

# **NEW DEAL FOR COMMUNITIES: WEST GATE**

**An evaluation of the first West Gate community elections  
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New Deal for Communities (NDC) in West Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, held its first community elections between November 2000 and January 2001, to elect twelve local residents to represent the community in New Deal for Communities proceedings. The elected representatives would sit on the Shadow Board along with representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors, and would be able to vote on issues and project proposals associated with NDC: West Gate.

In evaluating these elections, the Sustainable Cities Research Institute researchers have attended elections meetings and events as participant observers, liaised with members of the Trust Constitution Group and the project team responsible for running the elections, consulted key players in the election process and in the community, and reviewed election-related literature. The work builds on the earlier paper *'New Deal for Communities: West Gate Community Elections, A Consultation Paper'* which was prepared for the West Gate NDC Interim Steering Group by Sustainable Cities Research Institute.

The following paper evaluates the election process and aims to highlight the key lessons and good practice that have emerged. Where appropriate, recommendations are made for improving practice in future West Gate and other community elections. These recommendations reflect the views of a variety of sources, including issues raised by members of the Trust Constitution Group and those involved in initial planning for the elections.

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## **1 Key recommendations**

All of the recommendations made below are included with further discussion later in this paper. The main recommendations are included in text boxes throughout the report.

- ✓ **Allow more time for future elections to run.**
- ✓ **Compile a specific West Gate voter database that does not use the electoral register as a base. This would allow under 18s and other potentially marginalised groups to take part.**

**If using the electoral register as a voter base:**

- ✓ **In the run-up to future elections, launch a local campaign in West Gate to encourage residents to join the electoral register.**
- ✓ **Supplement the electoral register by giving residents who are not on it the chance to register for NDC elections.**
- ✓ **Run elections as soon as possible after the main electoral register is published.**
- ✓ **Involve young people by targeting local secondary schools, colleges, community groups and services for young people.**
- ✓ **Make rules about candidature as clear as possible on nomination forms. Include guidance notes on how to write an election statement, and ensure that potential candidates know help is available if they want it. This may mean that more candidates come forward.**
- ✓ **Provide adequate training to help candidates prepare for their potential new role. Training for newly elected community representatives should happen as soon as possible after election.**
- ✓ **Vary locations, days and times of election events in order to ensure that as many people as possible can attend.**
- ✓ **Take account of the dates of religious events, festivals, and holidays when planning the elections and related events.**
- ✓ **Only have documents translated into other languages or large print/audio copies made if requests for these are received. Try to target other language speakers using other means.**

## 2 Voter database

- 2.1 The voter database was compiled using the 2000 electoral register as a basis. This register included information that was current on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1999.
- 2.2 The West Gate area lies more or less within the electoral wards of Elswick, West City and Wingrove. The ward boundaries do not exactly match the NDC area boundaries and also contain other areas. To compile the voter database, project officers had to determine the exact boundaries of the West Gate area and include only those households on the electoral register that fall within the area. This process then had to be repeated as the West Gate voter database was divided into four to reflect the four constituencies – Areas 1, 2, 3, and 4 - that make up West Gate.
- 2.3 There are various reasons for looking for a way to compile or supplement the voter database that does not rely on the electoral register (some of these reasons are discussed later in this paper). For instance, young people aged under 18, people who have newly moved to the area, and asylum seekers are not on the electoral register, although it would be good practice to include all these groups in the West Gate community elections.

***Recommendation: Compile a specific West Gate voter database that does not use the electoral register as a base.***

*This would allow residents who may be eligible for the NDC elections but are not on the electoral register to participate. Ways of doing this include:*

- ✓ *Sending a 'Form A' type of registration form to every household, using NDC-specific literature, for residents to complete and return.*
- ✓ *Employing and training local residents as canvassers who visit every household and collect resident details. This would meet cross-cutting NDC themes of providing employment and building local capacity.*

- 2.4 It may be useful to explore other ways to enhance inclusiveness, while still using the electoral register as the basis for the database.

