



## **Kirklees Democracy Commission**

### **Summary Note from the meeting held on Thursday 29 September 2016**

#### **Witness:**

Dominic Campbell is a digital government entrepreneur with a background in government policy and technology-led change. He is experienced in organisation and service re-design and has senior management experience in implementing successful change initiatives within public services.

Having spent six years in government, Dominic established FutureGov in 2008. FutureGov supports designs public services for the digital age in the UK, Australia and many places in between. Dominic has previously been voted in the top 50 most influential people in UK local government.

#### **Present:**

Cllr Andrew Marchington, Cllr Fazila Fadia, Cllr Andrew Cooper and Cllr Gemma Wilson

#### **In Attendance:**

Carl Whistlecraft, Spencer Wilson, Alaina McGlade and Diane Sims

### **Summary of Discussion**

#### **Representative and Participatory Democracy**

Dominic explained that he believed that classic representative democracy is currently under pressure which has seen a knee jerk response to explore how to engage people in different participatory ways. This has seen the emergence of responsive, faddy approaches such as budget simulators, crowd sourcing and referendums which are superficial and fail to address the important role that representatives can play in redesigning services. Many of these approaches are quite often “too late in the game” as the decisions have already been made. It is important to get back to the more fundamental questions in this context.

Dominic explained that it is important to think how services can be “democratised” and a fundamental part of this involves revisiting the officer / councillor relationship and the wider governance and decision making bureaucracy. Dominic observed that there is an assumption that councillors have a community leadership role although

they appear to find it difficult to provide leadership, vision and engagement, with a tendency to get increasingly involved in operational service delivery. This reduces the space for service redesign, innovation and proto-typing. Dominic acknowledged that this is as much an issue for officers as it is for councillors. If councillors are advocates for such change it will get traction in the organisation, although councillor input is often perceived as meddling despite being the “porous membrane” of the authority.

Bridging the gap between representative democracy and participatory democracy is best done by finding people opportunities to do really small things e.g. [Casserole Club](#). This involves thinking creatively as to how best to lower the barriers to participation and using digital to take the pressure out of the situation.

## **Digital and the Councillor Role**

Dominic advised that it is increasingly difficult for councillors to be involved in delivering technology changes to the public and therefore have a tendency become involved in service / operational detail. Dominic believes that councillors could take on an organisation’s leadership role through prototyping and outlined a number of benefits that could be achieved:

- Councillors will improve their own understanding;
- As Councillors already have a good knowledge of the organisation, their input will assist in understanding how to manage delivery;
- Councillors can play an important part in the research work given that they provide a valid voice on behalf of service users;
- Councillors are better placed to fully advocate the new practice as they will fully understand it.

In the wider context Dominic explained that there are not many jobs that can operate without involving or including digital. Councillors are truly meant to be representatives so it is about more than digital but the competence to use and understand technology needs to be embraced within the councillor job description as councillors tend to be less digitally literate than the communities they represent. This is a consideration as part of candidate selection by political parties. In the digital context councillors will have an important role in orchestrating conversations on-line which will involve a cultural change.

Dominic explained that councillors are currently using a range of techniques and approaches and bringing these together into a coherent pack / methodology would be helpful. He explained that a good approach would be to let councillors trial a new digital service before it is released live – if councillors struggle to use it, this could be a fair representation on how the public would cope. Given that councillors can have a “foot in each camp” they are locally founded so are very well placed to be the best client advocates, whilst also acting as a critical friend of the council. Dominic explained that there needs to be a more consistent culture. Councillors or councils cannot request participation in some areas and then lock people out of others.

## **Digital, Engagement and Decision Making**

Dominic explained that the ways in which the public engage with councils digitally in the ways that you might expect, it will depend on the subject matter and recognising that people are interested in personal and pragmatic issues which are unlikely to result in predictable ways of engaging with the council.

Dominic advised that a blend of both online and offline approaches can work and that seeing digital as a singular approach is where approaches often fails. Dominic cited the example of the work in Iceland to crowd source their constitution. The process involved training members of the community to facilitate the conversation off-line, the outcomes of which were captured and posted on-line, commented on and assimilated into themes which form proposals to change the constitution. An important consideration is to be very clear in terms of the rules of engagement. Where people are clear up front they are more likely to be realistic in terms of the outcomes.

Dominic added that, in the context of decision making, many of the problems are upstream of the formal decision making process. Getting this right, as part of a co-design process, reduces the need for consultations that in many cases may not be needed unless it is a statutory requirement.

Dominic explained that communications and engagement should be designed around the people required to engage in that issue. Essentially, you go to where people are and specifically design your approach based on how these people want to interact with you – once you have their attention, you then begin to nudge them towards different ways of working. Understanding the entire user journey through the whole service is important as part of this process.

Dominic emphasised the importance of getting politicians involved in service redesign work, whilst acknowledging that this can be a real challenge, particularly in terms of allowing them to lead delivery. This should involve creating design briefs and rapidly testing progression which will mean councillors can then be successful in publicising actual action results.