

Kirklees Democracy Commission Public Engagement Events

Final report

November 2016

*The behaviour
change people.*

social
marketing
gateway

smg

‘Democracy
in Kirklees’



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1. INTRODUCTION

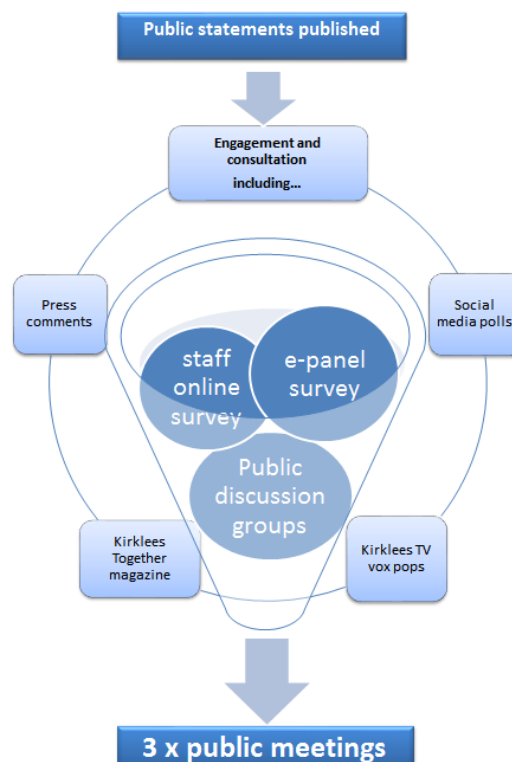
The Social Marketing Gateway (SMG) was commissioned by Kirklees Council to conduct a series of public engagement events as part of the ongoing work of the Kirklees Democracy Commission (KDC) over the summer of 2016. In addition, desk-based work (including social media analysis) was carried out to provide a wider context for the findings from the local events. Details on the methodology employed for both of these components of the work are set out below. The work was designed to support the KDC in furthering its ambition of:



OUR MISSION...

"By 2020 Kirklees is an informed citizen-led democracy with accountable elected representatives who enable communities to influence and affect decisions governing their lives."

SMG's contribution forms part of KDC's wider programme of engagement and consultation work, which is demonstrated in the diagram below. It represents an impressive and rounded effort to reach out to the whole community to invite and listen to its views, coupled with a firm commitment to share the findings with everyone who has helped in the process. Indeed, at the public events, the independent chair of KDC repeatedly emphasised KDC's commitment to feeding back to local residents.



A total of 5 public engagement events were convened (3 in Huddersfield and 2 in Dewsbury and Batley respectively). The focus of the events centred on three themes identified by KDC:

- The Role of Councillors in a Representative and Participatory Democracy
- Elections and the Electoral Cycle
- Governance, Accountability and Decision-making

A total of 88 local residents attended the events. While the core of work at each event was to consider a range of questions within each theme, the session opened with a presentation from the Chair of KDC and also included a Q&A with councillors.

The following report is mainly structured around the 3 main themes, with the findings from both the desk-based work and the public events set out under each theme.

The wider literature on local democracy, and conversations taking place in social media nationally, has been reviewed through the lens of the key themes and questions explored during the public meetings. This provides useful context for the local findings. As the reader will find, there is a lot of similarity between what we found through the public meetings with the wider debate.

Before presenting the main findings from both the wider review and the public events, there is a short description of the methodology used, followed by a section briefly profiling the attendees at the 5 public events.

2. METHODOLOGY

There were two discrete elements to the methodology. First, desk-based work drawing on available literature related to the three themes, coupled with an analysis of conversations taking place in social media. Second, engaging residents in a series of roadshows: i.e. public events organized by KDC that assembled a mix of local people interesting in sharing their views and helping the Council address the question 'how should we do democracy in Kirklees?'

Desk and Social Media Review

The secondary review explored sources across the UK, and used the following approach

- i. Construction of a content selection guide. This allows relevant content in the source documents to be 'flagged and tagged'. The content guide was constructed around the three themes.
- ii. Flagging and tagging of assembled material, where relevant sections as defined by the content guide were identified as appropriate. This involves the electronic extraction of relevant content and its grouping under the main headings of the content required for subsequent appraisal.
- iii. A more focused consideration and appraisal of the selected content, weighing up what it might mean for KDC, highlighting where the information is not entirely consistent, where there appear to be insight gaps, and considering what the secondary evidence tells us that is relevant for the project at hand.
- iv. Packaging of this consideration and appraisal into this summary secondary insight report.

In total, over 40 sources were reviewed in detail. More secondary content was available relating to some topics (e.g. increasing voter turnout) than others (e.g. impacts of moving to whole council elections). The emerging, ongoing nature of many of the developments in the local political landscapes mean that definitive answers or 'instructions' for Kirklees are not available. Therefore, the latest available thinking across the themes and questions is presented.

As an addition to the traditional literature review, analysis was also undertaken to establish what people are saying about the state of local democracy in the increasingly important and dynamic field of social media. A social media listening exercise was undertaken from the 12th of July 2016 until the 16th of August 2016. During this time period, we were interested in gaining a deeper understanding of social media conversations across the three themes.

Using a number of tools, we searched and analysed national conversations on the following subjects:

- ("local democracy" OR "participatory democracy" OR "local party politics" OR "electoral cycle" OR "open democracy" OR "attracting councillors" OR

"electoral wards" OR "voter turnout" OR "increasing voter turnout" OR "local government election*" OR "local government" OR "local elections" OR "local election cycle" OR "voting in local election*" OR "local government decision-making" OR "local governance").

Also, as part of KDC's twitter campaign, we felt it would be relevant to track the following hashtags to gain insight from emerging conversations. We tracked:

- "hashtags:(kirkdemocracy OR batley OR dewsbury OR huddersfield OR kirklees OR kirkcouncil)".

The majority of the use of the hashtags that we found during the analysis period were from Kirklees Council-associated/owned content, and so specific 'organic' or public findings in this regard is limited to a handful of tweets, which are highlighted under the relevant themes.

All of the above noted searches were limited to the UK only. Before any data cleansing took place, there were over 3,000 mentions (i.e. text inclusion of monitored keywords) from social media relating to the conversation topics searched, with 489 unique authors on these topics. However, once this data had been cleansed, these figures dropped to 948 mentions, which were then further sorted for their relevance to the topics at hand.

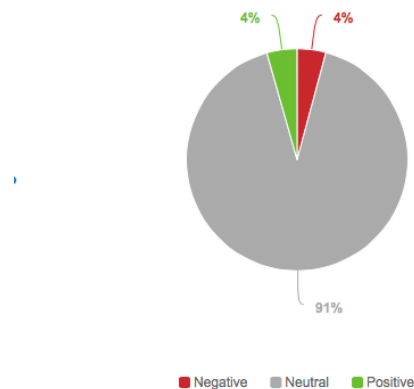
Trending topics identified from these conversations were The Kirklees Democracy Roadshow and the term "County Council". The Kirklees Democracy Roadshow dominated the social media 'noise' – i.e. information which is not useful - from the above-noted search terms.

From these mentions, it was found that the majority of people who were involved in conversations were male, contributing to 77% of all conversations with 23% of females sharing their views.

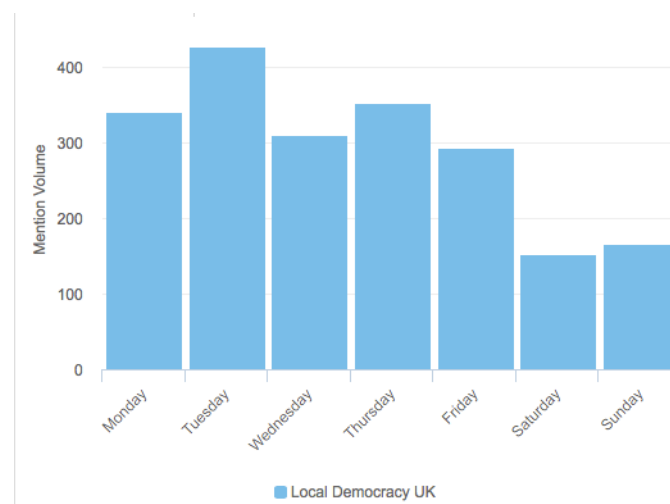


The sentiment drawn from contributors was mostly neutral. This is due to the matter-of-fact tone usually adopted by people when talking about such a serious issue. There were instances of positive and negative sentiment which, when combined, accounted for 8% of the emotive language used when talking about local

democracy. It should be noted that, in some instances, this was corrected for sarcastic tone used by contributors that had been misidentified as being positive.



The volume of conversations drawn from social media was found to fluctuate at different times during the week. In particular, it was found that the most popular day to be talking about this topic was on a Tuesday.



Other spikes in conversation over the tracked time period related to happenings in the political sphere that had made the news, such as the appointment of Sajid Javid as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. However, conversation remained relatively steady throughout.

Public Engagement Events

A World Café methodology was used for the events, with small groups of people (between 4-5 people on each table) participating in table-top conversations lasting 30-40mins per theme, facilitated by a SMG ‘host’. For each themed-discussion, participants were presented with a small number of key questions (Fig 1). They considered and discussed these questions during table conversations.

The table discussions were facilitated by the Social Marketing Gateway (SMG). A member of SMG played the role of ‘host’ for each of the three themes. Towards the end of each table discussion, the SMG host invited participants to reflect and share

the main things that they had taken out of the discussion. These comments were audio recorded.

In addition to the views harvested in the above way, participants were encouraged to write down their views and thoughts during the table conversations; using flip chart paper and post-it-notes provided for this purpose. This written output was collected by SMG and has also been used in the analysis.

In addition to the table conversations on the three themes, each event opened with a short presentation from the Chair of the KDC. Following the table conversations, the event closed with a session where participants voted electronically on questions put to them – some of these questions were generated during the table conversations.

Some 88 residents participated. On arrival, people were asked to complete a short profiling questionnaire. This provides a helpful overview of the composition of the residents who participated in the events and of their experience across key questions, like voting behaviour, contact with councillors and so on. This profiling information is summarised in the next section and reported more fully in Appendix 1.

Following each session, a separate 'event report' was prepared drawing together the main findings. This final report draws from all 5 event reports, plus the additional desk-based work that has been carried out.

Fig 1: Key questions across the themes
(Source: KDC website)

COUNCILLORS



The role of Councillors in a representative and participatory democracy

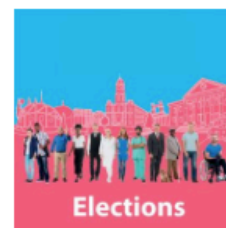
Do you know why we have councillors and what's involved in the role? Have you noticed that this is changing? What might councillors do differently to help communities do more for themselves? How do you think we can attract the next generation of councillors?

Help us to determine the future role of the councillor in Kirklees and share ideas about how we can support councillors to be strong representatives of their communities.

How should we do democracy here in Kirklees?

[Join the debate to help us find out.](#)

ELECTIONS



Elections and the electoral cycle

How do we encourage more people to vote in elections? How can we make better use of digital and mobile technologies to improve registration and voter turnout? What other changes might help?

It would save money for us to elect Kirklees councillors only once every four years, but this would give local residents fewer opportunities to exercise their democratic right. Help us to work out how to get the right balance and how to get more people interested in voting.

How should we do democracy here in Kirklees?

[Join the debate to help us find out.](#)

DECISION-MAKING



Efficiency, governance and decision-making

How can we improve our local decision-making? Are you clear about how the council makes decisions now? How might regional or more local decisions change things? Do we have the right kind of checks in place? How could we make decisions more open?

Help us to explore whether we're using the right methods for decision-making now and how we could use new technologies to open up decision-making more in the future.

How should we do democracy here in Kirklees?

[Join the debate to help us find out.](#)

3. PARTICIPANTS AT THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

A total of 87 local residents attended the public engagement events. Output from the profiling questionnaire shows a good spread of ages, and a reasonable turnout from younger groups: e.g. 11% of participants were aged under 25 years. There was also a good gender balance, with 55% female and 45% male.

Just over a half of the participants (53%) were in paid employment (34% being in full-time jobs), with 7% unemployed. The 'other' category (38%) included a substantial proportion of older and retired people, plus a handful of students and a small number of self-employed.

A strong feature of the participants was a fairly strong interest in politics, with the great majority of attendees claiming to have a healthy interest in politics in general (Fig 1). Some 36% were a member of a political party, and 49% active in a local community group. Interest in local politics and the council was also strong (Fig 2), though slightly less so than for 'politics in general'. Nevertheless, this is certainly a 'more engaged' body of the people than we would expect in a truly representative sample of the Kirklees' population.

Fig 2: Level of interest in Politics in General

(Scale 1-10 where 10 is very interested and 1 is not interested at all)

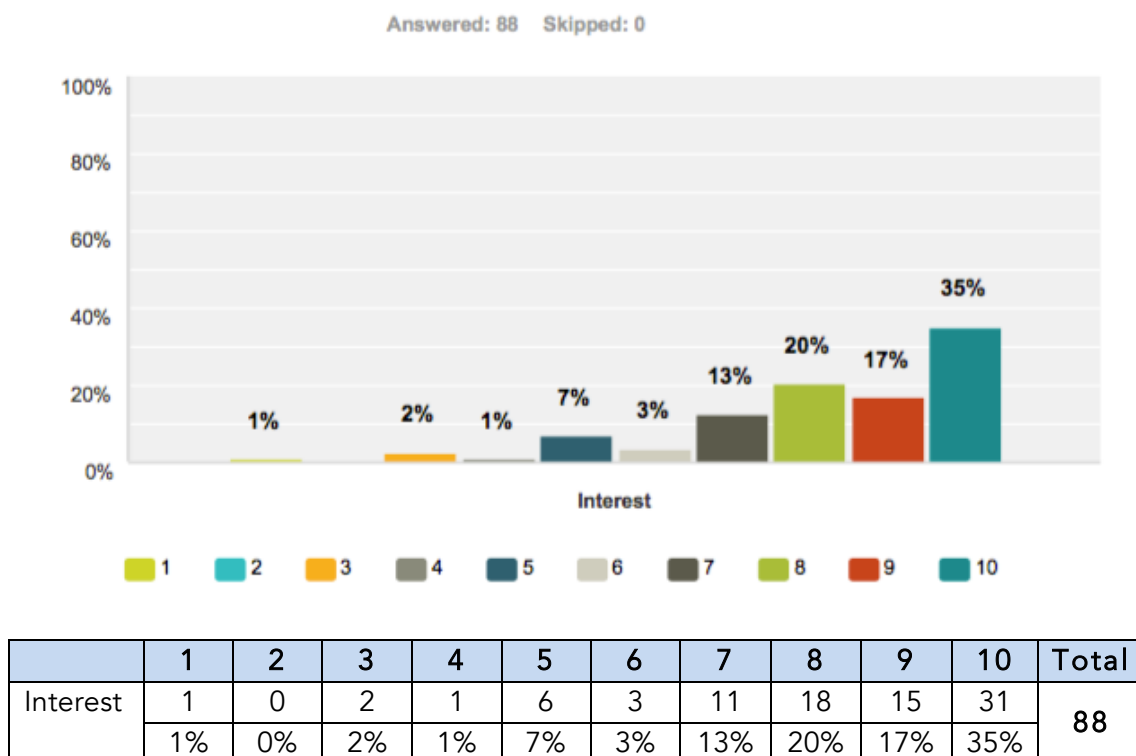
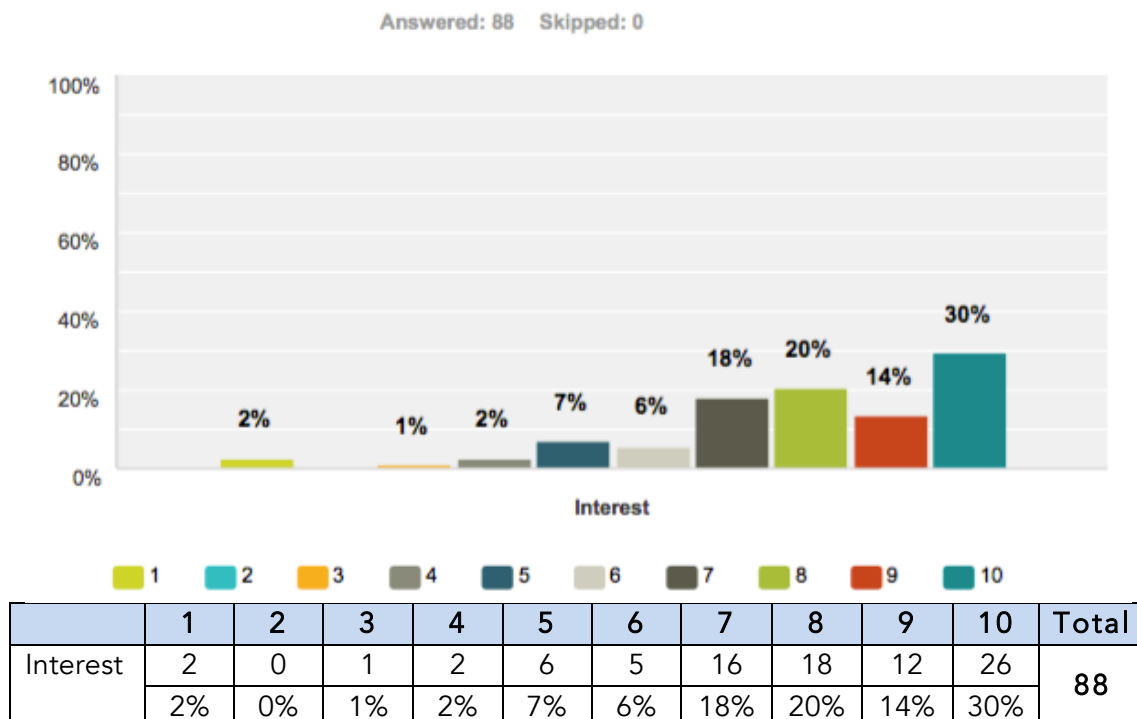
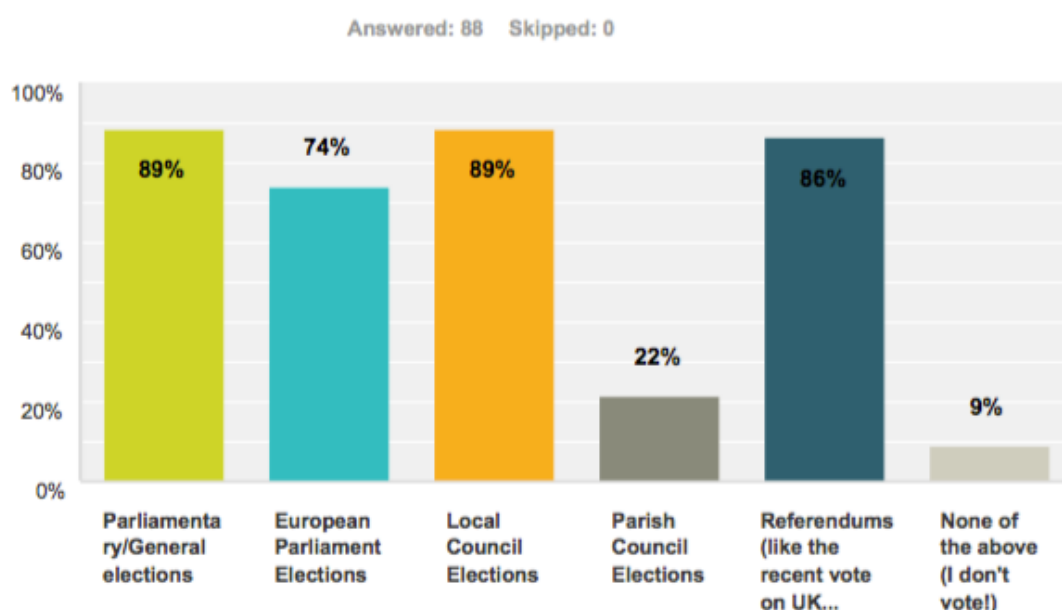


Fig 3: Level of interest in Local Politics and Council
(Scale 1-10 where 10 is very interested and 1 is not interested at all)



Evidence that the public reached by the events is a relatively engaged one is shown in their responses when asked 'which, if any, elections do you vote in?' (Fig 3). With the exception of Parish Council elections (22% voting), the great majority of participants claimed to vote in Local (89%), Parliamentary (89%) and European (74%) elections.