***Recommendation: In the run-up to future elections, launch a local campaign in West Gate to encourage residents to register to vote.***

*There are several reasons why residents may be interested in being on the electoral register:*

- ✓ *It gives you the right to vote in local and general elections as well as the West Gate elections.*
- ✓ *It may enable you to get credit more easily.*
- ✓ *You can be fined up to £1,000 for failing to correctly complete and return electoral register Form A.*

***Recommendation: Supplement the electoral register by giving residents who are not on it the chance to register for NDC elections.***

- ✓ *One way of doing this would be for residents to present proof of residence (e.g. a household bill, driving licence etc), either by sending photocopies to the project officers, or by attending special registration sessions held in the West Gate area on specific days and times.*

### 3 Publicity materials

- 3.1 A number of publicity materials were produced for the elections (see appendices for copies). The elections were also advertised on other NDC literature, such as the newsletter produced in Autumn 2000. The publicity materials included:
  - 3.1.1 Pre-election publicity: *'New Deal for Communities: The West Gate, Community Election'*. Posted to everyone on the voter database.
  - 3.1.2 Poster/handout: *'Community election'*, advertising the information sessions. Posted at a number of local venues.
  - 3.1.3 Handout at information sessions: *'So you want to be a community representative...?'*
  - 3.1.4 Poster/handout at information sessions, showing a map of the whole of NDC West Gate and the four different voting areas.
- 3.2 All of the publicity materials were clear and easy to understand, and a telephone number was provided in case people wanted further explanation. Four different versions of the pre-election publicity were produced (one each for Areas 1, 2, 3, and 4), so that each person received publicity telling them about their own area only. This may have helped to reduce unnecessary confusion for voters.
- 3.3 Because of the delays in the election time scale, some of the dates quoted in publicity materials – which had been prepared in advance - were incorrect. For instance, the pre-election publicity and newsletter stated that nominations closed on 24<sup>th</sup> November. In fact they closed on 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- 3.4 The voting packs included publicity about the hustings. Unfortunately, the packs did not reach households in time, due to delays, and some residents did not find out about the hustings until too late. An extra mail drop was organised at the last minute to overcome this problem, but still a number of people did not find out about the hustings in enough time to attend.
- 3.5 Only the pre-election publicity and nominations forms posted to residents were translated into other community languages. It may be helpful to translate posters into other languages and post them in local Asian shops, restaurants, community centres and places of worship, in order to raise awareness of NDC and the community elections in ethnic communities.

## 4 Nominations

- 4.1 Nomination forms were posted to all West Gate residents who were on the database. A copy is included in the appendices. The forms had three sections:
- 4.1.1 Candidate details: Name, address, phone number and qualifications.
  - 4.1.2 Supporters' details: Name and address of ten other local residents who were willing to support the application.
  - 4.1.3 Candidate's election statement: Up to 150 words written by the candidate, explaining why they wanted to be elected.
- 4.2 The forms were area-specific and included a map of the area in question and the message '*You live in Area (..)*' typed in bold, in order to reduce possible confusion and ensure candidates knew they could only stand in the area in which they lived. Supporters also had to live in the area in which the candidate was standing. This was mentioned on the nomination form, but on another page. This could have been made clearer. It was initially decided that candidates could not have blood relatives as their supporters. However, this would not have prevented spouses from acting as supporters. It would have been impossible to know whether people were blood relatives without resorting to blood or DNA tests, so this rule was abandoned.

***Recommendation: Make rules about candidature as clear as possible on forms.***

- ✓ *This reduces the chance that people will misunderstand the rules and send in nomination forms only to find that they cannot stand for election because of a technicality.*

- 4.3 The only guidance on how to write an election statement was the line: '*Write up to 150 words about why you want to be elected*' (this appeared on another page of the nomination form). This apparent lack of information may have been because it was intended that accepted candidates would receive further training. However, this did not happen due to time constraints, and the candidate statements that people wrote on their nomination forms were the ones that were sent out in the voting packs. Lack of guidance on how to write an election statement may have deterred some people from standing, although informal support and guidance was offered by the Community Support Team based in the West Gate area.

***Recommendation: Include guidance notes on how to write an election statement, and ensure that potential candidates know help is available if they want it.***

- ✓ *This may mean potential candidates would be more likely to submit nomination forms, so that more candidates come forward.*
- ✓ *This may result in better quality and more uniform statements from candidates, which better reflect their position and beliefs, and make choosing who to vote for easier for voters.*



## 5 Candidates

5.1 14 candidates stood for election.

