wards, for instance, some councillors felt that some of their colleagues were ‘continually sending out questionnaires and Christmas cards’ in an attempt to keep favour with the local electorate. However, this rarely takes the form of party political disputes and there is an awareness of the need to cooperate.

The feeling of one councillor, who had worked in wards with 2, 3 and 4 councillors, was that it was more difficult to work cooperatively in wards with more members as you are dealing with more personalities. In a two-member ward there ‘is less jockeying for who’s going to look after what’ and less competition over who would be involved with high profile issues. If this is mirrored in Scotland perhaps we will find that the 3 member wards work more cooperatively than the 4 member wards.

All the councillors agreed that cooperation was vital to get policies passed at council level due to the lack of firm voting alliances. It was not clear how councillors would vote on specific issues, so building good working relationships, networks and alliances and the ability to influence people and lobby on specific issues were all important.

“It didn’t do you any good in the long term to make enemies around the table. You had to, in fact, work out who could be allies...And you had to garner that support by your relationship with other councillors and debating the issues with them”

As alliances change over time and are dependent on the specific issues, it is important to maintain good relations with all councillors even if they disagree on specific votes.

Elections, Campaigning and Political Parties

On the whole, there is a distinct lack of party politics at the local level in New Zealand. However, competition between councillors was most evident at election time. Two of the interviewees were members of national parties but this seemed to only have a small impact on their campaign. One councillor did not stand under the party banner, the other did receive some practical support (e.g. leafleting and posters) and was involved in the party both locally and regionally. They were also concerned that being too involved in the party could be a distraction from their role as a councillor. In Marlborough District Council all current elected members stood as independents.

One councillor felt that having elections every 3 years meant that campaigning occupies too much time in any one term of office, which does not assist collaborative working. However, there is evidence that collaboration in local government extends into periods of election campaigning in New Zealand. For instance, two candidates publicly supported the work of another ward councillor at a public meeting in the run up to the last election.

One of the councillors in 2004 had entered into a joint election campaign with two other councillors. This type of joint campaigning was also mentioned by other councillors. They stood on a joint platform and encouraged the electorate to vote for all three of them. However, only one of the three was actually elected, possibly due to voters not fully understanding the STV system and ranking them in alphabetical order as they appeared on the ballot paper. However, this level of cooperation goes beyond what has been seen in other countries where STV and multi-member wards operate.

Workload Management

The councillors who shared their workload with other ward members did so firstly on a geographical basis. There was often a clear natural division between two different areas and, even where there were more than two councillors, the ward was only split into two areas. There was also some division by areas of interest or expertise, which often reflected responsibilities at council level on specific committees or political interests.

Committee work meant that councillors became involved in particular issues across the council area and the publicity they received for this work would highlight to constituents a councillor's particular area of expertise. It also meant that constituents from outside their ward contacted them about issues. One councillor stated that the ward councillors also tended to work with different sections of the population. For instance, one would work more with migrant groups and another with the 'aggrieved pensioner'. One councillor highlighted these divisions:

"I stick to what I believe I can make a difference in my area and let other councillors deal with other issues"

These divisions were agreed informally between the ward members and there was no suggestion that formal protocols were necessary. In fact, councillors felt that formal protocols would be unworkable as there are so many different personalities and ways of working. The divisions of labour were also flexible. For instance, in some wards, councillors attend meetings on behalf of the other elected members and, amazingly, they even represent opposing views from members who are not attending! Councillors were also keen to attend meetings and represent constituents across the ward, and were often aware of the need to be visible, and were conscious of the need to get voting support from all sections of the ward at election time.

Engagement with constituents

All the councillors were aware of the importance of engaging with the electorate and making sure they were recognised in the community. However, it is not common in New Zealand for local councillors to run surgeries or clinics. Rather, they remain accessible through attending local meetings and publicising their contact details in local press or newsletters (although there is evidence that surgeries are used in campaigning as some councillors run them in the 6 months prior to an election). Some councillors felt that they had as much to do with constituents throughout the council area, as in their local area, due to their high profile on wider issues and their position within the council. In New Zealand, councillors take an oath to serve all residents of the council area and this is certainly the role they take when they sit and chair council committees.

Councillors felt that even in multi-member wards the constituents were not confused about whom to go to, as they either knew you from the local area or through the local press. Constituents tended to go directly to a councillor rather than needing to contact the council first to find out who their councillors were. However, constituents only tended to contact councillors once they had been through the channels at the council and when they were dissatisfied.