Fig 4: Proportions Voting in Elections



Type of election	Count	%
Parliamentary/General elections	78	89%
European Parliament Elections	65	74%
Local Council Elections	78	89%
Parish Council Elections	19	22%
Referendums (like the recent vote on UK membership in the EU)	76	86%
None of the above (I don't vote!)	8	9%
Base	88*	

**respondents could answer more than one option*

4. ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

Evidence from desk and social media review

The changing role of councillors

Available literature on councillors and their role ranges across increasing demands and expectations; a less paternalistic relationship with local people; and the implications of the digital age. There is an ongoing debate about demands on councillors, their changing role, and the need to improve their status and cultivate recognition of what they do.¹

On the frontline:

The move away from committee-decision-making, and the creation of separate groups of 'backbench' councillors and those with more responsibility as cabinet members/committee chairs, has generated debate about the role of the councillor in the community.² The relationship between individual councillors and the communities they represent is discussed positively as an important, frontline role. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) challenges the view that councillors are simply community volunteers and do not deserve to be acknowledged in a special way: 'Councillors are volunteers, but they are undertaking an increasingly demanding role, involving many levels of responsibility and judgment never called upon from most members of parliament.'³

Localism:

Localism presents both opportunities and challenges for councillors. On one hand, their relevance could be seen to be reduced as communities gain a stronger voice, yet it is important for them to be at the centre of local consultation and decision-making.⁴ This position is further complicated by mixed messages – i.e. some government measures give councils new responsibilities, whilst others appear to bypass them. Terms such as 'guided localism' are seen to be contradictory.

The LGIU Select Committee inquiry recommends the following:⁵

- Councillors should forge working relationships at a local level. They broaden their own understanding of what is required and coordinate more effective identification of local needs if they work closely with schools, GPs, the police and other service providers.
- Councils are urged to consider how best to provide support and assistance to councillors to ensure that they are able to fulfil an active role in their communities. Councils can consider what concrete powers, budgets and support

¹ Kitchin, H. (2013) Briefing: Councillors on the frontline: A select committee report [online] available at: <http://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Councillors-on-the-frontline-a-select-committee-report.pdf>

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

are needed for councillors to play frontline roles. Witnesses to the inquiry provided many illustrations of councillors influencing the ways that services are delivered, e.g. from being a key point of contact to serving on area committees and boards, including the allocation of funds for decision-making on local projects including highways and street scene.

- Where services are delivered by external providers, it is important that the councillor's role is not reduced. Councillors must be able to influence the way services are delivered and should not be prevented by long-term contracts. They suggest that care is taken to ensure that contracts provide that councillors are able to shape service delivery locally, as well as to have regular contact with frontline staff.

The mayoral model:

In some places where the model has been adopted, councillors are frustrated with the way it is working, e.g. Bristol.⁶ An unsympathetic and unconstructive view is that such councillors are simply resistant to change. Hambleton & Sweeting (2015) recommend that in these changing times, and particularly where a move to the mayoral model takes place, active attention should be given to developing and strengthening councillors' role: 'Efforts to re-imagine the roles of councillors, and to come up with new ways of tapping the talents of all local politicians are vital. It should be possible for councillors to develop more productive and fulfilling roles within the mayoral system of governance than appears to be the case at present.'⁷ Councillors should take a lead in developing this agenda.

Helping communities to do more for themselves:

The role of councillors is becoming far less paternalistic than in the past. They are beginning to be referred to with terms such as 'community leaders', 'community champions', 'door openers' and 'facilitators' and 'civic entrepreneurs'. Society faces big challenges that cannot be solved by the state alone – civic involvement is essential given the context of reductions in public money. However, civic action needs a mandate and an anchor body to orchestrate and legitimise it, and local government is that mandated body. Polls suggest that the public know that they need to do more, and many are willing to do so, but they cannot do so without well-functioning public services.

Looking forward, there is a sense that local government must rediscover the spirit of the original civic entrepreneurs, like Joseph Chamberlain creating Victorian utilities and infrastructure or Joseph Rowntree who, while growing his business, devoted time and resource to public life. 'Just as clean water, sewers and electricities were the utilities needed in the 19th century, local government can help develop the

⁶ Hambleton, R. & Sweeting, D. (2015) The Impacts of Mayoral Governance in Bristol [online] available at: <https://bristolcivicleadership.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/impacts-of-mayoral-governance-in-bristol-web-version.pdf>

⁷ Hambleton, R. & Sweeting, D. (2015)

infrastructure needed for the 21st century.’⁸ This includes stimulating local economic growth, ensuring that the benefits are felt by all, and forging a new social contract with citizens to reinforce and restore people’s faith in local democracy as a progressive and vital British institution.

‘We live in an unforgiving age when every missed bin, unreturned phone call and impersonal letter chips away at taxpayers’ confidence in public services and trust in democracy’.⁹ The challenge is to change the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state, rebuild trust and ensure good local integration between health, social care and other services.

Councillors have a crucial role to play in this. They need new approaches, such as using less formal social networks, participatory democracy, better engagement with young people and a broad influencing role – rather than more formal traditional structures. It is important that they adapt to what works locally, and are active and visible, encouraging communities to make the most of available powers, including under the Localism Act. It is felt to be important that the authority of councillors is not accidentally undermined by government, and that councillors themselves actively encourage a wider range of people to take an interest in local government.

10

Research from Changes, a community development company, has revealed that in order to play their pivotal role in terms of supporting local people to become more involved and influential in their own communities, councillors must have a number of skills across six dimensions of the ‘ideal councillor’. These are included in Appendix 2.

Attracting and supporting councillors

How to attract the next generation of councillors is a challenge mentioned fairly frequently across the literature. It appears that people’s broad dissatisfaction with and disengagement from democracy often means that they are less – rather than more – inclined to get involved themselves.

Additionally, there is concern that the composition of many councils does not reflect the communities they serve, e.g. with regard to representation from women, young people and BME people specifically. In 2013, for example, the average age of a councillor was 60.2, over two thirds (67.3%) were male, and 96% were of white

⁸ The Commission on the Future of Local Government (2012) [Evidence](https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/city-growth-commission/evidence/commission-on-the-future-of-local-government.pdf) [online] available at: <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/city-growth-commission/evidence/commission-on-the-future-of-local-government.pdf>

⁹ The Commission on the Future of Local Government (2012)

¹⁰ The Commission on the Future of Local Government (2012)



ethnic origin.¹¹ This is problematic when 'healthy democracy depends on different sections of society feeling a connection to those who represent them'.¹²

Recommendations for how to increase the diversity of the councillor population include:¹³

- Political parties have the most important role here. Mechanisms are required to monitor recruitment and selection policies and assess results.
- Parties should initiate discussions with those working in the voluntary sector/running a business, whose skills often reflect those required a councillor. Parties should promote interest and opportunities to stand for election, and should make their meetings more welcome and opening.
- Local authorities can also play a key role in promoting local democratic engagement, and encourage under-represented groups (especially young people) to become actively involved in local democratic processes. Councils need to take conscious, active steps to popularise the idea of becoming a councillor. The LGA's 'Be a Councillor' programme is well regarded.¹⁴

To establish how people might be encouraged to become councillors, it is useful to understand current barriers that deter individuals from standing or cause them to stand down after one term.^{15,16}

- **Time commitment** – The role of a councillor has become 'massively more involved', and it can be a struggle to find time to combine being a councillor with full-time work and a family. The resulting strain can mean that any younger people who do hold office in their twenties often stand down to focus on career and family. The pressures of email and casework are having an impact on all councillors; the responsibilities associated with cabinet positions are even more demanding of time.
 - Recommendation: Councils should consider assigning an officer to assist individual councillors – or groups of councillors – with managing casework.
- **Employers** – Another aspect of time commitment relates to the extent to which employers support councillors by giving them time off to fulfil their duties. This is an important factor in becoming and remaining a councillor. Some employers are willing and supportive, but others – especially small businesses – find it difficult to replace the time of an absent staff member. It can be difficult for unemployed councillors to find a job.
 - Recommendation: A kitemark recognition scheme/financial incentive schemes could potentially help.

¹¹ LGA (2013) Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013: Executive Summary [online] available at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6202621/National+Census+of+Local+Authority+Councillors+2013+-+executive+summary.pdf/0f420e9d-efe7-4cc4-8897-f3e61d0fd367>

¹² Kitchin, H. (2013)

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ <http://beacouncillor.co.uk/>

¹⁵ Kitchin, H. (2013)

¹⁶ National Association of Local Councils (2015) Devo Local: A white paper for empowering and strengthening local democracy [online] available at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6917361/Inquiry+submission+-+NALC+report.pdf/608776d7-0854-498b-bb2d-8cc76f05050b>

- **Remuneration** – Although allowances are not an incentive to become a councillor, people can be deterred from standing because the existing allowance does not provide sufficient compensation for their time. As the leader of Hertfordshire told a committee, ‘Allowances for front-line councillors...leading councillors, are high enough to offend the public, but not high enough to encourage any sane person to give up their career and earning capacity to take it on.’
- Currently, councils are required to make their own decisions on recommendations for the level of allowance made by independent panels. Many councils are reluctant to vote for unpopular increases, which perpetuates a deterrent for those wondering whether to stand for election in future.
 - Recommendations:
 - Councillors have a right to expect an appropriate level of remuneration given the time commitment, increasingly demanding role and common necessity to take time off work.
 - Remuneration should be determined locally. To end the deadlock, the government should make it possible for councils to transfer the entire responsibility for setting allowances to independent local bodies. Councillors would then no longer be required to accept or reject external advice, and allowances would be decided on the same basis as MPs’.
 - Allowance schemes could include a capped element to cover loss of earnings where relevant.
 - Because of public attitudes, it is difficult for councils to increase allowances even when they feel it would aid recruitment and support the work of councillors. This can be made even more difficult when ministers intervene, so councils should be free to exercise their decision-making powers without ministerial intervention.

Councillor support, performance and training:

- The provision of training for councillors is having to change in response to their changing role. As they become more community-focused, training programmes are being adjusted to include skills such as facilitating, negotiating and dealing with challenging situations.
 - Recommendations:
 - Local authorities (as well as political parties and any other relevant bodies) should review the training and support they offer to ensure it meets councillors’ changing needs.
 - Councils should avoid the temptation of reducing training and support provided to members. Many councils have chosen to ring-fence member development budgets, but in some cases staff support is being reduced. Councillors are currently required to make increasingly difficult decisions; this is not the time to reduce their ability to perform vital tasks.
 - Councillors should make public details of any training they have completed over the course of a year.

- Councils and political parties should collaborate to organise taster courses and briefing sessions for those considering standing for election.¹⁷

Digital and mobile technologies

The increasing prevalence of digital technology, particularly social media, means that councillors are more visible and more accessible than ever before. It is imperative that councillors recognise the opportunities associated with this – in terms of having a valuable dialogue with the communities they represent. The concept of ‘digital democracy’ is used to describe social media’s ability to serve as a valuable bridge between the formal world of local politics and the ‘real’ world of ‘ordinary’ people.¹⁸ This is particularly important given the problem of many people feeling distanced and disengaged from politics and democracy. Furthermore, the reliance on digital communication by young people means that effective use of digital technology is vital if councillors want to engage this crucial, but often under-represented group.

Simultaneously, however, they must be conscious of the potential risks associated with this, knowing how to manage their content and engagement appropriately. There is now also the risk of communities and interest groups being able to mobilise and influence without working through elected councillors. To avoid this, councillors should do all that they can to make themselves approachable and accessible. This might involve ‘joining in’ on conversations where they can contribute helpfully, even if they were not initially directly addressed – see Appendix 3¹⁹ for this and other social media guidelines, provided to new councillors by the LGA.

Kirklees Council appears to recognise the importance of keeping up to date, for example publishing social media guidance for councillors as many other local authorities have done, including specific advice on how to respond to social media approaches from the public.²⁰ Providing such guidance, and ensuring that is comprehensive and remains up to date, is important to help councillors to make the most of the opportunities available through digital technologies.

A five point checklist for local government to ensure they are doing all they can to foster local digital democracy is as follows.²¹ It appears that Kirklees is doing well in this regard, for example webcasting council meetings etc.

¹⁷ Kitchin, H. (2013)

¹⁸ Kirklees Council (2016) Responding to people on social media [online] available at: <http://socialmedia.kirklees.gov.uk/advice-and-tips/responding-to-people-on-social-media/>

¹⁹ LGA (2015) Councillors Guide: A guide for new councillors 2015/16 [online] available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/L15-125+The+Councillors%20Guide+2015-16_03.pdf/5b4d2760-0ac3-4cfe-b870-1768987c482d

²⁰ Kirklees Council (2016)

²¹ Localopolis (2012) Local digital democracy: a five point checklist [online] available at: <http://localopolis.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/44-local-digital-democracy-five-point.html>



1. Are councillors online?
 - How many councillors are blogging, tweeting, facebooking etc.?
 - Is training and support provided for those using social media?
 - Are awareness sessions provided for those who haven't yet started?
2. Is the council's online decision-making social?
 - Can online agendas, minutes and reports be easily shared via social media?
 - Are items broken down into bite-sized chunks rather than published in unwieldy PDFs?
 - Is it possible for people to comment on decision-making items via social media?
3. Are council meetings social?
 - Do meetings have webcasts that allow engagement via social media?
 - Can councillors and citizens tweet at council meetings?
 - Does an officer provide a formal live commentary on meetings via social media?
4. Are local elections social?
 - Do election teams make use of social media to promote the election process?
 - Do candidates share their election materials online or parties provide online manifestos?
 - Are results shared via social media?
5. Is there a local Digital Democracy Committee?
 - Is the council actively supporting local digital democracy?
 - Are initiatives such as Local Democracy Week being used to support digital engagement?
 - Are there online communities supporting local digital democracy and looking at how it might be improved?

The consensus seems to be that digital does make better councillors, but they need to know why they are using it – it's not just about broadcasting messages; you need to engage and respond. Other advice for new councillors who want to use digital in their role but want to find out how to do so is included in Appendix 4, collected from a local engagement session.²²

It is important that local authorities do all that they can to encourage and support councillors to make the most of digital opportunities. It is crucial for re-engaging the public with local democracy, and encouraging the collaborative approach to improving communities which the devolution and localism agendas require.

Optimal number of councillors and electoral wards

There is no consensus in the literature regarding clear guidelines for the number of electoral wards or councillors that is optimum for an area. The Local Government

²² RewiringDemocracy.org (2014) 11 digital tips for councillors [online] available at: <http://www.rewiringdemocracy.org.uk/11-digital-tips-for-new-councillors/>

Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) conducts electoral reviews of individual local authorities' electoral arrangements, covering: the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors to be elected to each.²³

These reviews are primarily initiated to solve problems regarding electoral inequality, i.e. where some councillors represent many more or fewer voters than others, meaning that the value of each vote in council elections varies depending on where you live. However, they can also be carried out at a local authority's request, e.g. to look at council size (the total number of councillors) or provide for single-member wards/divisions. The Commission is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect, using a Statutory Instrument or order. The local authority then conducts local elections on the basis of the new arrangements set out in the order.²⁴

The most recent 'report of the year' from LGBCE, covering 2012/13 highlights some general trends with regard to their findings, for example:²⁵

- There is a trend for many councils to be inclined to reduce the total number of members elected to their authority ('council size') to complement streamlined governance arrangements and the changing responsibilities and ambitions of English local authorities.
- Even when the size of electorates is increasing, this is not necessarily a reason to increase the number of councillors. The Commission does not set targets for electoral ratios – i.e. the number of electors per council seat.
- Many local authorities seek to reduce the number of councillors, either for business management/efficiency or financial reasons.
- As in 2011/12, electoral review in 2012/13 was more likely to result in a decrease in council size than an increase. Of the 19 completed reviews, twelve (63%) resulted in decreases, four resulted in no change to council size and in three, one additional council seat was created. In total, there was a reduction of 88 council seats and 9.1% in the total number of councillors in the reviewed local authorities. The majority of these were in seven councils who requested reviews because they were keen to reduce their size.
- Whilst the Commission is willing to support reductions in council size when sound justifications are presented, it does not presume it will be the case at the outset of a review.
- The figures show that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between reduced council size and reduced numbers of electoral areas. E.g. a reduction by 12 council seats in South Oxfordshire was accompanied by a reduction of 8 wards, whilst in Herefordshire, a change to a pattern of single-member wards

²³ LGBCE (2016) Final recommendations for new electoral arrangements for Lincolnshire County Council: Electoral review [online] available at: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/29139/Lincolnshire-Final-Recommendations-002.pdf

²⁴ LGBCE (2016)

²⁵ LGBCE (2013) Report on the year: 2012/13 [online] available at: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/9943/lgbce-13-94-report-on-the-year-2012-13-stakeholder-version.pdf

resulted in an additional 13 wards, although the number of council seats fell by five.

- The Commission does not have a policy preference for either single member wards or multi member wards. It might be led to move in either direction based on the need to balance considerations of electoral equality with those of reflecting community identity.

However, it is clear that they make judgements based on the circumstances in each location, and so conclusions cannot really be drawn from other reviews with regard to the optimum model for Kirklees. Rather, a local review based on the specific Kirklees circumstance would be an ideal approach.

Social Media Analysis

The role of councillors in a representative and participatory democracy wasn't spoken about to a large extent on social media. However, conversations showed that people do certainly have opinions on the role of their local councillors. The tweet noted below, for example, shows a view that that being a councillor in a local democracy is a somewhat futile role, bringing considerable responsibility but with limitations as to what can be achieved to actually make a difference to local democracy.



(Unfortunately the tweet that this conversation stemmed from is now unavailable.)

Another theme that emerged from Twitter conversations in relation to local politics included the importance of supporting local newspapers, due to a sense that local journalism is integral to local democracy.