### CANDIDATES

AREA 1	Fiona O'Connor Ifty Kahn
AREA 2	Bub Bul Haque Mohammed Anwar Mujibur Rahman Taj Mohammed Taleabul Choudry
AREA 3	Elizabeth Stewart
AREA 4	George Robert Curry Dennis Martin Gallagher Maureen Hamilton John Howie Mary Joyce Robinson Jonathan Walker

5.2 It was decided that there would be no election in Area 3 as there was only one candidate, and that Elisabeth Stewart would serve for the maximum time of three years. In Area 1, the election would determine which of the two candidates won a three-year term. The second placed candidate would serve for two years. For the remaining two places in Area 3 (a one-year and a two-year seat), and the third place in Area 1 (a one-year seat), the Shadow Board would decide how to co-opt additional representatives after the elections.

## 6 Election events

6.1 The following election events were held:

6.1.1 Two information seminars on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> November (one for Areas 1 and 2, held in Area 2, and one for Areas 3 and 4, held in Area 4). The information seminars lasted around 1½ hours.

6.1.2 Two hustings on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December (one for Areas 1 and 2 held in Area 2, and one for Areas 3 and 4 held in Area 3). These were both evening events, lasting around 1½ hours.

6.1.3 The announcement of results on 17<sup>th</sup> January. This was an evening event held in Area 2.

6.2 Attendance at all events was low relative to the population of West Gate, which covers 3,975 households, and the number of people eligible to vote, which was 5,936 for the three areas under election. However, a variety of age and ethnic groups were represented.

Approximate total attendance was:

22 people (13 and 9 respectively) attended the information seminars.

63 people (35 and 28 respectively) attended the hustings.

100 people attended the announcement of results.

6.3 Efforts were made to make events as inclusive and accessible as possible:

6.3.1 Locations and times were varied to maximise attendance. However, the majority of events ended up being held on weeknights between 6 and 8pm.

6.3.2 Interpreters who spoke the community languages were made available.

6.3.3 A crèche was provided.

6.3.4 All event venues had wheelchair access.

6.3.5 Asian and European food was provided at the hustings.

6.3.6 Entertainment was provided in the form of a DJ playing music before the hustings. A number of people attending did not realise this was part of the event, instead assuming that the DJ had been performing at an earlier event targeted at young people. It would be difficult to think of a form of entertainment that successfully encompasses the entire age and interest range of West Gate people.

6.3.7 Free transport was provided to the announcement of results.

6.3.8 Events were spread over a number of venues in West Gate in an attempt to make them equally accessible for all residents. The venues used were:

Dilston Road Church (Area 2).

Westgate Primary School (Area 2).

St Pauls School (Area 3).

Park Road Community Centre (Area 4).

- 6.4 It was suggested in planning meetings that holding events at certain types of venue may prove off-putting. For instance, people of other religions may not wish to attend an event in a Christian church. However, in a relatively small area such as West Gate there are few venues which fulfil the space and access requirements of these events so choice was limited, particularly because of the need to spread events over the entire area for residents' convenience.

***Recommendation: Vary locations and times of events in order to ensure that as many people as possible can attend.***

- ✓ *Hold morning, afternoon, and evening events.*
- ✓ *Hold both weekend and weekday events.*
- ✓ *Vary the locations so residents do not always have to travel a long way.*
- ✓ *Vary the venues in case there are people who prefer not to enter certain types of building.*
- ✓ *Experience may show that some times and locations are more successful than others in terms of attracting a large number of people.*

- 6.5 Those who attended the information seminars commented that they found the sessions informative, and that they felt that their questions were given due weight and answered thoroughly. The hustings were 'livelier' and candidates had to deal with a lot of questions, arguments, and heckling about NDC itself and proceedings at ISG meetings, rather than questions relating to their own intentions as potential community representatives. This occurred in spite of the project officers' attempts to keep order. This raises an important point about establishing ground rules at events of this nature, to prevent them from wandering too far from the subject in hand or becoming disorganised. This is particularly crucial when large numbers of people attend events. It is hoped that by the time of the next elections, ground rules or a code of conduct will have been successfully agreed and enforced for all NDC meetings, to ensure that order can be maintained effectively.

- 6.6 The announcement of results was the most widely advertised event, with the Northern Profile publicity agency being involved in publicising it. It probably also benefited from the momentum gathered through preceding events and residents' knowledge of and involvement in the voting process. This was the best attended of the election events.

## 7 Information and training

7.1 The information seminars on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> November involved a presentation about NDC and the elections. The session included information about:

What the elections were for.

The four areas.

Who would be eligible to stand for election, what they would have to do if elected, and how to get help and support.

Legal status for the Shadow Board.

Who would be eligible to vote.