"It is slightly self-perpetuating, you display your interests and then you get people who are interested in your interests contacting you"

Constituents did go to more than one councillor with the same issue but this was not viewed as problematic. One councillor expressed it as a strength as it enabled the constituent to get access to a different perspective. Sometimes councillors would inform the other ward councillors regarding a constituent's query by copying the response to them, especially if it related to a committee which another councillors sat on.

If it was known that a constituent had already contacted another ward councillor, the councillors tended to contact them to clarify what had already been done. In some wards the councillors did discuss constituent's queries with one another 'to share the decision, or share the advice'. This is particularly useful for newly elected members and means that an informal 'buddying' arrangement is in operation. This approach of being open and sharing information means that duplication can be avoided but a constituent is still free to seek more than one opinion.

Officer- Member Relations

All of the councillors interviewed felt that they had built up good relationships with the council officers and either passed queries directly to the relevant officers or tried to bring the constituent and officers together to resolve issues. They were clear about whom to pass the query to ranging from the Chief Executive to specific staff members in departments. There was a feeling that face-to-face meetings were often the most effective way to resolve issues. There was no suggestion that there was any bias in the relationship between the officers and different councillors.

Wellington City Council has a tracking system for cases they are dealing with. Two of the councillors advised their constituents to ask for their reference number when contacting the council as they could then call back and check progress on their case. The councillors, however, do not have access to this system.

One councillor mentioned that other councillors would ask for responses to come through them so that they would go back directly to the constituent. However those interviewed were more likely to:

“have it resolved within the system rather than trying to do a political resolution outside it”

This reflects a broader approach which all the councillors adhered to and was expressed by one councillor:

“My job was to make sure the council system was working properly, and if it wasn't working, my job was to fix the council system, resolve issues that weren't able to be resolved by management but primarily to let the management manage the council rather than the councillors manage it”

Conclusion

This study involved interviews with 45 councillors, officials and local government stakeholders in Wales, England, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand. The key findings that emerged as a result of this study have been about:

- Parties and personalities
- Ward organisation
- Officer / member relations
- Relationships with the electorate

Parties and personalities

As with any system that involves human interaction, personalities play a major role in the success, or failure, of working relationships in multi-member wards. Of course, matters are further complicated when party affiliations are added into the mix. Councillors in split wards clearly have to contend with the added tension of political differences and, as a result, coexistence rather than co-operation tends to be the best outcome that can be expected, particularly in England and Wales. This can be particularly trying for councillors who find themselves in the minority in their ward, as there can be little support on offer from fellow ward members. In saying that, there are many local issues that are not party political and, in such cases, co-operation is possible. This research suggests that such co-operation is common in Ireland and the norm in New Zealand, where a local government system devoid of party politics enables significant co-operation.

In general, co-operation between members of opposing parties was most evident in rural or close-knit councils, where it seemed that a stronger sense of community, and closer ties with other councillors at both council and ward level, encouraged more positive interaction. It appeared that in larger councils, multi-member working was more challenging as members, who may have had little else in common, found that they were working in close proximity to each other on a day-to-day basis. However, there was no evidence of this urban / rural split in New Zealand, where co-operative relationships were more commonplace whatever the locality. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that personality clashes can occur no matter where a council is located.

Interviewees in the Republic of Ireland suggested that the STV electoral system might help to reduce the ‘them and us’ mentality in evidence under FPTP in the UK. This is because the hung councils and split wards that are often created under STV demand a level of co-operation that does not exist to the same degree under FPTP. On the other hand, STV often forces members to compete with their ward colleagues for votes, notwithstanding which party they represent. Consequently, some Irish interviewees suggested that, under STV, intra-party conflict at ward level can be even worse than that which takes place between parties; as one put it, “at least you know your enemy when you’re working with someone from another party!” Fortunately, this was not necessarily the experience of these research subjects; they merely wished to point out that collaboration in the ward with colleagues from the same

party could not be assumed under STV. Again, the situation in New Zealand differs from experiences elsewhere, with ward members choosing to run electoral campaigns together, rather than competing against each other.