In relation to attracting and supporting councillors, the majority of discussion on Twitter tended to be in relation to improving representation of minority groups. For example, the aforementioned lack of female representation in local government is recognised by social media users, as illustrated by the following tweet:



There was also discussion of how selection of local government candidates should take place, for example in relation to new vs. incumbent councillors:

Efforts to encourage younger people to show an interest in local politics were also apparent. For example, this tweet is promoting 'I'm a Councillor, get me out of here' – an initiative which uses a reality TV-style format to make engaging with their local representatives more appealing and relevant to young people. The fact that this particular tweet received 4 retweets and 4 likes suggests that it was resonating well.



In relation to the optimal numbers of councillors, social media conversation tended to relate to news articles sharing the findings of reviews, for example a BBC article relating to research findings that the number of West Sussex councillors should be reduced from 71 to 70.

Findings from Public Engagement Events

Why do we have councillors and what do they do?

While participants at the public events tended to be engaged in politics, in the sense that they voted and many were active in local groups, most had little or no contact with their elected local representatives, and most were unaware of who their local councillors were. Some 37%, for example, claimed to know their local councillor on some level, though the proportions who had directly engaged with them (e.g. at surgeries or on an issue of some sort) were lower than this.

Nevertheless, despite limited knowledge and contact, the majority felt that councillors played an important bridging role between local people and the council and would be a point of contact for them to go to should they have an issue or problem.

A substantial number were, however, unsure about important aspects of the councillors' role, and many felt that the wider community would have even less of an understanding than they had. Themes that emerged in the conversations were:

Representation:

While most people were aware that councillors were primarily there to represent their electorate, a fuller understanding was often clouded by factors such as: where do they sit when there is not 'one community' view (but often a conflicting mix) to represent?; and a suspicion that there may be conflicting loyalties, e.g. when balancing the decisions and priorities of the council, or the party of which they are a member, with those within the community

Power and influence:

There was a fairly widespread sense that councillors lacked the power to really influence big decisions that impact communities. Those aware of the Cabinet system pointed out that the average councilor didn't get involved at that level of decision-making. Others claimed that councilors' 'hands were tied' given the financial control exerted on councils by central government, and that many people may have inflated or unrealistic expectations about what influence their elected members can really exert. A few people commented that if they felt the need to approach an elected representative, then it would be their MP rather than a councillor that they would approach, partly because of the perceived lack of power and influence.

Local identity:

The theme of local identity, which raised its head frequently during the public meetings, impacts on this question as it does others. The point was frequently made that, for many (though not all) participants, a Kirklees identity meant little. If people felt that councillors represented what they felt to be 'their' local community

or neighbourhood, then they would be more likely to an interest in who they are and what they do. In this sense, representative local democracy was seen to be disconnected from the local identity and association which people were passionate about.

Time and commitment:

There was some confusion about practical aspects of a councillor's role. For example: how many hours do they spend on council business?; do they also manage to hold down another job?; or what's the dividing line between the councillors and officers at the council? Some participants expressed the view that the job of a councillor was demanding and hard. In some people's eyes, the role of a councillor on Cabinet was a highly professionalised job, and akin to that of a high-powered businessman.

Communication:

Poor or inadequate knowledge about the role of councillors was frequently put down to a combination of lack of direct contact and poor communication between citizens and elected representatives. Participants expected that, among the wider body of local residents, awareness was likely to be a good deal poorer as a result of this limited communications and dialogue.

Practical suggestions - From the discussion around this question a number of practical suggestions emerged (some of which centred on improving communications):

- Reverting to (and identifying themselves with) smaller units of decision-making where it would be more attractive and easier for residents to engage with councillors
- More opportunity for regular face to face contact – e.g. 6-monthly ward meeting
- Holding a Kirklees question time
- Making more information available on who the councillors are, what they do and how to get in touch
- Making information available in areas of high footfall, like supermarkets and post offices
- Greater use of the internet and digital technology to communicate – e.g.: a monthly email update; or a regular short video (e.g. on YouTube).
- Introducing shorter, fixed-terms for councillors, e.g. a maximum of two terms, as a way of supporting the introduction of fresh blood and new ideas.

What experiences – good or bad - have you had, or heard of, about local councillors?

Experiences, actual or perceived, presented a varied picture. Generally, there was a feeling that Kirklees is marked by inconsistency in how councillors work and in how they engage with their communities.

Good experiences included instances where councillors had provided support through local area committees, or helped mobilise volunteers to support a local library. Numerous people commented that they were aware of very hard working councillors, though not necessarily their own representatives.

Criticisms arose around: the short-term perspective squeezing out the long-term view; a lack of visionary leadership and planning; decisions being made without the public being involved and in spite of strongly held local views (e.g. Huddersfield Royal Infirmary), and councillors pointing to 'cuts or lack of resources as the end of the matter' and not looking for solutions and fully exploring alternatives ('*how to organise things differently so that the community can get what it needs*').

Notwithstanding the criticisms aired about elected members, there was a majority-held view that councillors remain a very important element for local communities and have huge potential. There was an appetite for councillors to become champions of their communities, e.g. by challenging austerity and its consequences. For some people, in this respect, the importance of elected local representatives has never been greater.

There was a fair amount of discussion about things that could be done to improve relations between elected members and their constituents, these largely centering on establishing platforms where they could meet face to face, and where elected members could be questioned and held accountable for local decisions.

Practical suggestions to improve the citizen's experience included:

- A select committee of residents that the local councillor would appear before once a year as. This would allow members to account for what they have done and allow the public to find out how active and valuable their councillor has been.
- A system of hustings when it gets to elections to allow people to get to know their candidates.
- More door-to-door contact between councillors and voters, partly to enable local views to be fed into decision-making.
- Better communications to reduce the possible gap between people's expectations about what their councillors can do and what is possible.

Have you noticed any changes in the role that councillors play or the things that they do?

With a large body of participants across the public events not being fully clear about the role of councillors, there was frequently some difficulty for participants to engage with this question. Nevertheless, key observations that did emerge were:

Professionalisation of the few

Many people were aware that the Cabinet system meant that these members were involved in high-level decision-making; in the management of the council as a whole, rather than working on the local problems (which some felt should be what they should be dealing with). Where it was recognised that most councillors were not on Cabinet, it was felt that the introduction of the new system had 'broken the link' between members making decisions for the areas that they represent. This also weakened the case, in some people's eyes, for councillors asking local people in their area what they think in advance of decisions being made.

Cross-party collaboration

Notwithstanding the many negative comments that were made about the influence of political parties in terms of 'who' becomes a councilor, and voting on the party line not being in tune with community wishes/needs, it was noted that (partly as a result of the Cabinet system) there has been a trend towards greater collaboration in decision-making across party divides. This was broadly welcomed (although there were certainly some concerns about the Cabinet system).

Local decision-making becoming less local

The changing role of area committees (many people still use the term 'area' as opposed to 'district') was thought by many to have changed things for the worse - in the sense that councillors on these bodies had moved away from local people. Participants talked about decision-making now being 'at a distance' from local people; a distance that was widening as a result of how the Council now makes decisions (noted above). Indeed, there was belief that most councillors are removed from the big decisions that impact their communities.

Challenges of austerity

Several participants recognised that with central government-driven austerity, the power of councillors will have diminished alongside council budgets. There was also some awareness that these changes would very likely drive changes in the future relationship between elected members and their local communities: possibly leading to a new approach to working with communities.

Suggestions for change:

- The main change called for was to go 'back to the future' and re-instate the system of local area committees in favour of the larger units that have replaced them. It was felt that this would help rebuild relations with councillors and lead to a higher level of citizen engagement in local decision-making.
- Suggestions were made to look at the competencies of the modern councillor and to possibly develop forms of training that would support them in their current and future roles (e.g. using new technology to communicate).

What would you like to see councillors do differently to help strengthen local communities? Could they help communities to do more for themselves?

There was a broad recognition that councillors could probably do more to help strengthen local communities. Groups had quite a lot to say about change and about how they might like to see councillors doing things differently. Much of the conversation centred on building new relationships with a wider body of active citizens in the local community, and in particular young people, sharing power with communities, and moving to a more local base of decision-making.

Also, a fairly strong suggestion emerged that local residents and community bodies would like to, and be ready to, play a more active role in making decisions (in some way) in tandem with their local members.

Despite the enthusiasm for change, some participants were cautious, and a few a little suspicious, when considering this question. The idea of communities doing more for themselves was seen to carry hidden assumptions that perhaps failed to fully recognise the variation in capacity (at least in the very short-term) across communities. For example: What is a community? Can councillors really cope and reflect the diversity and complexity? How can communities mobilise and organise in ways that allow the many various interests to be heard or to take collective action?

One perspective that came through saw little hope of councillors doing things to strengthen communities and rejected the premise of the above question. This perspective wanted to reframe the question away from 'what councillors could do to enable communities to do more for themselves' to one of calling for local people to be free to get on and do things for themselves, without restrictions and meddling from local institutions and services:

- *There is loads of community capacity about that just does not get allowed to flourish. The whole system is risk averse, and that means that nothing will change. Councillors don't have the time or resources to change things: it's up to us (people in the local community) to do things as a community. Democracy should be about us, what are our passions, what do we want, and not about waiting on councillors to make decisions for us.*

While the language used did not explicitly refer to the idea of asset based community development (ABCD) - an emerging theme in the wider debate about democracy and citizen power – these sentiments were there. ABCD is a set of principles (that often get confused with the wider debate about asset-based working) that prioritise 'community building' through increasing new connections between residents (building social capital) and the growth in new local associational life based on residents' coming together around shared cares and concerns. ABCD is about groups of citizens mobilising and discovering how their previously underused assets and gifts can be used to 'make their community better' on their own terms.

ABCD explicitly rejects the deficit-based model that anti-poverty work is based on, focusing rather on bringing existing assets to the surface and into play, 'starting with what is strong, not what is wrong' in a community'. There were certainly some undertones coming through the conversations that (possibly unconsciously) touched on this. ABCD is a philosophy for building and strengthening communities which may seem very attractive to councils at a time of austerity, but it presents some difficult challenges to existing power public sector structures and ways of doing things.²⁶

Suggestions for change – this question more than others served to generate a rich set of suggestions to strengthen local communities, and strengthen relationships between people and elected representatives. There was a wide variety of ideas for what councillors could do differently, including:

- More support for important local campaigns and local activists when they are fighting for or against a big decision.
- Going into schools to speak to children to create a greater understanding of local democracy.
- Supporting greater celebration of community and what it can achieve – like street parties.
- Support for the wider coverage of parish councils on the basis that these may make for stronger communities where residents are more engaged.
- Encourage a larger pool of local resident representatives (in addition to members) to participate in decision-making.
- Consider paying people to be professional representatives above and beyond the role of councillors.
- Engage in more community-based debate, dialogue, interactive two-way communication.
- Present themselves as champions for their community, regardless of party policy.
- Working at a small-area level and giving residents more opportunity to input to decision-making and to feel more affinity with whoever is elected.
- Finding ways to work more closely with other voices and groups within local communities - e.g. schools becoming 'community hubs' a bit like churches used to be.
- Move away from the party system and encourage more independent members.
- Experiment with new ways of working – e.g. look for others in the community who may be better placed to speak for the community on certain things.
- Develop the area committees so that the people who do attend from the local area have an opportunity to speak and table their views, and vote.
- Consider using 'local referenda' more – e.g. to allow the community to decide on the future uses of key local assets, e.g. vacant school building.

²⁶ We understand that KDC is intending to engage with Cormac Russell of Nurture Development who is a leading advocate of ABCD in the UK.

- Support local people to connect and show their views about bigger things...*to show that we care beyond 'the back yard'*.
- Continue and extend the good work taking place in relation to engaging with young people on the Kirklees Youth Panel, e.g.:
 - a cross-party panel held in secondary school halls with pupils over 12 years meeting and conversing with the councillors
 - encourage pupils to come to area meetings as part of their citizenship education.
- Giving time and space for residents and communities to mobilise their assets and develop their own agendas for change, then supporting it.

**Have you or anyone you know, ever thought about being a councillor?
What do you think it would take to attract the kind of people you
would like to see becoming councillors?**

Despite the engaged nature of the participants, very few expressed a desire to put themselves forward to become a councillor. A number of perceived barriers were identified such as:

- cynicism over self-interest of parties and career politicians
- lack of support outside of political party structures
- lack of information about 'how to go about it'
- the anticipated hassle and negative press that councillors can expect (not all of which is merited)
- personal demands (like caring of childcare) that are perceived to not leave enough room in a person's life to become a councillor.

There are only three independent councillors in Kirklees and all represent the same ward. There was a strong feeling that there could be a lot more people who would want to stand if the system was more open and supportive of independents. Parties give financial backing and a campaigning machinery that independent candidates don't have. This serves as a further disincentive to people not in parties to think about representing their community.

For participants who might aspire to represent their community, the pressure to enter politics through the machinery of a political party was widely seen to be a disincentive, reflecting the general disillusionment with established politics that appears fairly widespread at present.

There was, however, a minority of participants who felt that there is a healthy untapped interest in becoming a councilor, currently thwarted by one or more of the barriers above. There are a lot of really good people doing good work in their local communities that may not know that the councillor-route is open to them and that they may be good at it.

The kind of people participants would like to see becoming councillors are people who:

- are more present in the communities and more engaged with local people
- work more on local problems and less on management of the Council
- represent everyone regardless of political affiliation
- are not driven by party politics
- demonstrate authority through deep knowledge and understanding of the subject matter of the committees they sit on.

Suggestions for change included:

- Open up opportunities for people to stand as independents
- A stronger, transparent, community (non-party political) voice is needed in selecting who is to stand for election as a councillor
- A fairer voting system that better reflects the diversity of views
- Spend more time thinking about the things that can help bring people forward and the things that get in the way.

5. ELECTIONS AND THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Evidence from desk and social media review

With regard to elections, the key areas of consideration for KDC relate to:

- i. Improving accessibility, interest and voter turnout at district elections
- ii. Potential impacts of changes to the cycle and pattern of district elections
- iii. Any wider electoral considerations in the current context
- iv. Digital and mobile technologies and the potential they offer

These themes are often interlinked and overlapping. Where possible (i.e. where available in the literature), primary focus of the discussion below is on those measures that can be taken at Council level. However, some recommendations would require action at the national level.

Improving accessibility, interest and voter turnout at district elections

Across the UK, participation (interest and turnout) in elections has been falling for decades: a clear sign and symptom of weak democracy. Fewer than 20% of people have voted in council elections in some areas of England over the past four years:²⁷ Consequently, there is a desire to increase engagement and turnout; Kirklees is by no means alone in this regard. The problems and potential solutions relate both to national elections and local elections.

There is a wide literature available on possible ways to increase turnout. Many potential solutions relate both to national and local elections, as the problem of low turnout spans both. The options can be grouped into the following categories:

- Automatic registration;
- Modernising electoral administration (for example: weekend voting, voting anywhere, online voting);
- Improving the provision of information about elections – including non-partisan campaigns;
- Target young people;
- Citizenship education;
- Electoral reform;
- Work out what voters want.

For all of these categories, commentators highlight both the potential positive impacts they may have, and possible risks associated with them. A detailed review of each factor is included in Appendix 5.

Ultimately, none of these will solve the problem of low turnout if wider issues with regard to democracy aren't resolved. Falling participation in elections is one a

²⁷ Wainwright, D. (2016) Council elections: Five ways to get more people to vote [online] available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-36047612>

number of interlinked, concerning trends which can currently be seen across the UK, with the others including mistrust in politicians and disinterest in/disaffection with politics. Overall, the problem seems to relate to dissatisfaction and disempowerment - people feel too removed from the results of elections to see the point in taking part. Figures for 2016 show that 46% people in the UK would like to be involved in local decisions, but only 25% currently feel that they have some influence at the local level.²⁸

The Commission on Strengthening Democracy highlights that it is unsurprising that fewer and fewer people are taking part in democracy when they have little influence over what happens. Essentially, many people have become disillusioned with the whole democratic process, and so are choosing not to vote at all.²⁹

A key reason behind low engagement levels with UK elections, therefore, is broader dissatisfaction with the UK's political culture. This cannot be solved by moving elections to a weekend or enabling people to vote on their mobile phone. Although some specific measures may have a positive effect on registration and turnout, the broader question of voter engagement requires a more long-term and 'deeper' response, combining public policy, cultural change and institutional reform, 'all driven by a relentless focus on what will re-engage the public in politics'.³⁰

The Commission concludes that:

'all our evidence suggests that giving people a real say over what matters to them is the key to addressing poor electoral participation and revitalising the whole democratic process.'³¹

This was said in relation to Scotland specifically, but applies to the wider UK. There is some hope at the local level, with the Hansard Society stating that perceived influence at the local level is always higher than at the national level; people are inclined to be more positive about local rather than national elements of the political process. People are said to be 'closer to and often more knowledgeable about' the local level, which may drive favourability.³²

Similarly, the LGA have found that the closer to local areas that decisions are made, the more people trust that they are made in their best interests, with 77% of the public trusting their council over the national government to make local decisions in a 2016 research study.³³ The question, therefore, is how can this potential be

²⁸ Hansard Society (2016) Audit of Political Engagement 13 [online] available at: <http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/assets/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-13-2016.pdf>

²⁹ The Commission on Strengthening Democracy (2014) Effective democracy: Reconnecting with communities (August) [online] available at: <http://www.localdemocracy.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Final-Report-August-2014.pdf>

³⁰ House of Commons (2014) Voter engagement in the UK: Fourth Report of Session 2014-15 [online] available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpolcon/232/232.pdf>

³¹ The Commission on Strengthening Democracy (2014)

³² Hansard Society (2016)

³³ LGA (2016i) What next for devolution? A discussion paper [online] available at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/3.5+What+next+for+devolution+-+final+WEB.pdf>

'tapped into' to secure higher voter turnout in district elections in Kirklees? The public engagement sessions being held by KDC are a key step towards giving people their say and building the approach from the bottom up.

There is a growing consensus that focusing on the local level is central to achieving ambition to 'improve democracy'. Being overly prescriptive contradicts the notion of localism, and is unlikely to solve problems in the long term.³⁴ Therefore, establishing which of the above options for how electoral turnout might be improved is likely to have most positive impact within Kirklees specifically is important. The KDC programme of work, including the public engagement sessions, is thus an appropriate approach.

Potential impacts of changes to the cycle and pattern of district elections

In Kirklees, consideration is currently being given to changing the district electoral cycle from councilors being elected for a four year term by thirds – i.e. elections held three years out of four followed by one fallow year – to district elections on a four yearly basis where all councilors are elected every four years.

Unsurprisingly, our searches revealed that other local authorities are exploring this possibility, and some have made the change, for example: Huntingdon (2015)³⁵, Bassetlaw (2015)³⁶ and Hertsmere (2014)³⁷. Their explanatory documents describe the reasons given in favour of changing, which include:

- A council has a clear mandate for four years, allowing it to make a more strategic, long-term approach to policy and decision-making – and focus less on yearly election campaigning.
- Avoids election fatigue and the results are simpler and more easily understood by the electorate. There would be a clear opportunity for the electorate to change the political composition of the council once every four years.