When the elections would take place, and the time scale.

Future elections and the staggered system.

Who would manage and oversee the elections.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session open to everyone attending.

7.2 Extra training was to have been provided before the hustings to help candidates prepare their address, to give them more information about the community representative role, and to agree ground rules about acceptable canvassing behaviour. Due to timing delays, nominations were only officially accepted a few days before the hustings and there was no time for extra training. Instead, candidates received a letter and a phone call to let them know that their nomination had been successful, inform them about the date and time of the hustings and briefly explain what would be expected of them.

7.3 This lack of time and preparation meant that composing an address and speaking at the hustings was made more difficult than necessary for candidates, who may have had little idea about what to expect. This may have been particularly hard for candidates who had not previously been involved with NDfC and knew little about their potential future role or the way meetings usually work.

***Recommendation: Provide more training to help candidates prepare for their potential new role.***

✓ *Providing comprehensive training has the dual benefit of building individual capacity, and making sure that elected representatives carry out their duties to the best of their abilities and to the benefit of the community.*

- 7.3 It may be argued that training candidates is a waste of time and money if they do not get elected, although such training can be empowering for local residents and help them to become more confident about getting involved in community issues. Instead, it may be more useful to offer training once representatives have been elected. For successful candidates in the elections, a training programme was planned which would include all members of the new Shadow Board. It was felt that this would help members to get to know each other better and operate more effectively as a team. This training has not yet taken place, but is planned for March and April 2001.

***Recommendation: Training for newly elected community representatives should happen as soon as possible.***

- ✓ *This will help them settle in to their new role, learn their duties, get to know their fellow Board members and begin to operate as an effective team.*

## **8 Voting**

- 8.1 A voting pack was posted to all West Gate residents who were on the voter database. The pack included:
  - 8.1.1 Candidates' election statements (and photographs, if provided). These were written by the candidates themselves and were up to 150 words long.
  - 8.1.2 A ballot paper showing the list of candidates standing in your area, instructions on how to place your vote, and how and when to return the ballot paper. Voters could vote for one candidate only.
  - 8.1.3 A pre-paid envelope in which to return the ballot paper.
  - 8.1.4 Area-specific information only, e.g. people living in Area 1 only received information about candidates standing in Area 1. This may have helped to reduce unnecessary confusion among residents.
- 8.2 The voting packs and the information contained were simple and easy to understand, as was the voting process itself. However, other language translations of voting packs were not available, which may have prevented some residents from either fully understanding the election process, or taking part at all.

## 9 Time scale

9.1 Table 1 shows the time scale of the elections.

Table 1

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ORIGINAL PLAN</b>		<b>ACTUAL TIMING</b>
Send out pre-election publicity.	Week 1	28 <sup>th</sup> September	6 <sup>th</sup> November
Send out election pack with nomination forms. Nominations open.	Week 2	5 <sup>th</sup> October	20 <sup>th</sup> November
Information seminar for potential candidates.	Week 3	Week of 12 <sup>th</sup> October	14 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> November
Nominations close.	Week 4	20 <sup>th</sup> October	1 <sup>st</sup> December
Information seminars for candidates.	Week 5	26 <sup>th</sup> October	-
Send out voting pack. Voting begins.	Week 6	1 <sup>st</sup> November	8 <sup>th</sup> December
Hustings.	Week 7	9-14 <sup>th</sup> November	12 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> December
Voting closes.	Week 9	24 <sup>th</sup> November	9 <sup>th</sup> January
Counting.	Week 9	25-30 <sup>th</sup> November	9 <sup>th</sup> January
Results announcement.	Week 10	1 <sup>st</sup> December	17 <sup>th</sup> January

9.2 The timing of the elections was delayed. The plan was to run them from 28<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2000, but these dates were put back several times due to delays, and the actual time scale was November to January. It is suggested that the original plans did not take into account the amount of time that would be needed for initial preparations. For instance, assembling the database of voters from the electoral register took much longer than anticipated. Also, little time was allowed for dealing with any unforeseen problems that arose.

9.3 The total length of time the elections took from beginning to end was, as planned, around ten weeks. However, the project team had to work extremely hard to try to ensure events remained on schedule and ran in sequence. It is usual to allow a longer time period for running elections, e.g. Walsall Community Elections are run over a total period of 15 weeks.