Despite the potential for conflict that can exist in multi-member wards, it was not a major issue for the majority of the councillors who were interviewed for this research. For many, this was perhaps because they had always worked under such a system; as one councillor put it, “I haven’t known anything but this.” A significant number also felt that multi-member working has benefits unavailable in its single-member alternative. For instance, if dealt with in a positive way, it allows for responsibilities to be shared and for pressures to be eased for councillors. Councillors in New Zealand stated that other benefits included having other local members to discuss, debate and share ideas with. Additionally interviewees identified a number of benefits for the electorate of multi-member working. For instance, it means they have more than one councillor to contact and to represent them and so can provide a better representation of constituents’ views.

Ward organisation

Where there were good working relationships in multi-member wards, members sometimes shared their caseloads with each other. Any arrangements that the councillors had with each other in this regard seemed to be organised on an informal and ad hoc basis. Members sometimes shared their caseloads with each other based on their areas of expertise, whilst others developed a loose geographical split with regard to casework management. This tended to be dictated by where members lived rather than by any formal arrangements. For practical reasons, this geographical division of labour was most pronounced in rural areas. In Scotland, members in large rural wards may find it logistically difficult to cover whole wards by themselves. As a result, informal arrangements may allow for an easing of the burden in this regard. However, a balance will be needed that allows councillors to maintain their visibility across their ward, and fulfil their duty to serve all their constituents.

This research revealed no evidence of formal protocols governing the level of contact between members within wards. Instead, it was suggested, on more than one occasion, that ward dynamics could not be controlled in this manner: the personal and political differences that were at the centre of most ward disputes could not be legislated for. Consequently, members tended to decide on the level of interaction that would take place in their ward on an ad hoc basis, whilst still working within the parameters of broader, council wide, codes of conduct.

While co-operation in the ward is, to a large degree, dependent on the personal and party dynamics discussed above, there are vehicles through which positive relationships can be developed. For instance, sharing information about constituent queries, copying other members into emails or keeping councillors with specific interests and responsibilities, such as relevant committee membership, informed of casework issues. In Scotland, a pilot study is currently being conducted that may facilitate further co-operation between councillors in multi-member environments. Six local authorities are currently working in partnership with the Improvement Service to pilot a new caseload management

software system. As with similar systems that have been developed in-house by a number of other councils, this tool helps councillors and officers to track, through to conclusion, the progress of each case. It also has the capability to facilitate closer and more effective working of councillors within a multi-member ward environment, as it allows them to share casework information with their fellow ward members if they so desire. However, questions have been raised concerning whether such data sharing will actually take place to any significant degree. As such, there is perhaps room for further discussion on how this tool can be used effectively.

There is also some evidence that decentralised political management structures may facilitate greater co-operation in multi-member wards. For instance, in both Dublin and Kildare, Area Committees place a significant degree of power in the hands of local councillors. Members seem to work well together for the good of their locality and the structures themselves appear to facilitate inter and cross-party co-operation. It would seem that such schemes empower local councillors, and the communities that they serve, and encourage members to work together for the good of their communities. Such structures can take a variety of forms. For instance, in Manchester, ward service co-ordination groups are involved in bringing together ward councillors, officers responsible for managing services delivered to wards, and community representatives, to co-ordinate council services delivered to the ward (Leese, 2006, p. 44). However, no matter what form decentralising power takes, giving members real responsibility for their immediate locality appears to have an important effect in encouraging all members to work together for the good of their community.

Officer / member relations

The principle of officer impartiality, while always central to the running of councils, is perhaps even more important in the context of multi-member wards. While this did not seem to be an issue in New Zealand, councillors in England, Wales and Ireland emphasised the need for officers to provide each of them with the same level of information. In general, councillors were satisfied in this regard, although there were instances of conflict when this did not take place, or was perceived not to have taken place. With this in mind, officers in England, Wales and Ireland tended to be governed by formal protocols that demanded the even sharing of information with all ward councillors. Such protocols also covered arrangements for meetings and events taking place in individual wards and ensured that all members were invited to these. Further examples of good practice included the suggestion from an officer at Cardiff Council that, when members of the public contact the Council requesting information about their ward councillors, contact details are provided in alphabetical order to ensure that there is impartiality on the part of the Council and its officials. Common sense practices, such as this, may well be transferable to the Scottish context.