Support for whole council elections was obviously dominant in the areas mentioned. However, their respective explanatory documents also highlight arguments given for retaining elections 'by thirds':

- Avoids electing a complete change of councillors with no experience and allows continuity of councillors; avoids disruption to on-going policies.

³⁴ The Commission on Strengthening Democracy (2014)

³⁵ Huntingdonshire Council (2015) [Changing to whole council elections – Explanatory document](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/2069/whole-council-elections-explanatory-document.pdf) [online] available at: <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/2069/whole-council-elections-explanatory-document.pdf>

³⁶ Bassetlaw District Council (2015) [Changing to whole council elections – Explanatory document](https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/media/380750/S35-notice-WCE.pdf) [online] available at: <https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/media/380750/S35-notice-WCE.pdf>

³⁷ Hertsmere Borough Council (2014) [Changing to whole council elections – Explanatory document](https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Documents/11-Your-Council/Democracy-Elections/Changing-to-whole-council-elections.pdf) [online] available at: <https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Documents/11-Your-Council/Democracy-Elections/Changing-to-whole-council-elections.pdf>

- More likely to be influenced by local rather than national politics, and thus national influence will increase given the trend toward Parliamentary elections being held on the same day as local elections.
- Encourages the habit of voting (although, evidence to date would suggest that this is often not the case in practice), and voting for one person is well understood by voters. Voting for two or three councillors under whole council elections could cause confusion.
- Allows judgement of a council annually and the electorate to react sooner to local circumstances, thereby providing more immediate political accountability.

Even as early as 2004, the Electoral Commission concluded that, on balance, the evidence suggested that a move to whole council elections across England would best serve the interest of government electors. They recommended that each local authority in England should hold whole council elections every four years. The rationale was as follows:

- The existing pattern of local government elections in England did not provide equal access to the democratic process for all electors, with partial council elections particularly problematic in this regard.
- They regarded the system as overly complex and confusing, finding a strong case for simplification of the arrangements. They recommended that each local authority in England should hold whole council elections every four years. This would provide clarity for electors, which is likely to improve turnout.
- A more standardised, consistent approach was needed. They felt that, in terms of access, it is fundamentally unfair and unacceptable that within an individual local authority, some electors may have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the political composition of the authority than neighbours in a different ward. 'A key principle for the electoral cycle of electoral authorities should be to ensure that all electors are given the same opportunities for participation in the local democratic process'. A more equitable pattern of elections by thirds would require a uniform pattern of three-member wards across authorities, or a uniform pattern of two-member wards and biennial elections. Whole council elections, however, would require no changes to local authorities' current electoral arrangements. The Boundary Committee for England has noted that the requirement to recommend a uniform pattern of three-member wards in metropolitan borough areas has caused specific difficulties when attempting to reflect community identities in some authorities. Under a pattern of whole council elections, authorities would not be restricted to any particular ward size, since the entire electorate would be eligible to vote together once every four years.
- Whole council elections would provide greater stability for local authorities.³⁸

³⁸ The Electoral Commission (2004) The cycle of local government elections in England: Report and recommendations [online] available at: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0015/16125/cycleoflocalelecti nal_11595-9056__E__N__S__W__.pdf



Published evidence of the impacts of a change to whole council elections is limited. However, it is clear that KDC is not alone in considering the option, and that it is right to be doing so collaboratively with local citizens through the public engagement sessions.

Wider electoral considerations in the current context

Another key question for KDC in the context of the developing devolution agenda and moves towards the 'combined authority' approach is whether the introduction of an elected mayor would be beneficial to local democracy. Kirklees voted against an elected mayor in 2001 and public consultation led the Council to implement an indirectly elected Leader rather than a directly elected mayor.

There are currently 16 elected mayors of single local authority areas across England and Wales (excluding the Mayor of London who has different powers to local authority mayors).³⁹ Although legislation in 2007 means that the office of elected mayor can be established by simple council resolution rather than referendum, broad expansion of the mayoral system has not occurred. In two instances – Stoke on Trent (2008) and Hartlepool (2012) - the post was instated, but then abolished by referendum due to concerns regarding issues such as poor governance of the city.⁴⁰

The debate about whether or not to adopt the elected mayoral model is therefore by no means unique to Kirklees. There is little available published evidence of the direct impact of the system - on elections specifically and more broadly. This is presumably because it is still 'early days'. Much of the discussion appears to be about what mayors *could do* for our cities, rather than what they *have done*. Such discussion tends to be mixed in sentiment, with both positive and negative aspects to the model being highlighted:

Arguments in favour of directly elected mayors:⁴¹

- Visibility – citizens and others know who the leader is, generating interest in public issues
- Legitimacy and accountability – arising from the direct election process
- Strategic focus and authority to decide – a mayor can make tough decisions for a city and then be held to account
- Stable leadership – a mayor holds office for four years and this can underpin a consistent approach to government
- Potential to attract new people into politics – creative individuals may be able to stimulate innovation in citizen activism and business support
- Partnership working – a mayor is seen as the leader of the place, rather than the leader of the council. This can assist in building coalitions.

³⁹ Sandford, M. (2016) Briefing paper: Directly-elected mayors, House of Commons Library, [online] available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05000/SN05000.pdf>

⁴⁰ Stevens, A. (2016) English mayors (May) [online] available at: <http://www.citymayors.com/mayors/british-mayors.html>

⁴¹ Hambleton, R. & Sweeting, D. (2015)



Arguments against elected mayors:⁴²

- A concentration of power – the model could place too much power in the hands of one person, who is overloaded
- Weak power of recall – elect an incompetent mayor and the city is stuck with that person for four years
- Celebrity posturing – the model could attract candidates more interested in self-promotion than sound policy-making.
- Wrong area – the Localism Act 2011 provides for mayors to be elected for unitary authorities when many consider that metropolitan mayors on the London model are needed.
- Cost – having a mayor will cost more money.
- Our over-centralised state remains – without a massive increase in local power to decide things, the mayor will be a puppet dancing on strings controlled in Whitehall.

Fenwick & Elcock describe how the hope for the elected mayor approach was that it would offer a solution to persistent problems of weak local leadership and bureaucratic inertia. In particular, the three 'chronic problems' it was hoped that it would solve were:⁴³

- i. Unduly protracted decision-making caused by complex and process-driven committee structures;
- ii. Poor cross-departmental coordination, especially when dealing with the 'wicked issues' that require multi-departmental agreement; and
- iii. The lack of leaders who are readily visible and available to external stakeholders in the business, labour and voluntary sectors.

In judging whether the introduction of directly elected mayors advances or detracts from democratic reform, Fenwick and Elcock identify several problematic aspects:⁴⁴

- i. Central government hesitation over how far to encourage or even compel the adoption of the mayoral system has produced faltering results, possibly because neither major party identifies any political premium in pushing the policy too hard. International experience suggests that if a government thinks elected mayors are a good idea, it should make their adoption compulsory, as has occurred in parts of Germany. This process could begin in Britain with councils over a certain size or certain categories e.g. metropolitan borough councils. However, this would undermine the crucial element of local democratic choice in deciding to opt for office of mayor. (Arguably, having voted against an elected mayor in a previous referendum, it could also perhaps be seen by some members of the public as 'undemocratic' for the council to pass a resolution to instate the role).

⁴² Hambleton, R. & Sweeting, D. (2015)

⁴³ Fenwick, J. & Elcock, H. (2014) Has the introduction of directly elected mayors advanced or detracted from democratic innovation in English local government? [online] available at: <http://demaudituk.wpengine.com/?p=3307>

⁴⁴ Fenwick, J. & Elcock, H. (2014)

- ii. Notwithstanding the perceptions that mayors themselves may have of their impact thus far, there are no agreed or reliable measures of whether elected mayors have had any measurable impact (for good or ill) locally. 'A major continuing policy initiative is built on few empirical foundations.'
- iii. The relationship with party politics remains complex. Mayors were intended to cut through local party politics, encouraging independent candidates to come forward with something new to offer. Independents initially did have some prominence amongst the small group of elected mayors, but subsequently local parties have reasserted their influence. Indeed, executive mayors may entrench rather than challenge party control when their own party enjoys a majority amongst elected councillors.

The Warwick Commission describe how one of the underlying aims of the Localism agenda of government is to reinvigorate the local body politic by giving power away to elected mayors.⁴⁵ The report states that directly elected mayors offer the possibility of greater visibility, accountability and coordinative leadership as well as re-enchanting the body politic, and much of this derives from their relative independence from party discipline through their direct mandate and through their four year term. But they also hold the dangers of electing mayors whose popularity obscures their inadequacy in leading their communities.

The Institute for Government⁴⁶ has usefully assessed the local authority mayors outside London (the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority are covered by separate legislation and have quite different powers to local authority mayors). They acknowledge that there were high expectations for the first wave of local authority mayors. Proponents expected a revolution in governance, with more decisive leadership and renewed local democracy, while opponents feared corruption and authoritarian leadership. They conclude that the reality has been 'a mixed bag' of these two extremes, with most mayors having done reasonably well, often in difficult circumstances, but also some high profile failures. Overall, the report finds that the evidence provides 'modest support' for the extension to other cities in the UK. Specific summary highlights of the evidence used to draw this conclusion include:

- Most mayors have done a fairly good job and, where this is not the case, a combination of the electoral process of local referendums have dealt with the problem.
- Mayors resulted in significant improvements in terms of stronger leadership, public profile and engaging minorities in council business.
- The fact that mayors generally manage to serve their four-year terms tends to result in more stable local government. This enables them to work in a more

⁴⁵ The Warwick Commission (2012) Elected Mayors and City Leadership: Summary Report of the Third Warwick Commission [online] available at: https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/electedmayors/summaryreport/the_warwick_commission_on_elected_mayors_and_city_leadership_summary_report.pdf

⁴⁶ The Institute for Government (2012) What can elected mayors do for our cities? [online] available at: http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/publication_mayors_and_cities_signed_off.pdf

strategic way than leaders, who do have guaranteed four year terms, but can lose their position if their party loses its majority on the council. Where there is no dominant party, this can result in high turnover or weak leadership.

- Where there have been clear failures - e.g. Doncaster and Stoke – it is hard to assign all blame on the mayoral model itself. A state of permanent crisis or negative culture within the council were also accountable.
- Whilst the experience of the mayoral model hasn't been uniformly positive, most mayoralities appear to have worked reasonably well and provided high profile, visible leadership.

The Institute for Government also considered the impact of elected mayors on democracy, finding overwhelmingly in favour of the mayoral model. A summary of their observations is as follows:⁴⁷

- Of all the constitutional reforms pursued by the coalition government, directly-elected mayors have the most potential to deliver a lasting democratic legacies.
- A move to directly-elected mayors is a step to help re-animate and reinvigorate democracy, 'opening up important new sites of power in which politics would once again matter in places outside of the capital'. Strong leadership and clear lines of accountability are essential for greater localism, so mayors are essential to efforts to break with the 'suffocating centralised system of government'. Mayors have real potential to make local politics more accountable, thus contributing significantly to the introduction of greater local autonomy. It is suggested that 'all localists should rally behind the mayoral cause'.
- International evidence suggests that mayoral contests often encourage higher levels of voter participation (although impacts are not dramatic). There is a wider belief that they will help to transform 'England's stale political culture' more broadly.
- The more visible and accountable form of leadership is expected to work against growing public indifference to and disengagement from local politics. Because they are directly elected, mayors tend to be known to a much greater proportion of the local electorate than council leaders selected by majority parties. A poll conducted shortly after the introduction of mayors found that an average of 57% of voters in mayoral areas could name their mayor, whereas other Institute research found that only 8% of respondents could name their local council leader.
- This relatively strong profile enables mayors to develop a stronger and more personal relationship with their constituents, and furthermore empowers local citizens by ensuring that they have a clear sense of who is in charge and who they can turn to. Many mayors hold open surgeries, take part in phone-ins and deal with constituents directly, thus generating a more tangible sense of connection between voters and their elected representatives.
- Greater visibility is shown by, for example, local authority mayoral election debate being shown on regional BBC television, which provides an

⁴⁷ The Institute for Government (2012) What can elected mayors do for our cities [online] available at: http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/publication_mayors_and_cities_signed_off.pdf

unprecedented level of exposure for local politics. This level of visibility is a prerequisite for accountability: 'if voters don't know who they are passing judgement on then they can hardly pass judgement at all'.

- Mayors tend to be relatively non-partisan, as they are accountable to the whole electorate rather than to party groups. Polls regularly show that the public is 'turned off' by petty partisan politics.
- Opening up new sites of power could mean that mayors provide a new route into politics for people from different backgrounds, thus helping to erode the notion of the homogenous traditional political class.
- Claims from sceptics that the mayoral model would render local politics 'a beauty contest waged between celebrities, or worse mavericks' - with little or no policy-based substance - have not, on the whole, been realised.
- The criticism that mayors concentrate too much power in one individual fails to recognise that mayors are directly accountable to the electorate; far more so than council leaders. Measures can be put in place to further avoid issues regarding concentration of power, e.g. reforms to the scrutiny role of councils to ensure sufficient checks and balances are in place, and a recall mechanism to ensure that mayors accused of unethical conduct can be removed from office between elections.
- Directly-elected mayors help to address the democratic deficit because they offer the best chance of ensuring that elected politicians actually deliver on election promises. This is important as that the biggest driver of cynicism in politics is the tendency for politicians to over-promise during campaigns, then subsequently fail to meet expectations. This is hard to avoid, but international and English evidence suggests that the mayoral model can make a positive and tangible difference to the way local communities are governed.

Additionally, there is some coverage in the literature of the impacts of the directly elected mayor in Bristol in 2012. Overall, the mayoral model is said to have provided a platform for 'a spectacular increase' in the visibility of leadership in Bristol, due to the high profile role. Only 24% of citizens thought that Bristol had visible leadership in 2012 before the introduction of the mayor, rising to 69% by 2014. However, it is felt that more needs to be done to bring local councillors onboard.⁴⁸

Digital and mobile technologies

Digital and mobile technologies are increasingly ubiquitous across all aspects of our lives. Understandably, KDC are keen to establish how this might be put to best use in order to maximise registration and voter turnout.

Overall, the key areas of opportunities from digital and online technologies with regard to elections are:

⁴⁸ Hambleton, R. (2016) What impact has Mayor George Ferguson had in Bristol? [online] available at: <http://www.centreforcities.org/blog/impact-mayor-george-ferguson-bristol/>



- Engaging/targeting young people.
- Making information about elections more accessible and widely available.
- Increasing electoral turnout

Much of the relevant content has already been discussed in the previous section on increasing voter turnout and/or Appendix 5. Additional points/examples include:

- Engaging young people - Young people generally remain much less engaged than older groups.⁴⁹ Maximising the potential offered by digital and mobile technologies will be critical to successfully engaging younger people – this is simply how they interact and engage. As the Local Government Group has highlighted, there has been inconsistency in how young people are used to - and prefer to - receive information and how information has traditionally been delivered by political bodies.⁵⁰ Young people are more likely than other age groups to use new media, and this inconsistency is likely to be a key contributor to their lack of engagement. Qualitative research with young people has found that, historically, many political sites used tools such as static online brochures, treating viewers as a passive audience. This did not appeal to young people, because it is not how they used the internet. Instead, the research found that they prefer to use websites that allow them active participation and to have a voice, e.g. forums and social networking sites. Twitter and Facebook are prime examples of such tools. A specific example of digital channels being used to facilitate interaction is the campaign for the 2015 Queensland (Australia) state elections. The campaign was designed to engage young, slightly apathetic potential voters using interactive website banners. The idea was to remind voters that they have a point of view which they should express. Opinions on apolitical, fun and topical issues are asked, with people voting a simple 'yes' or 'no' with a mouse click. Are dogs better than cats? Is mowing your neighbour's grass rude? Is orange the new black? After that, voters receive a thank you note and a link to enrol to vote.⁵¹ Data on the impact of this tactic is not yet available.
- The impact of social media on voter turnout remains under-researched, although appears promising. Some academics have found that users who received a social message (such as a Facebook reminder, a link to the local polling station and profile pictures of friends who had voted) were more likely to cast their ballot than users who received a purely informational message or users who received nothing.⁵²
- Social networks such as Facebook can also help to nurture the group mentality. But the trick is to ensure that discussions are authentic and organic. Based on the idea that people trust their friends' opinions, the Obama campaign engaged online communicators, i.e. fans most likely to share its content. Benenson

⁴⁹ Hansard Society (2016)

⁵⁰ Local Government Group (2011) *Re-engaging Young People in Voting: Learning from the evidence* [online] available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=49e6f67c-50fa-413e-b4e5-3cf3dad7c14e&groupId=10180

⁵¹ WPP The Government and Public Sector Practice (2015) *How Low Turnout is Turned Around: International Best Practice in Voter Turnout Campaigns* [online] available at: http://www.wpp.com/govtpractice/~/_media/wppgov/insights/voter-turnout/voter_turnout_best_practice.pdf

⁵² *ibid.*

Strategy Group's Daniel Franklin explains that: 'The power of digital is not following people around with ads, unless you are selling shoes. The power of digital is to know who people are connected to and letting them do your work for you.'⁵³

- Digital channels can be very effective, but it is unwise to choose a channel just for novelty value. In the US, for example, door-to-door canvassing remains a very powerful means of communication. Similarly, traditional mass media, particularly television, continues to be among the most effective channels. Successful campaigns tend to balance the breadth of television with the personalization of digital. However, practitioners expect the impact of traditional media on voter turnout to gradually decrease, reflecting broader trends in media consumption in most countries. Direct mail – as targeted and personal as possible – is valuable because it allows voters to explore content in the quiet and privacy of their own homes.⁵⁴

Examples of using digital technologies to encourage increased engagement from young people specifically include:

- A group of young people involved in the North Somerset Youth Parliament were keen to see a change of MP in their constituency, so decided to try and engage first time voters in supporting the campaign for their local liberal democrat candidate through a new Facebook group.
- The Facebook group, 'Change in Weston – Yes we can' was used to promote discussion between political candidates and young people on any political issue, as well as informing young people about campaigning work that was taking place and inviting them to participate. As many young people as possible were invited to join. The debate on Facebook ranged from student fees to services for young people with autism. Young people posted their own views on what they wanted to see from politicians in relation to these issues, as well as asking candidates direct questions. The political candidate posted information about when posters were being distributed, giving times and details of where to meet if any young people were willing to join in, and reminders about the leadership debates on TV were shared to encourage young people to learn more about the policies of each political party. The local college invited three political candidates to a debate and the politics class then carried out a before and after poll and posted the results on the Facebook group

The group proved popular, with 387 members in the North Somerset constituency. Many young people communicate daily on Facebook, meaning they could participate easily. The young people who established the Facebook group were surprised by the number of participants and the diversity of the group including young people aged 15 and 16. The campaign appeared to encourage young people to become involved in the election who otherwise would have been unlikely to, including producing volunteers for the campaign.