9.3 On several occasions local residents complained that they had not received information soon enough for them to attend events. For instance, extra leaflets had to be printed and delivered at the last

minute to advertise the hustings because the voting forms, which carried information about them, had not gone out soon enough. Even so, many residents did not find out about the hustings until the day they began.

- 9.4 The number of scheduled extra events such as training for candidates was reduced. As the project was not overspending, it would seem that the main reason for this was lack of available time.
- 9.5 The short time scale allowed for the elections may have been partly as a result of the Interim Steering Group's (ISG) wish to have community representatives in place as soon as possible, with the newly-constituted Shadow Board – which would supersede the ISG – effective by the end of the financial year on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2001.

***Recommendation: Allow more time for future elections to run.***

*This would:*

- ✓ *Allow more time for organising election events.*
- ✓ *Allow more time for publicity and distribution of election materials.*
- ✓ *Enable costs to be minimised, as the need for extra advertising and mail drops would be reduced.*
- ✓ *Allow any unforeseen problems that arise to be dealt with.*
- ✓ *Enable more time and effort to be given to helping candidates prepare for their role by providing a full programme of training.*
- ✓ *Reduce pressure on project workers.*



## 10 Timing

10.1 The electoral register being used as a source for the voter database was published in April 2000, and the information it contained dated from 10th October of the previous year. It was therefore over a year out of date by the time of the elections. This may have affected some residents' chances of being able to vote. Many of the people listed on the register may since have moved, and others who moved to the area or moved house within the area after October 1999 would be missing from the register, or listed by their old address and therefore unlikely to receive nomination forms or voting packs. This problem is increased by the unusually high annual resident turnover rate in West Gate of up to 30%, compared with a city average of 17%. In addition, none of the 'attaining voters' in the area that turned eighteen and therefore became eligible to vote since October 1999 would appear on the register.

***Recommendation: Run elections as soon as possible after the main electoral register is published.***

- ✓ *Up until rolling registration was introduced, the draft register was published on 28<sup>th</sup> November, and the final version on 15<sup>th</sup> February each year. This was based on information current on 10<sup>th</sup> October.*
- ✓ *With the introduction of rolling registration in February 2001, residents can register to vote at any time of year, with the electoral register being updated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of every month. However, this is dependent on residents applying for a registration form from the city council.*
- ✓ *There will still be an annual registration period each year in October, when completing and returning the registration form (Form A) sent to each household will be compulsory.*

10.2 During the religious festival of Ramadan, which began on 27<sup>th</sup> November in 2000 and lasts for one month, Muslims fast during daylight hours, breaking their fast at sunset. For Muslims living in the West Gate area, following the rituals associated with Ramadan may have prevented them from attending some of the elections events, particularly the hustings.

10.3 Voting forms were sent out during the week beginning 11<sup>th</sup> December, and voters were asked to return them by post by the 9<sup>th</sup> January. The voting period was extended from three to four weeks to make allowance for possible Christmas postal delays. However, coinciding with Christmas may have adversely affected turnout, particularly as postal delays in 2000 were exacerbated by postal strikes and the fuel protests. In addition, a number of West Gate residents are University students – who may have missed their chance to vote because of the Christmas vacation.

***Recommendation: Take account of religious events, festivals, and holidays when planning future elections.***

- ✓ *This may help to avoid clashes with important events in the calendar and ensure that residents are more fully focused on and committed to the election process.*

## 11 Inclusiveness

- 11.1 The pre-election publicity and nominations forms were translated into six community languages: Hindi, Cantonese, Punjabi, Arabic, Urdu and Bengali. A translation line was included on the English language documents sent out, with a telephone line to ring to obtain other language copies. The voting forms and candidate statements were not translated due to a misunderstanding between the project officer and Electoral Reform Services, who were unable to provide translations. Because of time constrictions, it was not possible to make other arrangements at this stage.
- 11.2 Take-up of other language copies was very low. The project officer received only four requests for translations – three for Bengali copies and one for Urdu. There were no requests for translations into any other languages.
- 11.3 It is good practice to provide large print or audio copies of literature for people with impaired vision. These could be produced and distributed upon demand only, in order to save unnecessary expense.