In general, the officers that were interviewed had a positive view of multi-member wards and did not perceive them to be detrimental to the effective running of councils. However, some did acknowledge that, from their own perspective, single

member wards were easier to manage because they generally involved less conflict. There was also the recognition that problem situations tended to be more difficult to manage in multi-member wards, because they were not controllable by far reaching policies, procedures and protocols. Thus, to a certain degree at least, councillors themselves have the responsibility to act responsibly in this regard – each must work in a way that is beneficial, not only to themselves, but to the council at large and, most importantly, to the people that they serve.

Relationships with the electorate

This research suggests that the public do not suffer from being served by more than one councillor in their ward. Even where there is conflict between members in a ward, some councillors commented that the electorate benefit from this because, in trying to ‘get one up on each other,’ members often get more done than they would have in more harmonious environs. It was also said that having members with differing perspectives serving a ward ensures that councillors are more representative of the population at large and the public are more likely to have someone willing to ‘fight their corner.’ However, there is a danger of members chasing the same, often higher profile, issues in order to win electoral support. Similarly, there may be dangers, especially in rural areas, of members giving undue attention to parts of their ward where the population density is higher, thereby neglecting the more sparsely populated areas.

A number of councillors in Wales and England pointed to a general lack of public knowledge concerning the work that they did, although members in more close-knit communities appeared to have a higher profile in their locality than their counterparts from larger urban areas. In Ireland and New Zealand the situation seemed to be rather different and interviewees felt that they were relatively well known in their communities. Councillors in these countries also seemed to be more involved in publicising their work than their Welsh and English counterparts. Whether this is as a result of the electoral system is not clear. However, it could be that, because STV tends to demand a higher degree of competition for votes between elected members, day-to-day contact with the public is even more pronounced than under FPTP.

In general, councillors reported good relationships with the electorate, although some interviewees in Wales and England did feel that a single-member environment would be more conducive to developing closer relationships with voters. Nevertheless, there was little evidence that multi-member working results in less intimate relationships with the electorate or diminished personal links between members and their wards. Indeed, in Ireland and New Zealand it appears that multi-member working might improve relationships with the electorate. Concerns that have been raised regarding the member/ward link in a multi-member environment should not, therefore, cause undue concern at this stage.

Making Multi-Member Ward Working a Success

This research has highlighted that multi-member wards can bring benefits to elected members and the electorate. Whilst the introduction of multi-member wards in Scotland will present challenges, those working in Scottish local

government have an opportunity to learn from experiences elsewhere and adopt working practices that can facilitate successful multi-member working in this country. For instance, this research suggests that decentralised political structures can place increased power in the hands of ward members and this seems to allow councillors with little else in common to work together for the good of their locality. Interestingly, contact that the Improvement Service has had with a number of local authorities in Scotland indicates that those councils which have already adopted decentralised political management structures are most comfortable with the shift towards multi-member working. Indeed, a number of these councils seem to have well developed plans to base local service delivery around their new wards. Other councils may therefore wish to consider whether shifting some decision-making from the centre to the local level may allow for an easier transition to multi-member working in 2007 and beyond.

Of course, the introduction of multi-member wards will not result in a sudden shift towards sanitised ward environments where inter-party rivalries are replaced by friendly consensus. Rather, it is likely that councillors and the parties that they represent will take some time to become accustomed to this style of working. This will also be the case at the wider council level, where it seems that, under STV, coalitions will, in many cases, replace the structures that exist at present. These will inevitably demand at least a degree of inter-party co-operation. However, this situation is widespread in both Ireland and New Zealand, and, in both countries, the co-operation that is fostered at council level is frequently replicated in the ward.

Central to the success of multi-member working under STV is the ability of members to find a balance between both co-operation and competition. If an appropriate balance is struck in this regard, members should be able to work together in a manner that reaps benefits both for themselves and for the electorate. From a member's perspective, while competition is necessary if he or she wishes to be re-elected, co-operation can reduce duplication and perhaps even workload. It is also surely conducive to more fruitful working relationships, which can, in turn, allow members to deliver better and more efficient services for the communities that they serve. The balance between competition and co-operation is therefore something that each councillor should consider carefully, and the motivation to develop beneficial working relationships at ward level should certainly be a strong one. Councillors should view the electoral changes that will take place in 2007 as an opportunity for them to work together to deliver improved services for the people of Scotland.

FINAL WORD

It is hoped that this research will inform preparations for multi-member ward working in Scotland and will offer some guidance for elected members and officials for how to make a success of multi-member ward working. If you have any questions or comments about this research or multi-member ward working please don't hesitate to contact the Research Team at research@improvementservice.org.uk

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