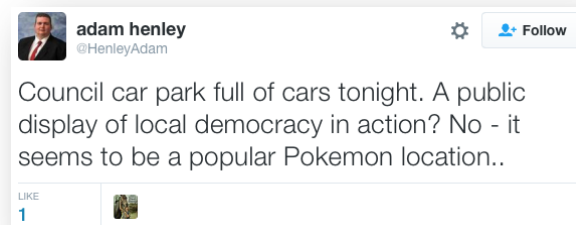
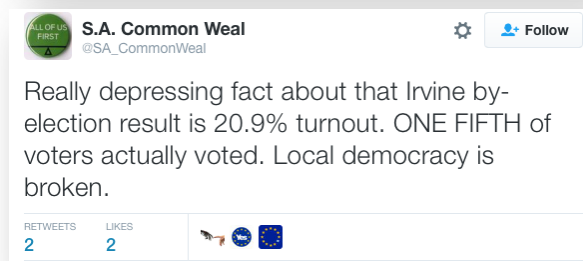
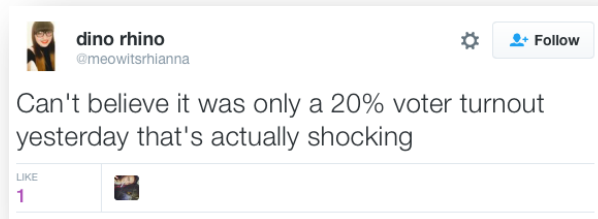
⁵³ ibid.

⁵⁴ ibid.

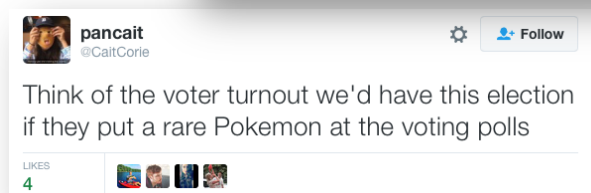
Social media analysis

Voter turnout

Voter turnout is a topic that is of particular interest to contributors on social media. Following the Irvine by-election, which took place during the analysis period, many expressed their dismay of how poor voter turnout was and felt that this is a reflection of the state of local democracy. For example:



Pokémon Go: There were a number of mentions of Pokémon GO – the popular augmented reality game recently introduced to Android and iOS devices – in relation to local democracy and election turnout. For example:



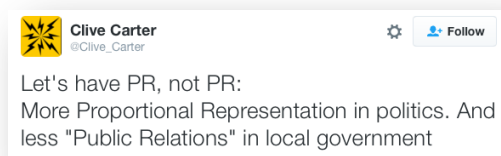
Whilst these appear somewhat 'tongue in cheek', they highlight an important issue: that people are perceived to be more engaged with/excited about this game than with real life democracy which effects their actual lives!

One Twitter user specifically highlighted that a Pokémon Go stop at polling stations would have increased voter turnout amongst young people – see below. However, a young woman was quick to respond, challenging this suggestion that all young people are disengaged from voting:



Electoral processes

In the context of electoral processes, there were some conversations from social media that have been of particular interest. The tweet noted below, for example, mentions the importance of having more proportional representation in politics to ensure that everyone has a fairer say in the democratic process. This tweet highlights the need for less "Public Relations" in government, suggesting that there needs to be more substance to it and make it less of a 'show'.



Similarly, this tweet also calls for a change to the voting system in order to improve representation:



Election cycles

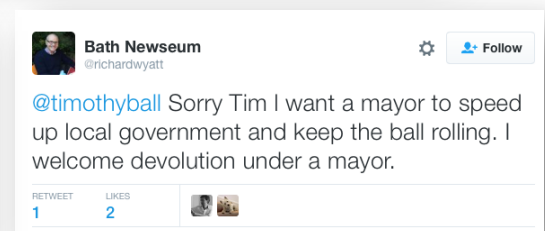
In relation to electoral cycles, there was some sense of frustration with frequent elections, leading to voter fatigue. The following tweet in relation to Scotland is an indicator of this sentiment. This line of argument would suggest that whole council

elections every four years might inspire greater turnout than more regular elections by thirds.



The mayoral model

Given that not every area has an elected mayor, there is still some uncertainty as to the efficacy of adopting this model. On social media, opinions were mixed, with some seeing it as an important opportunity for revitalising local government, while others take a less positive view, for example:



Digital and mobile technologies

There was a sense from social media discussions that digital voting could be useful in terms of both increasing involvement and preventing fraud. However, there was also some concern with regard to whether something as important as voting should be possible using online methods:



Some commenters – see example below - appeared to have an understanding that voting is only one aspect of democracy, and that there are wider problems to tackle.



Findings from Public Engagement Events

Attendees in all the sessions were very engaged with the day and showed great enthusiasm for the topic of elections and voting. Many were 'frustrated' that so few residents typically vote in local elections let alone get involved at any level in local politics on an on-going basis. For the great majority, the right and responsibility to vote was very important.

Respondents did acknowledge that they were not typical of residents across Kirklees and beyond in terms of their commitment to voting. The perceived detachment between the population and local politics and politicians was felt to be the main reason why 'more typical' citizens do not vote: detachment was significantly greater barrier than issues relating to the mechanisms or frequency of voting.

Explanations for why people don't vote were multiple, including a sense that people did not really know what they are voting for, the downgrading of local elections due to the increasingly marginal role of local government, and a general apathy with its roots in many things, some very difficult to change.

Responses to the Key Questions

Do you vote?

Most respondents voted in UK General Elections, Local Elections, Referenda, and European Elections. Very few people were exception to this: e.g. avoiding only local elections because they feel that they cannot influence the count on a long-standing councillor with a big winning margin. The only other respondents who did not vote were under 18 years of age.

Factors influencing people's attitudes to voting included:

- Women made repeated reference to the sacrifices that had been made to get women the vote
- For working class people, there were also references made to having to fight to get the vote
- The vast majority of respondents were interested in politics and this is why they voted. Many felt that if they did not vote then they would lose their right to be involved in politics and to 'complain'
- Voting was a responsibility for everyone living in a community who wanted that community to be as good as it could be
- There was enthusiasm for key topics that encouraged voting, e.g. education, housing or planning in general
- Many had a connection to local politics through involvement in a community group or political.

On why relatively few residents in Kirklees get involved in local elections, a variety of opinions were expressed. These fell into two main categories:

Lack of understanding of, engagement with and cynicism about politicians and politics

There was a sense that very few people in Kirklees have a good understanding of what councillors do and what responsibilities they have. As such, it was inevitable that many people would not get involved in local elections. This was a situation partly fuelled by residents just simply wanting to get on with their lives and leave local politics to 'others'; and partly because the system of local politics was a 'closed shop' where councillors only have a real profile in their local community during elections.

Also, many residents do not vote in local elections because:

- they believe that they are not as important as national elections; possibly due to a lack of awareness of the powers that councils have and the influence they have on everyday lives
- they don't know who the candidates are. And, they don't understand either candidates' personalities or their policies
- they don't trust politicians generally
- they have little faith in the political system to fundamentally change anything in their lives or communities.

Cynicism about campaigning and the election process

Many appeared to be cynical about the motives people have for choosing a candidate to vote for, which might further put individuals off voting. Modern politics was far too personality and media-driven, rather than being based on policies and fundamental values and beliefs. There was a perceived lack of honesty from politicians during campaigns.

Many candidates were felt to be guilty of spin and 'selly campaigning tactics': i.e. another barrier to voting. The cynicism many felt about the motives some people have for choosing a candidate led to discussions about whether it is important that people 'should be' encouraged to vote. A perspective was that many who do not vote are simply not interested in voting, and if they are encouraged or even 'forced' to vote, then they will do so without any due consideration for the facts. This would not help the democratic process, and many felt it would be a mistake to make voting a compulsory.

At the worst extreme, some felt that many residents saw the election process as being corrupt. On a number of occasions respondents referred to the fact that people took pens to mark their box in the EU referendum: reflecting the belief that many feel the voting system is open to manipulation. This issue of 'corruption' was compounded by the sense of media bias during elections: a frequent example given being the media's coverage of the EU referendum.

Many residents would be put off voting because they believe that their vote will not influence who wins. For example, 'people always vote the same way and for the same party' without any consideration for the alternatives, 'only the big parties have the budgets' to run high profile campaigns, and only the main parties' candidates will get exposure in the media. Elections are felt, by many, to be too party political and miss the most important focus, i.e. the policies and plans for the local area.

Also, people simply don't get involved in things as much these days, as they don't have as much time to give due to family commitments, longer working hours and the extended age of retirement. This perspective, however, is certainly at odds with what participants had to say about their potential interest in getting more involved in local decision-making (discussed below).

What might encourage people to vote in local elections in the future?

Suggestions fell into two broad categories:

1. Improve levels of understanding of the local political system and its importance
2. Make the voting and campaigning system fairer and more conducive with getting the best people into the Council.

Improve levels of understanding of the local political system and its importance

Advertising and Education - about the importance of the system

There was an argument for undertaking more explicit advertising and promotions that focus on encouraging people to vote, especially in communities where turnout is poor.

Young people should be a key focus for the development of a positive voting culture. It was recognized that 16-17 year olds embraced the opportunity to vote in the Scottish Referendum. More could, and should, be done in schools to encourage future voting; through education about the issues and through making young people aware of the importance of the voting process. Lowering the voting age to 16 years would be an important support to citizenship work in schools.

There was a suggestion for a compulsory GCSE on 'citizenship' which includes information about the importance of voting, how to vote, choosing a candidate to vote for, and getting involved in the political system. In addition, formal action could be taken to recognize voting age 'citizenship' being reached at 18 years of age. This could be done as part of a 'coming of age ceremony' that would raise awareness of the importance of voting and give greater status to 'the right to vote'.

In response to a feeling that some people may be being put off from voting because of a perceived loss of power at the council level – e.g. 'cuts' and 'what's the point' – it was argued that the council should be more forceful and clearer on what powers and influence it does have when communicating with voters.

Information provision on-going and at election times

By far the most important action required to get more people to vote was to ensure the potential voting population is more informed about what is being done by politicians, both on an on-going basis and during election campaigns.

At present there is a lack of trustworthy, timely, accessible, valuable information about what is being done by politicians and what their plans are. While it is possible to find out what issues the council is considering, this is often difficult to get hold of without a major effort (e.g. through watching very long web casts covering council meetings, searching through long and often technical official council documents, or searching the council website).

Suggested solutions included:

- Use a variety of communications to ensure that, on an on-going basis, residents know what the council is voting on: residents will see when decisions about issues that are important to them are being and made
- More on-going coverage of council agendas via regular local paper and radio features, on-line and through social media
- A system whereby each street could have a 'lamp-post banner' that presents a weekly notice of local issues being considered by council, what decisions have been made and how more information can be found out:
 - A team of local 'champions' could be recruited to receive emails of relevant notices that they could then post on their lamppost banner.
 - Or, have more high profile 'noticeboards' that show what issues are being discussed at council in libraries, supermarkets, chip shops, work places, etc.
- More opportunities for residents to meet and have discussions with their councillors. The surgery system was fine, but a wider variety of contact points were called for, e.g.:
 - Weekly or monthly gazebo meeting points in community centres to allow residents to drop in and ask questions
 - Councillors spending more time in communities
 - All residents having a poster which they can put in their window to allow councillors to see if they would like to have their door knocked
 - Regular mid-term and election time hustings to allow all councillors to debate key issues in front of residents
 - Topic-led, on-line and social media forums to debate key issues
- In relation to provision of information about the role and work of politicians, the media needs to be more responsible to ensure that the public is properly informed throughout political terms and during campaigns
 - Some blamed the media for the development of cynicism; fuelled by the desire to create sensational stories by twisting the truth.
- At the end of a term, councillors should produce a list of successes achieved to allow voters to consider the impact of individual councillors and the council as a whole. This could help reduce levels of cynicism.

Increase desire to get more informed about council business by giving residents the opportunity, at a formal level, to have their say about key issues

Respondents agreed that engagement with elections would be increased if they were given the opportunity to vote more frequently, on a wide range of important key issues. 'Key issues' that could lead to 'mini referenda' could be determined by either a pre-agreed list by the council or a sizable petition being submitted.

As an alternative to referenda, which would be expensive, the council could set up a substantial research panel that could be asked for opinions on key issues in advance of decisions being made by the council. Such a panel, which would have the potential to be truly representative, would be a fair way to determine attitudes as a guide for councillors. At its best, a panel system could allow councils to not only gauge the views of the Kirklees population as a whole, but also of key sub-groups who may be most influenced by a decision they make (e.g. residents of a particular ward or residents living next to a proposed development).

Make the voting system fairer and more conducive with getting the best people into the Council

The political system should be better equipped and set up to better inform voters about the relevant issues at election time. This should be done in a way that avoids making voters feel cynical because they are being 'sold to', or even 'bribed' (e.g. by promises of lower council taxes) by candidates and their parties.

Information should be made available in a uniform way, through a range of channels (online and offline), allowing voters to better compare candidates and their backgrounds, values and policies. This could be done through use of pro-forma systems that require all candidates to write a maximum number of words about their connection to, and knowledge of, their wards, and their policies on key issues.

Making councillors more accountable throughout their terms would also help. If politicians were more accountable, there would be less cynicism, which in turn would lead to a greater desire to be involved and to vote. Some argued that the general public should be able to fire councillors mid-term who are not performing, or performing badly. Performance could be assessed against pre-agreed targets (set by the council, by the individual councillor, or by a citizens' panel), or via a citizens' select committee that holds councillors accountable.

With the outcome of elections a foregone conclusion within specific wards because of the dominance of mainstream political parties, many felt it was important to increase the chances of independents and representatives of smaller parties getting voted in. This could be done, for example, through:

- Ensuring local elections are more about individuals, and less about political parties
 - Some respondents even felt that no candidate should be allowed to overtly campaign under a party political banner
- Use of a PR or STV voting system

- Although it is likely to lead to no party having overall control, this was seen as no bad thing: it's been the reality in Kirklees for some time
- Introducing a fixed standard maximum budgets for campaigns
- Big parties could pay a levy to help finance independents' campaigns
- Make it easier to get councillors with expertise, not just political ambitions.

Another suggestion (linked to the voting system) was to have 2-year fixed-term periods: i.e. no one allowed to stand for more than 2 years. Those in favour felt that it would encourage people who currently did not vote to get engaged, because they could no longer say that they always get the same councillor regardless of who they vote for. Others were less enthusiastic if it meant a shortage in the supply of good people interested in putting themselves forward.

Changing the voting mechanic; and would technology encourage people to vote more?

It was broadly felt that residents should be able to vote in as many ways, and in as many places, as possible. Only through this would voting be easier, potentially leading to more people getting involved. That said, most respondents felt it was far more important to get residents engaged with politics rather than simply to get a 'uninformed population' voting easily.

There was an interesting debate about the role of technology, with arguments aired for and against its use:

- Arguments 'for':
 - Residents should be given as many ways to vote as possible to make it as easy as possible
 - This included on-line voting, but potentially also the use of electronic voting booths in supermarkets, libraries, schools, etc.
 - If security could be guaranteed, residents should be able to vote in any location they want, not just in their local ward's polling station
 - Online engagement can be rolled out to allow residents (cost effectively) get more involved in decisions made beyond elections.
- Arguments 'against':
 - Security and potential abuse of an on-line voting system was the main concern
 - Concerns associated with hacking and corruption, and also the potential for individuals to be manipulated to vote in a particular way when not voting within the secure environment of the polling station.
 - That said, many stated that if banking can be managed on-line it should be possible to develop a robust system for voting
 - Concerned that by making it too easy to vote (e.g. on-line voting) there would be too many residents who would not take their vote seriously and not give due consideration to their choice. (NB. This was the main argument against making voting mandatory). Some felt

it would be better to have fewer people voting if everyone takes it seriously.

- Key segments of the population (the less affluent and older residents) have less access to the internet and may be further excluded
- Electronic voting, on its own, is unlikely to get more people involved. If e-voting is introduced, it may reduce the sense of responsibility for the council to get the population engaged.

The value of a 4-year election cycle v ongoing elections with one fallow year

In exploring attitudes to the election cycle and the value of changing to a four-year system, it was noted that any changes are unlikely to have a significant influence on levels of engagement in elections across the population of Kirklees. But there was a very interesting debate about the pros and cons of changing the current system. On balance, views were mixed regarding whether it would be a good idea to change to a four-year cycle or leave the system as it is.

Arguments for changing to a four-year/less regular election cycle:

- More cost effective
- Reduction in purdah period windows - making councils more accessible and more efficient for business
- More continuity; that is, less chopping and changing of key team members both in Cabinet and in the 'back-benches'
- Make councillors more accountable as the whole council would be 'judged' at the same time at the end of a four-year term
- Elections every four years would be more of an 'event' and, as such, catch more people's attention
- Give people time to consider the bigger issues
- Easier to understand, and for the public to get involved in campaigning.

Arguments for remaining with a three-year rolling cycle:

- Less 'party political' than with a four-year system
 - The results of a once every four-year election is primarily dictated by the perceived success and popularity of the parties in power and opposition in Westminster
- Option to change
 - Voters get the chance to change councillors if policies are not working or are not what people want
- More on-going engagement
 - Although councillors should be encouraged to think about getting constituents more involved on a continual basis, not just at election times, elections do focus the minds of candidates and give residents more opportunity to exercise their democratic rights
- Opportunity to 'refresh' the idea of annual elections

- If this can be done, creating a new buzz around this as an exciting annual event, then it could help 'make voting more of a habit'.

Some people felt that, before any changes were made towards a 4-year cycle, they would value further information about how difference systems would work. This underlines the current degree of uncertainty around different voting systems.

Some participants had alternative suggestions on how the voting system could be improved:

- A compromise system of 2 years on and 2 years off
- More people might vote if the terms were longer than 4 years – i.e. it would mean each election would be more important
- Maximum terms of 2 electoral cycles (or 8 years) to ensure a regular change in personnel with fresh perspectives being brought to the council.

6. GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND DECISION-MAKING

Evidence from desk and social media review

The difficult funding situation for local government means that councils increasing have to make big decisions which could have significant impacts on the way that services are delivered locally and on local people's lives. Whatever the changes, local people need to be able to have confidence that the decisions being made in their name are 'high quality, evidence-based and considered openly and accountably'.⁵⁵ There can be a sense that local authorities are accountable 'up to the centre, rather than out to its communities'.⁵⁶ This needs to change. Kirklees is one of many councils revisiting their formal governance arrangements, as the following discussion shows. Since the Localism Act 2011, the three main models to choose from are: leader and cabinet; mayoral; and committee (as well as possible hybrid options).