***Recommendation: Only have documents translated when requests for other language copies are received.***

- ✓ *Although getting translations done can be time consuming, a more relaxed election time scale could accommodate this process.*
- ✓ *This would mean there would be no need to have translations done if there was no demand.*
- ✓ *Translations are expensive (around £80-105 per 1,000 words) so this could potentially reduce overall costs.*

- 11.4 Anecdotal evidence suggests that other language speakers who do not read English may not be able to read in their own language, meaning that providing written translations is not a useful way to reach these people.
- 11.5 The interpreting service provided at election events was in some demand, indicating that it may be more successful to reach other language speakers verbally. However, not all of the interpreters were in demand at each event, and some, e.g. Cantonese, were seldom used. It may be that more research needs to be done to ascertain what community languages there are in West Gate.

***Recommendation: Use other means to target other language speakers.***

*Potential methods:*

- ✓ *Use word of mouth.*
- ✓ *Exploit community networks.*
- ✓ *Target minority ethnic groups, shops, restaurants and places of worship, e.g. Anglo-Asian Club, Pakistan Muslim Association, Mosque and Islamic Centre.*

## 12 Including young people

- 12.1 Under 18s could not vote in the main elections for ordinary community representatives. The main reason for this was that the electoral register, which was used as a base for the voter database, contained no information about this age group. There was not enough time to collect this information using other means.
- 12.2 It was planned that a Young People's Representative aged 16-25 years would be chosen to represent this age group, and 16 and 17 year olds would help to select this representative. However, no plans have yet been developed for involving young people aged 16 and 17. A number of young people attended the hustings, which indicates that residents of this age group may be interested in being involved in NDC West Gate.
- 12.3 The Government has discussed the possibility of lowering the UK voting age to 16, and other community elections have included under 18s. For example, in Tower Hamlets, 17 year olds were allowed to both stand and vote in community elections, and a 17 year old was elected as female youth representative; Burngreave NDC elections in Sheffield will allow 15, 16 and 17 year olds to vote; Walsall Partnership allowed all residents aged 16 and over to vote. The earlier report '*New Deal for Communities: West Gate Community Elections, a consultation paper*' gave a number of suggestions for involving young people.

***Recommendation: Involve young people by targeting local secondary schools, colleges, community groups and services for young people.***

*Potential local contacts include:*

- ✓ *First Move/SNAP*
- ✓ *West End Youth Enquiry Service*
- ✓ *West End Youth and Community Centre*
- ✓ *Young Women's Outreach Project*
- ✓ *Mill Lane Youth Centre*
- ✓ *Children North East*

***Recommendation: Compiling the voter database using sources other than the electoral register would allow under 18s to take part.***

- ✓ *Alternative suggestions made earlier in this paper for compiling the voter database included asking people to register for NDfC elections by completing Form A style registration forms.*

## 13 Turnout

13.1 Table 2 shows the turnout for the elections.

Table 2

AREA 1	Number of ballot papers distributed	1,995
	Number of ballot papers returned	567
	Number of ballot papers found to be invalid (blank or spoilt)	5
	<b>Valid Turnout</b>	<b>28.75%</b>
AREA 2	Number of ballot papers distributed	2,027
	Number of ballot papers returned	1,014
	Number of ballot papers found to be invalid (blank or spoilt)	4
	<b>Valid Turnout</b>	<b>49.83%</b>
AREA 4	Number of ballot papers distributed	1,954
	Number of ballot papers returned	806
	Number of ballot papers found to be invalid (blank or spoilt)	0
	<b>Valid Turnout</b>	<b>41.25%</b>

13.2 The Area 2 electoral turnout of just under 50% was the highest that has yet been recorded for NDC Community Elections in the country. This area has a high ethnic population, and the result indicates that the elections were inclusive and efforts to target other language speakers were successful. Even in Area 1, which would only determine which of the two candidates won the longest term of office, the turnout was almost 29%.

13.3 Turnout figures for other community elections include 27.6% for Walsall Partnership Elections and around 28% for Braunstone Community Association in Leicester.

13.4 Turnout for all three areas of West Gate surpassed that of recent local elections in the area. The West Gate area lies more or less within the electoral wards of Elswick, West City and Wingrove (NB. the ward boundaries do not exactly match the NDC area boundaries and also contain other areas).

- 13.5 Table 3 shows the turnout for recent local elections.  
(Source: Newcastle City Council)

Table 3

WARD	TURNOUT	
	May 2000 Local elections	May 1999 Local elections
Elswick	25%	19.9%
West City	20.2%	17.6%
Wingrove	27.1%	23.6%

- 13.6 There are several possible reasons for the high turnout. New Deal for Communities: West Gate has high local interest value. There are large amounts of money involved and residents are keen to have a say in how it is spent. The experience of other regeneration initiatives in the area (notably Going for Growth) has made people distrustful of agencies coming into the area and making decisions without proper resident involvement.
- 13.7 Using all postal voting has been seen to increase turnout. The following results have been achieved using this method:  
A South East unitary authority got a 45% return rate in a referendum on council tax;  
New Zealand uses all-postal votes, with an average turnout of 54%;  
Gateshead saw rises of 26% and 32% in turnout, in wards using all postal voting.