Optimising decision-making arrangements

Putting communities in control

The NALC describe how communities need to be put 'in the driving seat and in control of their areas'.⁵⁷ The Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy states that building a strong democracy is a journey, and that the first step is allowing communities to participate fully in decisions about their own governance.⁵⁸ Similarly, in relation to Scotland, COSLA state that 'strengthening local democracy means strengthening Scotland's communities, and nothing matters more than that'.⁵⁹

The localism agenda and reductions in local authority budgets both steer towards increased public involvement in local decision-making, with a new relationship between Councils and their communities. There is appetite for this: 'There is a latent desire among a significant proportion of the public to be involved in decision-making that remains untapped, particularly at the local level'.⁶⁰ Following the introduction of the Localism Act (2011) new structures and efforts have been emerging at local and neighbourhood levels, such as community planning partnerships, co-production networks, and participatory budgeting. Examples of where this has begun to take place include:

⁵⁵ LGA (2014) Rethinking governance: Practical steps for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements [online] available at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/5854661/Rethinking+governance+-+practical+steps+for+councils+considering+changes+to+their+governance+arrangements/6f1edbeb-dbc7-453f-b8d8-bd7a7cbf3bd3>

⁵⁶ The Commission on Strengthening Democracy (2014)

⁵⁷ National Association of Local Councils (2015)

⁵⁸ The Commission on Strengthening Democracy (2014)

⁵⁹ COSLA (2014) 2014) #CHOOSELOCAL: COSLA's Manifesto for a Stronger Scottish Democracy [online] available at: <http://www.cosla.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/chooselocalcoslamanifesto.pdf>

⁶⁰ Hansard Society (2016)

- **Bristol City Council Neighbourhood Partnerships**

Bristol City Council revitalised neighbourhood governance by introducing Neighbourhood Partnerships in 2008. The partnerships brought together local councillors, neighbourhood police teams, local residents and community groups. Since then, the Neighbourhood Partnerships have evolved, and in 2013 the council ran a consultation exercise on how they could be improved. The survey work revealed that four out of five respondents did not consider that enough decisions about council services were made locally, and over half wanted to be more involved in decision-making.⁶¹

- **Scottish Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)⁶²**

Community planning is 'a process which helps public agencies to work together with the community to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives. Community Planning in Scotland has two chief aims:

- Making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which effect them; linked to
- A commitment from organisations to work together – not apart – in providing better public services.

Additionally, two key principles of Community Planning are:

- Community Planning as the key over-arching partnership framework, helping to co-ordinate other initiatives and partnerships and where necessary acting to rationalise and simplify a cluttered landscape.
- The ability of Community Planning to improve the connection between national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.

Effective engagement with communities is at the heart of Community Planning. There is no restriction on the type of community to be consulted, they can be linked to a place or can be a community of interest, for example young people. Information from engagement feeds into the planning and delivery of public services, making them more responsive to the needs of users and communities. Partnerships should work together to coordinate community engagement activity and the information gathered.

They can draw information on community views from a number of sources for example, the experience of service users, specific consultations, visioning exercises etc. Many Partnerships use the National Standards for Community Engagement to inform their work.

- **Participatory budgeting (PB)**

PB is a different way to manage public money, and to engage people in government. It is a democratic process which allows community members to directly decide how to spend part of a public budget, enabling taxpayers to work

⁶¹ Hambleton, R. & Sweeting, D. (2015)

⁶² Scottish Government (2015) Community Planning in Scotland [online] available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/CP>

with government to make the budget decisions that affect their lives.⁶³ There are over 1,500 cities and institutions implementing PB around the world.⁶⁴ Examples of PB in practice in the UK include:⁶⁵

- Newcastle City Council – In 2008, Newcastle launched a PB process where 450 young people helped to decide how to allocate the city's £2.25m Children's Fund. Following months of preparation, young people aged 5-13 years attended a PB event where they voted electronically for services targeted at young people. Their votes were incorporated into Fund's complex procurement process, weighted to count for 20% of the final spending decisions.
- Tower Hamlets Borough, London – The Tower Hamlets 'You Decide!' project began in January 2009. Through 8 events over 4 months, 815 residents allocated almost £2.4m from the central council budget for public services.
- Durham County Council – In 2013, Durham rolled out PB in all 14 of the council's local engagement structures (Area Action partnerships) and have aligned it to a consultation on local priorities and consultation on the council's budget.

• **Scottish Co-Production Network**

The Scottish Co-Production Network provides a locus for the sharing of co-production learning and practice. Co-production involves services being designed with and for local people and communities, rather than being delivered 'top down' for administrative convenience. It involves services being built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, working to build up their autonomy and resilience. It's about fostering a sense of participation through more than just consulting – actually handing decision-making powers back to communities.⁶⁶

- In Lochside, South Ayrshire, for example, Lochside neighbourhood group is a community-led multi partnership forum, where the local community partnership is working in partnership with the council to deliver a common vision for the area. Outcomes in their first two years included revised plans for a new housing development; improvements in community safety; increased community involvement and development of a local Community Action Plan. Crucially, 'In the community, local representatives' self-esteem has improved – they have access to officers who follow through on issues they raise and respond to their ideas'. This

⁶³ Participatory Budgeting (2016i) What is participatory budgeting? [online] available at: <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/about-participatory-budgeting/what-is-pb/>

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Participatory Budgeting (2016ii) Examples of participatory budgeting [online] available at: <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/about-participatory-budgeting/examples-of-participatory-budgeting/>

⁶⁶ Scottish Co-production Network (2016) Co-production in Scotland – a policy overview [online] available at: <http://www.coproductionsotland.org.uk/resources/co-production-in-scotland-a-policy-overview/>

is key to residents feeling engaged with and trusting of local democracy.⁶⁷

The best governance model?

In the wider context including increased public involvement, Kirklees Council need to establish how to optimise their governance and decision-making, ensuring that the arrangements are enabling, clear, co-ordinated, agile and take place at the right level. An idea of potential pros and cons of different models can be found in the literature. For example:

- There is a sense that the cabinet model can concentrate power in the hands of two few. This can be problematic for councillors, who, as previously mentioned, have a crucial role to play in fostering and enabling the greater involvement of communities in local democracy and decision-making. Under the cabinet or mayoral system, therefore, some councillors who are being tasked with this may simultaneously be feeling distanced from key decision-making themselves. Councils should be mindful of potential sensitivities such as this.⁶⁸
- There appears to be support amongst commentators for a 'return' to a modern version of the committee system, including in the KDC governance and accountability document which highlights that some councillors feel they were more involved in decision-making under the former system.⁶⁹

However, the Local Government Authority (LGA) stress that there is no 'one size fits all' governance model that is 'intrinsically better' than another, nor a better option financially.⁷⁰ This is supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.⁷¹ The LGA stresses that the process should not be about looking at the pros and cons of different structures, or considering structural options and developing a post hoc justification for them. Instead, what is most important is 'obtaining a real understanding of the underlying political and cultural issues which, between them, may be driving the apparent need to change the way the council does business'.⁷²

Once again, in the interests of re-building democracy 'from the bottom up', this is a key issue for KDC to consider as it engages with the public across its wider programme of work. The LGA has provided a 'thinking toolkit' of practical steps and key issues that councillors should consider when contemplating governance change. The five steps are as follows:⁷³

1. Plan your approach, and assess your current position
2. Consider some design principles
3. Think of ways to meet these objectives and put a plan in place

⁶⁷ Scottish Co-production Network (2015) Lochside Neighbourhood Group [online] available at: <http://www.coproductionscotland.org.uk/resources/resource-case-studies/lochside-neighbourhood-group/>

⁶⁸ Inspiring Democracy (2015) A guide to help local councillors navigate our changing times [online] available at: <https://inspiringdemocracy.wordpress.com/>

⁶⁹ KDC (2016) Governance, Accountability and Decision Making

⁷⁰ LGA (2014)

⁷¹ Centre for Public Scrutiny (2012) Musical chairs: Practical issues for local authorities in moving to a committee system [online] available at: <http://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Musical-Chairs.pdf>

⁷² LGA (2014)

⁷³ *ibid.*

4. Make the change
5. Return to the issue after a year and review how things have gone

Highlight of the detail on each of these steps are provided in Appendix 6.

Case studies

LGA provide case studies of other UK councils who have undertaken reviews of their governance arrangements. Summaries of these are included in Appendix 7.

The LGA provide key lessons for English councils facing strategic governance choices, based on international models of sub-national governance in Auckland Council, New Zealand; Greater London Authority, UK; Portland Metro, Oregon; and the Association of the Region of Stuttgart, Germany. The lessons include the following:⁷⁴

- It is clear that a single model of governance, no matter how effective, is unlikely to be directly applicable to all councils.
- The international evidence shows that different cities and regions have adopted different leadership models, and no one particular model is superior to others. In particular, cities across the world have thrived and are thriving without a directly elected mayor.
- In local governments across the world, there is huge variation in the way powers are distributed between 'the Executive' and 'the Assembly'. Combined authorities and other areas with devolved governance will want to develop their own ideas on this power-sharing relationship. It would be wise to build in opportunities to review the balance of powers in the light of experience.
- There is room for combined authorities and other areas with devolved governance arrangements to invent new ways of presenting public policy choices to their citizens. Transparency and efficiency are important considerations here.
- Devolved areas wishing to ensure that councillors with different types of experience are able to exercise senior leadership roles may feel that mayoral models have limitations. That question aside, it is clear that combined authorities, whether or not they have a directly-elected mayor, should be able to invent an array of new arrangements for ensuring inclusive leadership in their constitutions. There are opportunities for creative innovative arrangements for a wide range of voices to be heard.
- International experience suggests that a much more open scrutiny process is likely to be both more effective in delivering results, and more attractive to citizens.

Drawing from the same case studies, the LGA highlights six principles of good governance for those designing and implementing sub-national governance arrangements:

⁷⁴ LGA (2016ii) English Devolution: Learning Lessons from International Models of Sub-National Governance [online] available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/3.2+English+devolution_06-WEB.pdf/24c5a48b-744c-4ba4-8736-2277d9fa6e67

1. Civic leadership

- Does the governance model provide for effective place-based leadership?
- Leadership includes the capacity to develop a vision for an area coupled with a governance arrangement that can ensure effective and accountable delivery of this vision.

2. Effective decision-making

- Does the governance model support high quality decision-making processes that go beyond discovering the preferences of various stakeholders?
- The importance of creating sound arrangements for the development of deliberative local democracy is essential.

3. Transparency and efficiency

- Does the governance model make it clear (to other councillors, professionals and the public at large) who is making decisions, on what issues, when, why and how?
- Transparency is fundamental not only in building trust and competence in the political process, but also in ensuring efficiency.

4. Accountability

- Does the governance model provide for effective public involvement in decision-making?
- The creation of a devolved governance structure should ensure that there is proper public debate about important policy choices. Do the processes of decision-making ensure the inclusion of citizen voices?

5. Public involvement

- Does the governance model provide for effective public involvement in decision-making?
- The creation of a devolved governance structure should ensure that there is proper public debate about important public policy choices. Do the processes of decision-making ensure the inclusion of citizen voices?

6. Business engagement

- Does the model provide for the effective involvement of local business interests?
- What role will local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) play in governance arrangements? How will the authority assist local businesses?

The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) also provide case studies of four councils – London Borough of Sutton, Reading Borough Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and Norfolk County Council - who have changed to the committee system since the Localism Act 2011.⁷⁵ Their comments on those case studies collectively include:

- All of the councils insisted that they were not going back to the pre-2000 committee system – instead, they said they were ‘building on the best of that system but also on the best of the cabinet model’.

⁷⁵ LGiU (2014) Policy briefing: Changing to a committee system in a new era [online] available at: <http://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Changing-to-a-committee-system-in-a-new-era.pdf>

- The current context is very different. For example, these councils have had the experience of scrutiny, and they are introducing a new system at a time when costs of administration are carefully monitored.
- The new committee system is invariably more streamlined than the old. The most important difference is that much more of the council's work is done in partnership, informally and formally. This adds a degree of complexity – how does an adult social care standing committee work with the health and wellbeing board; where are budgets decided or scrutinised?
- There are also issues around perceptions – partner bodies can assume that all councils have a cabinet member with responsibility and with delegated powers, but with a committee system this may be more complex. Brighton & Hove have pointed out that, despite the Localism Act, some government legislation and guidance does not seem to recognise that some councils have introduced a committee system.
- The increasing complexity of local governance – with new partnerships evolving all the time, and new models and initiatives e.g. combined authorities, city deals and community budgets, means that these councils will have to review their own structures and lines of accountability regularly, but then so do councils with a cabinet model.
- The most cited advantage of the committee model (and reason for changing) is that the committee system is inherently more democratic, with more councillors directly involved in decision-making. Where relevant, the opposition has more say and its voice is more strongly heard. In Councils with a history of no overall control and/or where decisions are hotly contested, a committee system can feel like a better fit.
- Some councils felt that the committee model provides greater clarity to residents and local organisations – it is clearer where decisions are being taken and what the process for making them is. (Critics of the committee system may, however, argue the reverse i.e. that having cabinet members with clear responsibilities improves clarity.
- Supporters of the committee system feel that decisions are more out in the open.
- Councils said that councillors in general were having to take on extra work so that they could contribute effectively to their committees and that they needed more training. However, council leaders saw this as positive, as was the need for officers to be better at forward planning.
- The old committee system was often criticised for being slow to take action, for discouraging joint working and for leading to a huge number of meetings. It is perhaps still early days to judge how successful the example councils have been. However, it is clear that where councils have decided to reintroduce a committee model, they have been determined to avoid these problems. Therefore, they all have clear urgent business and delegation processes which seem to be working well.
- They did not expect an upsurge in councils wanting to introduce a committee system, but recognised that there were a number considering it.
- How to engage voters who can feel that their political institutions are too distant is currently a high profile issue for all political parties, as is the debate about

devolution at all levels. For some local authorities, this could result in a consideration of how their formal governance arrangements work.

- Looking at possibly introducing a committee system means a council has to reassess how it makes and scrutinises decisions, how involved members feel in the process, how effectively residents are brought in and whether the delegations to officers are appropriate.
- Whether a form of committee system is the right one for a council will depend on many factors both political and cultural. No one can say that one system is inherently better than another, but even considering change can be a positive process, even if the final decision is to retain the status quo.

If moving to a committee system, the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) highlights the following key recommendations:⁷⁶

- Be clear about the reasons and objectives for change – and evaluate against them
- Get others involved - this is not just an internal 'democratic services' matter
- Forward planning, and effective delegation, are vital
- There is a clear case for maintaining a 'scrutiny' function

Further to the observation that there is no 'best option' of governance model per se, the CfPS also warn against people thinking that the committee system is 'intrinsically more democratic' and that a move to that system will automatically resolve any problems. They stress that 'structures are more the product of a prevailing culture, rarely the cause of it'.⁷⁷

Transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability are crucial factors for any model of governance. This is particularly true given the lack of trust that many people currently have in democracy and political processes.

Placing more power into citizens' hands, as discussed above, is intended to increase democratic accountability. To help with this, the government has issued a local government transparency code, which aims to make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision-making process and help shape public services.⁷⁸ Transparency is described as 'the foundation of local accountability and the key that gives people the tools and information they need to enable them to play a bigger role in society'. The availability of data can also open new markets for local business,

⁷⁶ Centre for Public Scrutiny (2012)

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) Local Government Transparency Code 2015 [online] available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408386/150227_PUBLICATION_Final_LGTC_2015.pdf

the voluntary and community sectors and social enterprises to run services or manage public assets.⁷⁹

The code provides detailed information on the information which councils must publish, covering:⁸⁰

- Expenditure exceeding £500
- Government procurement card transactions
- Procurement information
- Local authority land
- Social housing asset value
- Grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations
- Organisation chart
- Trade union facility time
- Parking account
- Parking spaces
- Senior salaries
- Constitution
- Pay multiple
- Fraud
- Waste contracts

Accountability and governance of the new community level structures that are emerging are also important. For example, Audit Scotland have commented that there is room for improvement in relation to the accountability and governance arrangements for CPPs in Scotland, which is said to have been weak initially, particularly with regard to planning and performance management. The problems were due to individual partner organisations not being routinely or robustly held to account for their performance as a member of a CPP. This means there are neither consequences for not participating fully, nor sufficient incentives to change behaviour. 'Resolving how this accountability deficit is one of the key ways to improving how CPPs perform and ensuring better outcomes for local communities.'⁸¹

Digital and mobile technologies

Digital technologies offer local authorities widespread opportunities to deliver better outcomes for local residents, businesses and communities, including in relation to governance and decision-making, and local people having more influence specifically. A recent report from NESTA and describes vision for where councils

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Audit Scotland (2013) Improving community planning in Scotland [online] available at: http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2013/nr_130320_improving_cpp.pdf

might be by 2025, in order to understand the opportunities they face now.⁸² The vision is as follows:

- **Seamless services**

In 2025, almost all transactions take place online. Seamless integration across all government services means that users verify their identity once, through voice- or thumbprint. Where beneficial, there's instant data sharing across services unless people explicitly opt out. Two-dimensional council websites have been replaced by interactive digital platforms that connect users with third-party apps and services, and stream personalised content on local democracy, jobs and services. Digital platforms have helped councils become enablers instead of direct providers of most local services.

- **Relational services**

Services that are about fostering connections between people – such as eldercare, social care and childcare – still rely on face-to-face contact and can't be digitised. But digital technologies are being used to support these sorts of services: new tools are helping people to manage their own long term conditions and connect to a broader network of support - such as peer mentors, health coaches, friends and family, volunteers and group-based activities. Meanwhile, many services have been revolutionised by predictive algorithms, which allow councils to intervene in a more timely and effective way.

- **Place-shaping** – ('Place shaping' is defined as 'the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general sense of well-being of a community and its citizens'. This includes community engagement, promoting the local economy, creating a sense of local identity, supporting community cohesion, and meeting the needs of local residents and businesses. Engaging local people in decision-making is essential to this.)

Digital technologies have helped councils take a more ambitious approach to place-shaping. The last decade saw councils use the twin opportunities of digital and devolution to grow their local economies. Greater transparency and use of challenge-based procurements have dramatically widened the pool of providers and ensured that a larger share of public contracts go to high-growth SMEs. Councils systematically engage residents in decisions about how services are commissioned, delivered and evaluated. Some have crowdsourced contracts and made real-time performance data a condition of winning public contracts. Local residents also decide how money is allocated: a chunk of council spending is decided by online participatory budgeting.

- **How councils work**

Like the best tech companies, councils are lean, agile and data-driven. Acting as brokers or enablers, they sit at the centre of a large web of innovative partners,

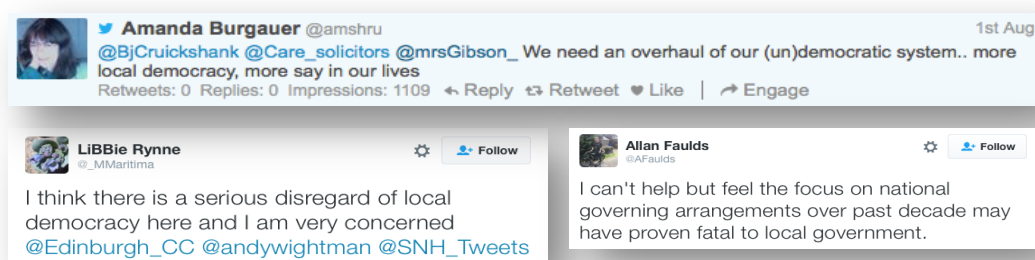
⁸² Benton, M. & Simon, J. (2016) Connected councils: A digital vision of local government in 2025 Nesta [online] available at: http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/connected_councils_report.pdf

providers and community groups. Multi-agency working is the norm; teams and departments are temporary structures that form around specific local challenges. A truly mobile workforce has freed up public space. Councils use digital platforms to share public space, equipment and even workforce time with other councils, businesses and residents.

In terms of local governance, digital presents opportunities with regard to: informing and consulting people (by increasing channels for communication); involving and collaborating with people (crowdsourcing new ideas and allowing citizens to deliberate on proposals); and as a means of decision-making (empowering by enabling direct decision-making through digital platforms).⁸³ Details of these are provided in Appendix 8.

Social media analysis

Discussions showed fear regarding the decline of local government. The tweets below are all examples of people bemoaning poor local democracy. The use of emotive language - such as 'fatal' and 'awful' - highlights the strength of people's feelings with regard to this topic:



The final tweet above, from @AFaulds, was produced in response to the sharing of a news article which highlighted the timidity that the SNP have shown in reforming local taxation. The tweet read: "Scotland continues to have awful approach to local government - not aided by timidity in reforming local taxation."

Devolution:

Devolution and localism appeared to be popular concepts for discussion, e.g.



⁸³ Benton, M. & Simon, J. (2016)

The level of engagement with the above tweet from @aliceperryuk shows that this is a particularly popular opinion. Others were more cynical regarding devolution, for example:



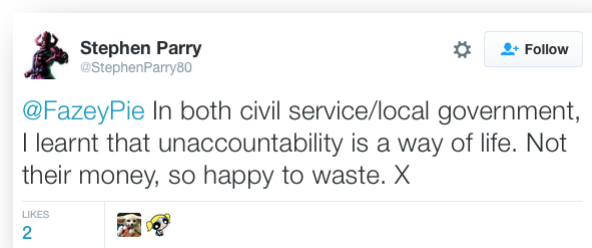
Community involvement:

The need for increased inclusion of communities in decision-making also came through in the social media analysis. For example:

"Why do local ppl not have more say in their local government? Why are planning objections not put 2 committee? @bolandeva @theSNP @GlasgowCC"

Transparency and accountability:

It was apparent from social media discussion that transparency and accountability are important to the public. Often this is expressed as mistrust in the current set-up, as shown here:



Digital technologies:

Desire for using digital tools to achieve greater transparency was apparent on social media. For example, the following tweet highlights an example for using the messenger app 'WhatsApp' to share information about council decisions:



Findings from Public Engagement Events

With many participants active or politically engaged in their community, they were already relatively well informed about this topic area. Across the events a few key themes emerged:

- A sense that Huddersfield had lost its identity and connection between the people and the Council when becoming Kirklees. There was a real concern that this might be accentuated when the West Yorkshire powerhouse goes forth on the basis on already weakened democracy and identity.
- Poor communications between council and the public, feeding unhelpful mistrust. This extended beyond the use of technology, with discussion concentrating on strengthening existing communication networks and channels between the Council and the public.
- The issue of meaningless public consultation, with several ideas forthcoming: from randomisation of selection of 'public jury' systems to ensure objectivity and reduce the usual suspects from taking part consistently in local democracy; to opening the consultation up to a wider group.
- Involving the public, including the public having the right to reverse council decisions when they are perceived not to be working. Setting quality indicators for local-decision-making was viewed as one possibility where the public could make a greater contribution.
- Civic Education – informing and offering training to adults and young people about their rights and responsibilities in society, and of how they can get involved in how local decisions are made.
- Local people's involvement was essential, but required to be effectively executed and incorporate not just the usual suspects. People were keen to put their views forward and increase their extent of engagement in decision-making and were very interested in the notion of HOW decisions got made, not just about WHAT the decisions were.

Responses to the Key Questions

Do you know how decisions about what happens in Kirklees and its local communities are made?

Despite participants self-reporting as reasonably active in the local community, there was a great deal of confusion about how decisions were made and by whom. On the whole, detailed understanding was limited. Some knew about the Cabinet

system: that *'few people in the whole Council have any influence to make real decisions'* and the idea of *'power being located regionally in a Northern Powerhouse'*.

Limited understanding was attributed to a mix of: poor communication and a lack of information, limited civic education in schools, high levels of mistrust in democratic processes that lowered people's desire to get involved, negative press about the council, and accusations of cronyism.

Communication

Poor communication between the Council and local people was perceived to heavily influence low awareness about how decisions are made. There was a need for communication to extend beyond the Kirklees' website, public statements and advertisements in the papers and other forms of local media. There was a groundswell of support for the Council to strengthen existing community networks and channels of communication, such as the local committees, leaflet drops, online, and public announcements by local politicians. In doing so, trust in the political process could be improved, giving people a reason for higher levels of engagement because they feel they would be heard.

Misconceptions about decision-making

A lack of positive, two-way communication was detrimental to perceptions about the competency of the Council, what it did, and those who represented and worked for it. Equally, once local people knew more, negative perceptions began to evaporate because in a personal exchange of information, i.e. face-to-face between a councillor and constituent, the context in which decisions were made was more easily understood. This led many to question: *'is the public's role to inform themselves, or is it up to the Council to inform the public?'* Some felt it should be more balanced between both parties, with the Council taking a lead and with the public not over-relying on the Council.

Civic education in schools

For some participants, a main reason why little was known about how decisions are made is *'optional'* civic education. There was much discussion about the need to teach young people about the benefits, responsibilities and accountabilities of the democratic process in schools, and for it to be *'made compulsory since the Local Council could decide the curriculum'*. This was seen as a way of improving early adoption of voting and public participation.

Public mistrust

Public mistrust in decision-making was raised a great deal and expressed itself in different ways: from the perceived lack of councillors working hard in/for communities, being vetted only by internal party staff and not the community, to concerns about Kirklees' planning committee not making decisions in tune with community need. The importance of regular and better communication that reaches

'ordinary' local people (not just 'the usual suspects') was felt to be of paramount importance in building trust.

Negative perceptions

Whilst healthy and balanced scrutiny was welcomed, local press often focused on entirely negative aspects of the Council; coverage that was not balanced with reporting good decisions made. Many believed negative press coverage exacerbated the views of those already jaded with democratic processes and offered a skewed picture of the merits of getting involved in local decision-making.

Perceptions of cronyism

The appointment of friends and associates of exiting councillors to positions of authority, without proper regard for their experience, qualifications or expertise, was brought up. Having the 'same old same old' involved in public decision-making, rather than people not normally involved in democracy who are directly affected by such decisions, was another factor that generated mistrust and apathy.

Would you like to see local communities, and possibly people like yourself, more involved in local decision-making?

While the majority of participants expressed an appetite to be more involved, the involvement of more 'ordinary' local people also was viewed as particularly important. This could improve both the quality of decision-making and local services, and, by people offering up their skills and talents, help to make a difference to the prosperity of the communities in which they lived.

However, people felt their views might not be fully taken into consideration or their involvement might make little difference to the outcomes. There was a degree of suspicion that involvement might be tokenistic - a box-ticking exercise or worse - which risked further damaging relationships between the Council and citizens.

It was acknowledged that people wouldn't necessarily always get their way and that hard decisions had to be made. Many believed that communications would need to make this clear in order to temper expectations, and called for communities to be supported in new ways if greater participation was to become a reality.

Greater participation should also take account of the reality that choices at a local level were becoming harder to make in times of harsh budget cuts. A common view was that *'while it's desirable to get people involved in the decision-making, it can be difficult to make tough decisions when people can be very emotive - i.e. having the public involved could elongate the process and make it harder to come to a decision. Councils are there to make the difficult decisions'*.

Practicalities of getting the public involved

As a point of principle, local people should be invited to take part in decisions that greatly affect them, or those where they have expressed a wish to be involved.

Whilst involvement made for better local decisions, for some it was a matter of having the time to do more, having the correct support mechanisms in place, or it being 'worth their while'. Getting involved would not be worthwhile if it was tokenistic, or if people were not given proper feedback on the impact their input had made to decisions taken.

Tokenism - Indeed, a sense that public engagement was often tokenistic and sourced only the 'usual suspects' was viewed as leading to wider public feelings of remoteness from the decisions that affect people's lives. This was linked to a sense that there was little transparency about how local needs are identified before decisions are taken, and how different options are considered.

Misconceptions about councillors - Perceptions about poor performance reportedly put some people off getting involved. Having said this, those people who mentioned that they had had personal contact with their councillor, via their work or local community, felt that this led to having a more positive view of councillors and their performance.

Limited influence at a local level - Increasing regionalization, where it took decision-making further away for ordinary people, was also a reason why people might not wish to get involved in local decision-making: as it further limited the influence that the public might have even when got involved.

Loss of local identity

A reason why some local people did not get involved was attributed to weak local identity. People from Huddersfield talked about losing yet more of their identity as greater steps are taken towards regionalisation. This echoed voices from some residents from the north of Kirklees who felt ignored by the urban core.

Yet, despite the numerous reasons for not getting involved, there was a strong desire to have a greater say in local decision-making. But it was clear that participation would have to be made on the public's terms, more than it has been in the past: possibly with the practicalities tailored to suit individual communities.

How might regional or more local decisions change things?

It was generally felt that more local or regional decision-making will change the number and types of decisions that local people can be involve in, understand or have expertise to lend to. Some viewed the changes as positive and some as negative.

For some the notion of local decisions for local people would be undermined by regionalization and questioned whether it would lead to better democracy or more remote democracy. While regionalisation was welcomed by some, for others the priority was to strengthen local communities as a defense against more remote and 'faceless' governance.

Many believed that greater regional decision-making at a West Yorkshire level offered financial benefits, though fewer were convinced that the same level of social benefits would flow, particularly if decisions were not tied strongly to local need.

Those welcoming greater regionalization thought it could breathe fresh life into political structures that had become stale, and possibly bring in new expertise and personalities that people could relate to. But others questioned whether regional representatives could be properly accountable to, and aware of what was happening at, a local scale.

Importantly, many felt that greater regionalisation, whilst at the same time moving towards more community-led decision-making, could be a recipe for confusion: e.g. *'Who's representing who, and what issues fall into what boundaries could muddle lines of responsibility and accountability'*.

Against a background of these possible changes, there were strong calls for a common language and simple, understandable structures appropriate to local people if citizens were to become more involved in public decision-making.

Given the degree of uncertainty about, before being convinced about the benefits of regionalisation, or more community-led decision-making, several participants wanted to know the redress process; e.g. *'who would put something right when it goes wrong, at either a community or regional level?'*

Regardless of the balance between regional and local levels, strengthening local communities would be needed if the Council was serious both about enabling the community to take a stronger lead on local issues, and for the public to engage with decision-making at a regional level.

Community education, support and development were, therefore, viewed as essential if communities are going to 'do more for themselves'. Careful consideration as to what talents, skills and experience exists within local communities, and how this can be further nurtured, was required before it was realistic to expect them to take on more responsibility.

At a local level, many participants were aware that choices were becoming harder for councillors to make (at a time of austerity), and therefore needed a fresh way of thinking and different solutions. It was suggested that councillors could have more of a role in facilitating people to have discussions and to share ideas and be creative, rather than 'being a conduit for views'.

Do you feel that technologies – like smart phones, iPads, tablets, e-panels – could be used to involve more local people in decision-making?

It was accepted and understood that increased use of technology was inevitable in future governance processes. However, for many, this needs to be an 'addition', and a 'complement', to existing channels, not a replacement for them. For example, new technology could be used to keep people in the loop following face-to-face engagement in forums or on the doorstep.

Any over-reliance on technology would be an easy 'opt-out' for the Council: e.g. signposting people to the website and doing little. There was some concern that technology, and how it was being used, currently left responsibility for seeking information about being involved purely on the public's shoulders, which many felt was unfair.

Smart phones, tablets and e-panels were seen as particularly good channels for two-way communication, particularly with young people. However, their use needed to be mindful of older people's needs, and the needs of the digitally excluded. That said, some younger participants pointed out that 'technology will soon be demanded by older people who are younger people now'.

Views were mixed as to whether technology would improve levels of participation. Many wanted to see evidence, if there was any. Personal, face-to-face, touch-points remain highly valued - and often the preferred - forms of communication: technology couldn't easily replace the personal touch.

Greater use of technology was seen as possibly going hand in hand with a reduction in personal interaction: a cause for concern. There was also a worry that 'easy' engagement methods, such as 'text voting' may risk encouraging flippant and 'sound-bite' voting and decisions: like the 2016 public poll to name a polar research vessel resulting in overwhelming support for 'Boaty McBoat Face'.

People aware of the E-Panel in Kirklees, also tended to be active users of the website and used it as a way of getting involved. Several others who had used the website, but not to get involved, felt that it was fairly complex and not user-friendly, though they also recognised the importance of the website and social media in the overall communications package.

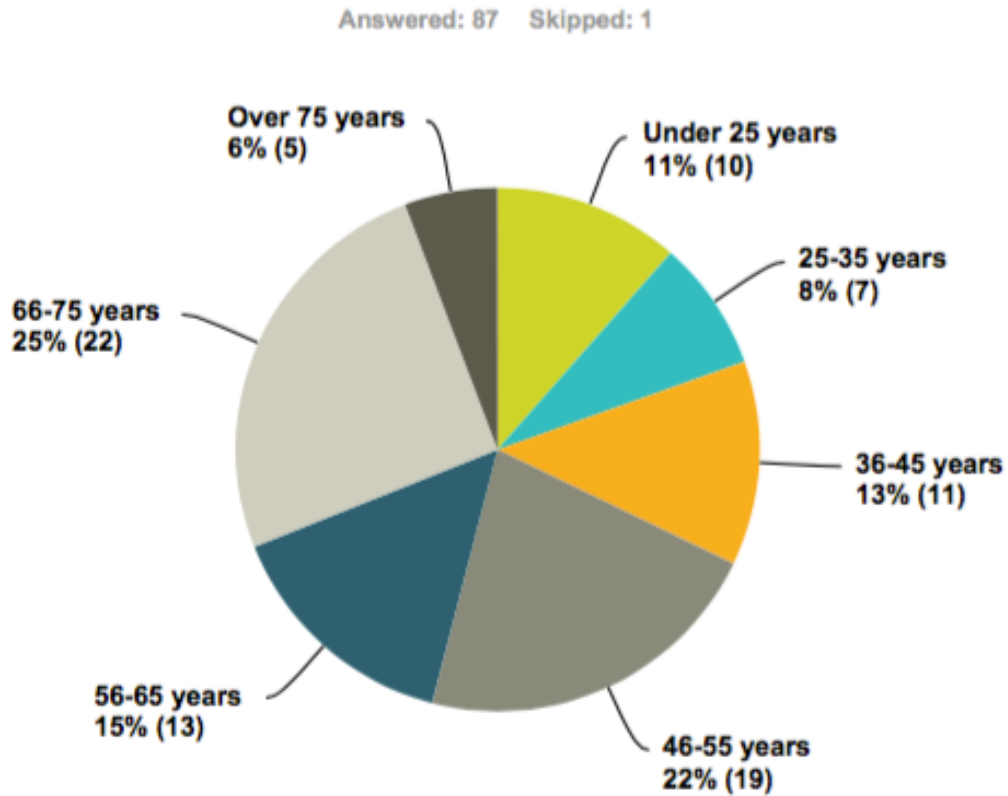
Wider concerns about security regarding technology and voting was cited as a key factor for caution, and not over-relying on technology. Hacking, bribery and corruption of voting and decision-making processes were all concerns. These were, however, concerns that were more common amongst older participants. Younger people felt that embracing technology was a logical and inevitable step.

Suggestions to improve people's participation in decision-making:

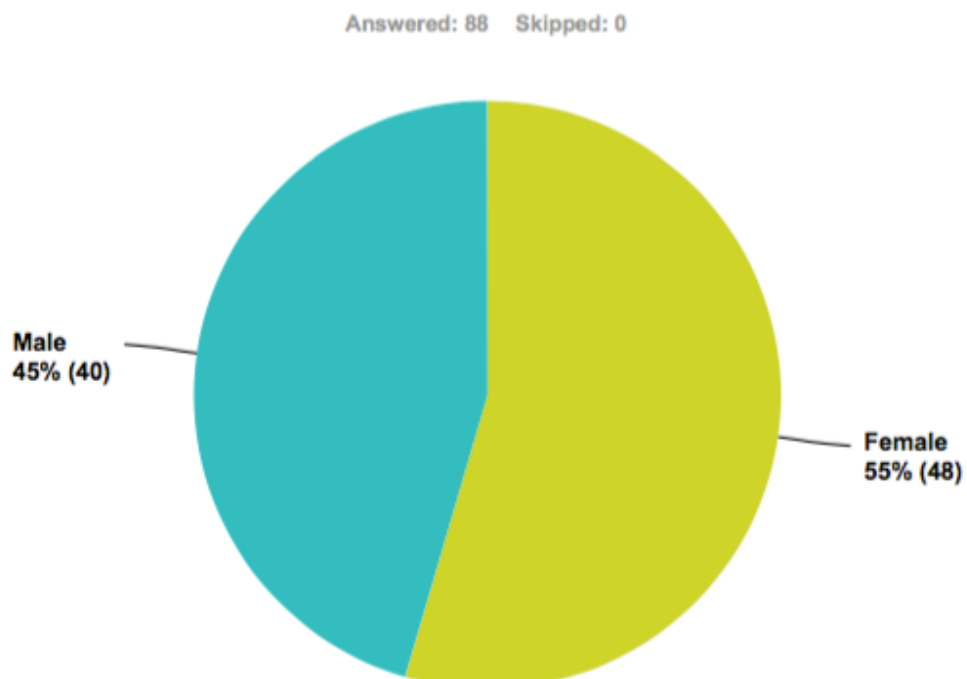
- **Communicate in simple terms – no jargon, plain English** – there was a strong call for greater and more imaginative communication tactics to enrich the dialogue between citizens and the Council
- **Improve representation via random selection of members of the public and detail the evidence upon which decisions are based**
 - Consider a USA-style jury system for the production of public/local people panels. Randomisation as a mechanism for selecting more objective 'people panels'
 - What's the evidence and who's given it should be automatically included so local people can judge the merits of each decision that is being taken
 - Communities also need to inform councillors about their needs
- **Harness the power of the community and voluntary sectors** - these sectors could offer an organised way of engaging, tapping into and presenting people's views
- **Provide tailored ways to encourage and enable more local people to get involved** – possibly offering a menu for each community so they have choice and flexibility to engage in the ways they want
- **Give the vote to people when they are 16 years old**
- **Introduce participatory, community budgets** – with power to prioritise and spend being devolved to local structures.