## **14 Paper spoiling and cheating**

- 14.1 According to the report by Electoral Reform Services, only 9 papers were spoiled out of a total of 2,387 returned. The spoiled papers were discarded. This indicates that the electoral system and voting procedures were adequately explained at the information events and in the literature sent to households, and that the voting forms themselves were also easy to understand.
- 14.2 There was anecdotal evidence that cheating may have occurred, for instance by people 'collecting' voting forms from other households, entering vacant properties or opening voting forms delivered to their homes but addressed to other people. It would be difficult to prove whether or not this actually happened. Voting forms were personally addressed to residents, which may have helped to reduce the chance of them falling into the wrong hands.
- 14.3 Having a more up-to-date voter database – using the methods described earlier in this paper – would reduce the chance of voting forms being sent out to people who no longer live in the area, which may help to minimise the chance (or suspicion) of cheating.



## 15 Candidates elected

15.1 Candidates were only told the election results on the night of the announcement of results, a few minutes before the official announcement. Only Electoral Reform Services knew the results in advance, and the project officers were not told. As well as ensuring that this event was more exciting, this meant that those running the election could not be petitioned for insider information or be accused of foul play of any kind.

15.2 Table 4 shows which candidates were elected as representatives.

Table 4

	CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF VOTES	TENURE
AREA 1	Ifty Khan	325	3 years
	Fiona O Connor	237	2 years
	<i>(vacancy)</i>	-	<i>1 year</i>
AREA 2	Bul Bul Haque	488	3 years
	Taleabul Choudhury	410	2 years
	Taj Mohammed	226	1 year
AREA 3	Elisabeth Stewart	Elected unopposed	3 years
	<i>(vacancy)</i>	-	<i>2 years</i>
	<i>(vacancy)</i>	-	<i>1 year</i>
AREA 4	Joyce Robinson	470	3 years
	Maureen Hamilton	458	2 years
	George Curry	324	1 year

## 16 Conclusion

The first West Gate Community Elections proved to be a very positive experience, with high local involvement and the highest turnout of any New Deal for Communities elections so far. The process by which this was achieved, which is detailed in this report, provides a sound model for those involved with regeneration initiatives who are contemplating holding community elections, both in the North East region and throughout the United Kingdom.

The experience of the West Gate elections provides evidence that residents of disadvantaged communities are eager to be involved in community regeneration initiatives, and that there are different ways of successfully engaging them. This may be described as a continuum of involvement. While some residents are willing and able to have high active involvement in their community's regeneration process, others may prefer to take a more passive or intermittent approach. Community elections give the opportunity for the majority of community members to have some involvement in planning for the future of their community, regardless of their commitment levels or the amount of time and energy they are able to contribute to local regeneration initiatives.

However, there are still potential improvements that could be made to the model. The recommendations made in this report may lead to increased inclusiveness, and maximise opportunities for community involvement and capacity building.

## **Election rules and regulations\***

- 1) The West Gate area has been divided into four constituencies, known as Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4. Each area contains approximately 2000 people who are eligible to vote.
  - a) Area 1 covers the north west area of Arthur's Hill.
  - b) Area 2 covers Arthur's Hill south, Bentinck and the Triangle.
  - c) Area 3 covers the Jubilee Estate, St Paul's and Rye Hill.
  - d) Area 4 covers Cruddas Park, Hawthorn, Sycamore, and Park Road Estates.
- 2) There will be 12 places for community representatives on the constituted board, of which 3 will be elected from each area. This will mean there is one representative for every 600-700 voters.
- 3) In addition to the twelve ordinary reps, there will also be one young people's representative to represent all 16-25 year olds in the area. This young people's rep will not be voted for in the 2000 elections, but will be selected using other methods to be decided upon by the Shadow Board.
- 4) All households will receive information on New Deal for communities and elections, plus a nomination form and details of how to stand as a candidate.
- 5) Electoral candidates:
  - a) Candidates for ordinary community representatives have to live in the constituency they wish to stand for.
  - b) Candidates for ordinary community representative places have to be eighteen or over on the first day of voting.
  - c) Candidates for the young people's representative must live in West Gate, and must be between 16 and 25 years of age.
  - d) Candidates have to obtain signatures from 10 other people who live in the constituency they wish to stand for.
  - e) Candidates must be on the electoral register.
- 6) Training for candidates:
  - a) There will be a seminar for all people considering standing as a candidate, so they can find out more about what is involved. A 'job description' will be available. This event will be held at the weekend.
  - b) After the cut-off date, another seminar will be held for all accepted nominees where the rules of the elections will be explained (This did not take place in 2000, but it would be good practice to do this).
- 7) A procedure will be put in place to decide on what is and is not an acceptable nomination.

A set of rules governing the conduct of candidates will be produced (This did not occur in 2000).
- 8). Everyone on the 1999 electoral register will be able to vote.

- 9). 16 and 17 year olds will be allowed to vote for the young people's representative, although not for ordinary members.
- 10). Foreign nationals will be allowed to vote if they are West Gate residents (no provision was made for including anyone who was not on the 2000 electoral register).
- 11). Everyone will be sent a ballot paper in the post. On it they will be able to register one vote for the candidate of their choice. They then return this form in a freepost envelope. Voting will take place over two to three weeks.
- 12). The 'first past the post' (FPTP) method will be used to count votes. The three elected candidates in each constituency will be the ones who received the most votes.
- 13). Time scale:
  - a) Pre election publicity will be sent out on 28<sup>th</sup> September.
  - b) Election pack and nomination forms will be sent out on 5<sup>th</sup> October.
  - c) Seminars for potential nominees will be held on 12<sup>th</sup> October.
  - d) Nominations will close on 20<sup>th</sup> October.
  - e) Candidate seminar will be held on 26<sup>th</sup> October.
  - f) Candidate information will be sent out on 1<sup>st</sup> November.
  - g) Hustings will take place 9<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> November.
  - h) Voting closes on 24<sup>th</sup> November.
  - i) Results announced on 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- 14). There will be a maximum three-year term of office. People can then stand again for further three-year terms.
- 15). All 12 positions will be directly elected in the first year. In order to set up a staggered system where only a third of places are elected in each following year, there will be a special system for the first elections. In each constituency, the candidate with the most votes will serve for three years, the next for two and the one with the third most for one year. In future elections all representatives would get a 3-year term of office. Candidates who had been representatives for a year could stand again.

\* = Rules and regulations were drawn up during the period March-September 2000, prior to the elections being held. Some procedures were adapted or changed during the election process, and amendments have been made to this section to reflect these changes.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to all West Gate residents, community workers, candidates and community reps who provided information for this evaluation, and also the project officer, Rob Williamson, and the members of the Trust Constitution Group.

Additional information sources used in writing this report include:

## **Papers**

McCulloch, A (2000) A New Deal in search of a community? Research paper number 3, Sustainable Cities Research Institute.

New Deal for Communities: West Gate Community Elections, A Consultation Paper. Prepared for the West Gate Area New Deal for Communities Interim Steering Group by Sustainable Cities Research Institute.

## **Web sites**

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rollingregistration/index.htm](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rollingregistration/index.htm)

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/election2.nsf/a/electhome](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/election2.nsf/a/electhome)

[www.opengov.uk](http://www.opengov.uk)

[www.detr.gov.uk](http://www.detr.gov.uk)

## **Telephone or email consultation with representatives of:**

NDfC Leicester (Braunstone)

NDfC Hull (Preston Road)

NDfC Norwich (North Earlham and Marlpit)

Lancashire Enterprises (Preston)

NDfC Tower Hamlets (Ocean Estate)

The Walsall Partnership SRB Scheme

Newcastle City Council Electoral Office

## Appendices

1. Pre-election publicity: '*New Deal for Communities: The West Gate, Community Election*' for Area 1. Sent to all voters (4 pages).
2. Poster/handout: '*Community election*', advertising the information sessions. Posted at a number of local venues (1 page).
3. Handout at information sessions: 'So you want to be a community representative...?' (3 pages).
4. Poster/handout showing a map of the whole of NDC West Gate and the four different areas (1 page).
5. Election nominations form for Area 2. Posted to all voters (4 pages).
6. Candidate election statements for Area 1. Posted to all voters (1 page).
7. Ballot paper for Area 1. Posted to all voters (1 page).