APPENDIX 1: Profile of participants at the Public Engagement Events

Age:

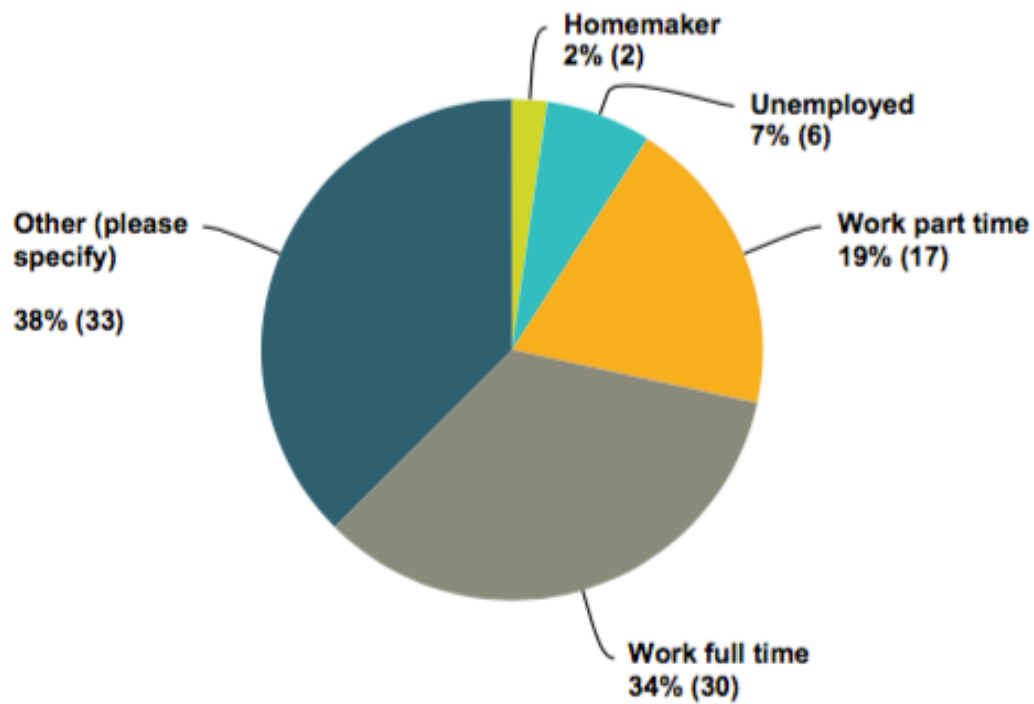


Gender:



Current working status:

Answered: 88 Skipped: 0

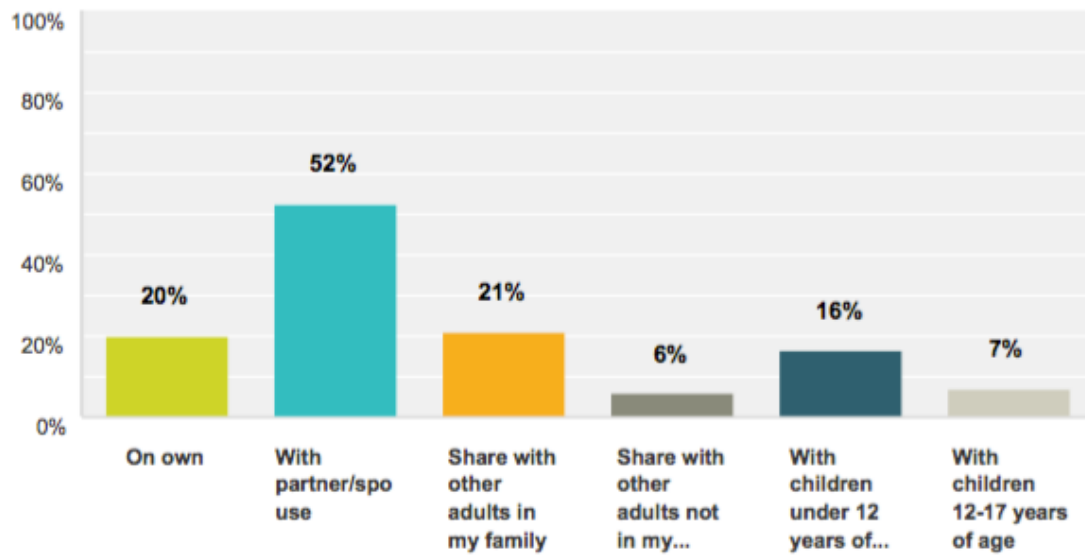


Other specified responses:

Retired (23)
Retired/Part-time self-employed
Semi-retired
Self-employed
Full time volunteer
Student (5)
Long term sick

Who do you live with?:

Answered: 86 Skipped: 2

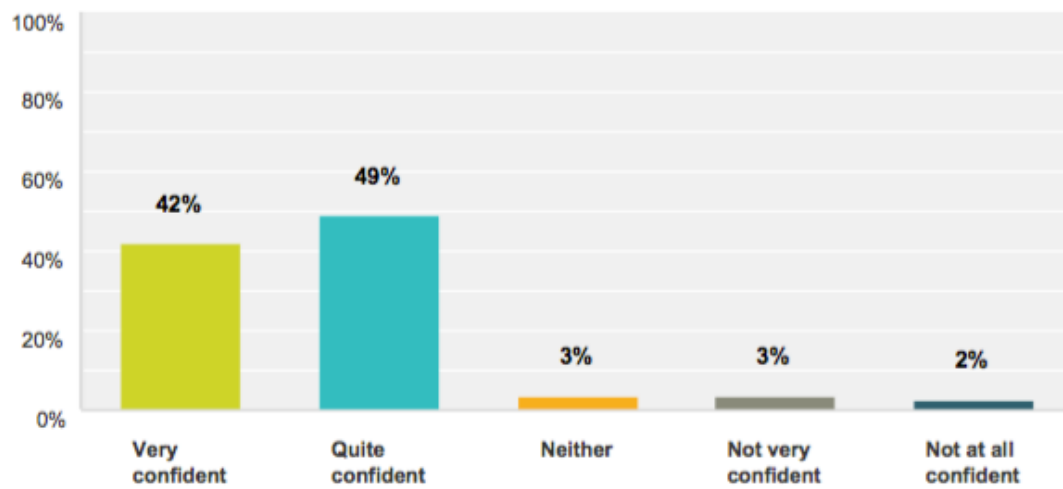


On own	17	20%
With partner/spouse	45	52%
Share with other adults in my family	18	21%
Share with other adults not in my family	5	6%
With children under 12 years of age	14	16%
With children 12-17 years of age	6	7%
Base	86*	

*respondents could answer more than one option

How confident are you with digital communications (including using the web, emails, social media)?

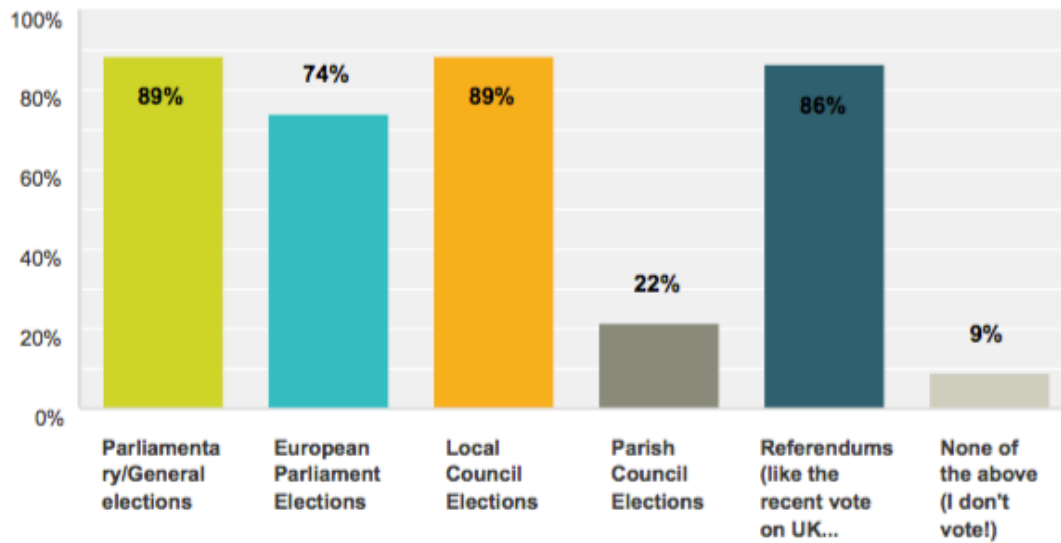
Answered: 88 Skipped: 0



Very confident	37	42%
Quite confident	43	49%
Neither	3	3%
Not very confident	3	3%
Not at all confident	2	2%
Base	88	

Which, if any, elections do you vote in?

Answered: 88 Skipped: 0

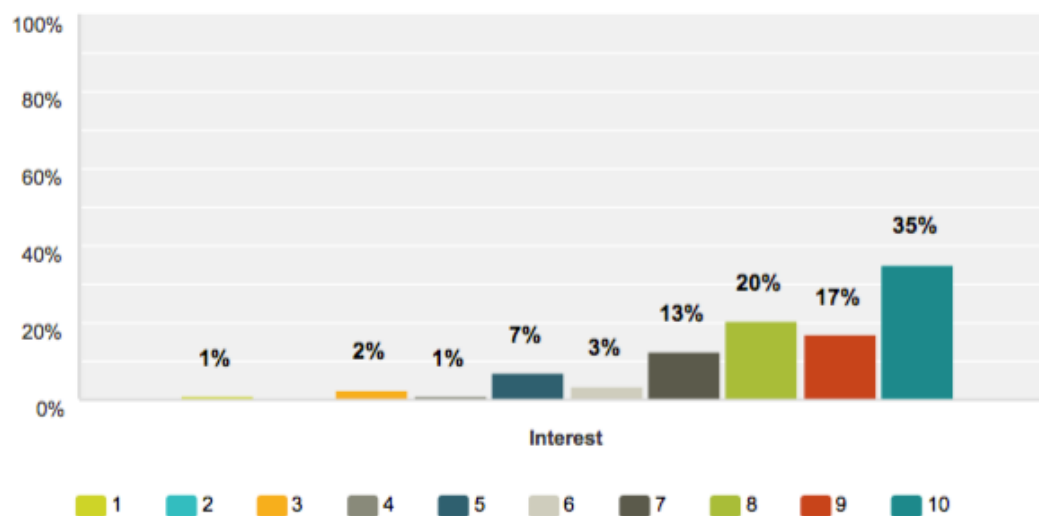


Parliamentary/General elections	78	89%
European Parliament Elections	65	74%
Local Council Elections	78	89%
Parish Council Elections	19	22%
Referendums (like the recent vote on UK membership in the EU)	76	86%
None of the above (I don't vote!)	8	9%
Base	88*	

*respondents could answer more than one option

How interested are you in politics in general? (please use the scale of 1-10 where 10 is very interested and 1 is not interested at all)

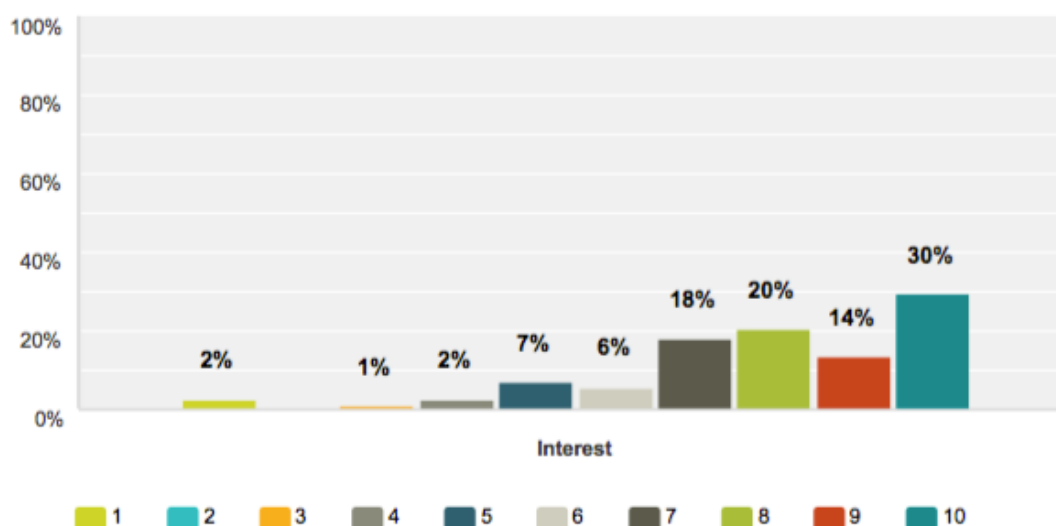
Answered: 88 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Interest	1	0	2	1	6	3	11	18	15	31	88
	1%	0%	2%	1%	7%	3%	13%	20%	17%	35%	

How interested are you in local politics and your council? (please use the scale of 1-10 where 10 is very interested and 1 is not interested at all)

Answered: 88 Skipped: 0

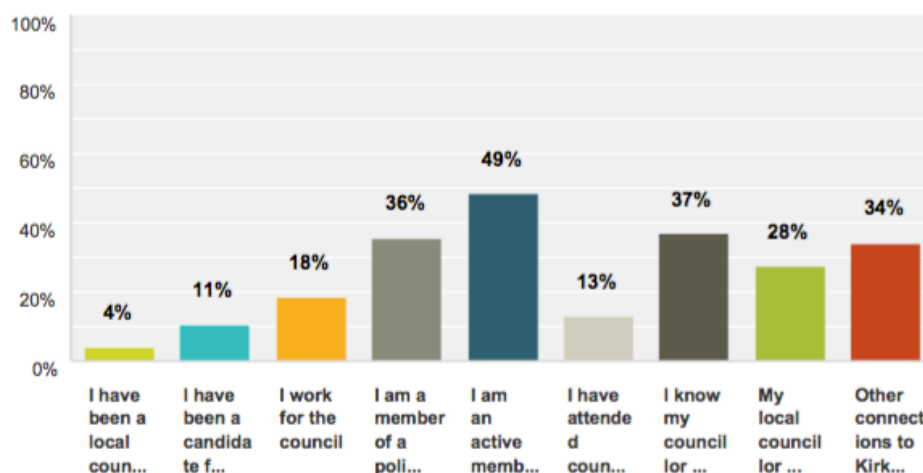


all)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Interest	2	0	1	2	6	5	16	18	12	26	88
	2%	0%	1%	2%	7%	6%	18%	20%	14%	30%	

Which of these descriptions is relevant to you?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 12



I have been a local councillor	3	4%
I have been a candidate for a council seat but I did not win	8	11%
I work for the council	14	18%
I am a member of a political party	27	36%
I am an active member of a local community group	37	49%
I have attended councillor surgeries in my community	10	13%
I know my councillor at a personal or social level	28	37%
My local councillor has helped me with a problem/enquiry	21	28%
Other connections to Kirklees Council	26	34%
Base	76*	

*respondents could answer more than one option

Responses for other connections:

Youth Council (6)
 Huddersfield live (2)
 KNH Area Committee (2)
 Used to work for Council and was town councillor in Mirfield ages ago!
 I'm a councillor
 Work for a social/transport charity in liaison with Kirklees
 Husband works for Council and I used to
 Secretary of Kirklees Enterprise Partnership
 Work closely with Kirklees Officers
 Sat alongside Council reps on a GHCCG Steering Group
 Parks and Green Spaces
 Co-founder of Save Mirfield (Community Group Unsustainable development)
 My husband stands for Green Party
 Previously worked in social care
 Partner with us
 Volunteer
 Planning campaigning
 Have done some contact work

APPENDIX 2: Councillors' role in encouraging communities to do more for themselves⁸⁴

To play the pivotal role of supporting local people to become more involved and influential on behalf of their own communities, councillors must be able to do the following:

- Motivate and inspire communities
- Support groups and organisations to take up opportunities, express views, claim rights, challenge and influence
- Encourage and support communities to get involved and work together
- Work with neighbourhood governance arrangements
- Build networks between people and groups
- Balance community leadership while trying to be firm and impartial
- Act as a critical friend to communities
- Facilitate, network, negotiate and inform.

Linked to this, six distinct dimensions of the 'ideal' ward councillor role have been identified, which emphasise the need to act as 'connectors' between communities and the council.

- **Political representative:** ability to connect with all parts of the community and represent everyone fairly, balancing local concerns with the political demands of the group manifesto
- **Community advocate:** for people from different backgrounds, cultures and values, with the confidence to speak freely and challenge the executive
- **Community leader:** support local projects and initiatives, encourage participation, explain 'how things work', be sensitive to difference and issues of diversity and equality, understand how to engage people and be a conflict broker
- **Service transformer:** understand how local government works and have the ability to hold service providers to account, be able to work in partnership with a range of agencies and interests, understand the local area and use this knowledge strategically in local action planning and setting and monitoring service standards
- **Place shaper:** able to identify priorities, work with officers and service providers to address local issues and manage delegated budgets
- **Knowledge champion:** be a primary source of local intelligence flowing between community and council

⁸⁴ Inspiring Democracy (2015)

APPENDIX 3: Principles for using social media⁸⁵

- **Be human:** be approachable in your language and tone; behave online as you would in person.
- **Be engaging:** respond to questions and join in when you can move the conversation on or help.
- **Be professional:** remember you represent your council, so be aware of how your public voice comes across.
- **Share and attribute:** you can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from.
- **Go to where your audience is:** if the section of the population you want to connect with is on a particular platform, forum or group, join it.
- **Content is king:** by creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to conversation and be heard.
- **Be authentic:** don't pretend to be something you are not.
- **Be strategic:** plan ahead – who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
- **The internet is forever:** be aware that what you post now could be found in years to come.

APPENDIX 4: Digital tips for new councillors^{86,87}

1. **Find out your local rules** – Social media for councillors is generally on the rise but not consistently, e.g. some councils still ban twitter from meetings.
2. **Change your local rules** – If you're not happy with your local approach, then raise it with the people who run your council.
3. **Check out what support is available** – Again, there can be big differences between councils and between different roles e.g. cabinet vs. scrutiny, but see what is available. Make sure officers are producing the kind of content that you will want to share.
4. **Listen before you speak** – Social media is a listening tool first and foremost. It is important to get to know the terrain before you contribute. Pause before you respond – remember you're in public.
5. **Don't annoy people by campaigning** – Even at election time. People want to hear about what you are doing to improve the area but will get put off constant recycling of 'party lines' on social media.
6. **Be careful when tweeting from meetings** – Not everyone thinks this is a good idea or likes to see councillors tweeting when they 'should be listening'. One thought is that an official twitter feed from meetings provided by officers would reduce the need for councillors to tweet. The officer stream is good for providing the commentary (which is by its nature factual) while the councillor value is in providing personal insight and views.

⁸⁵ LGA (2015)

⁸⁶ RewiringDemocracy.org (2014)

⁸⁷ ibid.

APPENDIX 5: Possible measures to increase electoral turnout

Automatic registration

Moving to a system of automatic registration (e.g. using National Insurance numbers) could be key to solving the problem of incomplete and inaccurate electoral registers, changing to an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' process. Whilst this would require a considerable culture change and present other potential challenges regarding accuracy and security/fraud, The House of Commons consistently highlight this as their recommended solution, which could operate alongside Individual Electoral Registration (IER).⁸⁸

Modernising electoral administration (for example: weekend voting, voting anywhere, online voting)⁸⁹

The House of Commons report highlights several ways in which current electoral practices could be modernised and made more accessible to the electorate, all of which have received considerable support from the public in recent Electoral Commission research:

- Weekend voting (supported by 70% of people) -
 - Since 1931, UK elections have always been held on a Thursday. It is common elsewhere in Europe for elections to be held on the weekend, as opposed to always on a Thursday as in the UK. Other countries e.g. America, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and Ireland hold elections on various weekdays. Evidence suggests that moving elections to the weekend could increase voter engagement, e.g. elections on weekends in Europe receive a 10% higher turnout. Some question whether the impact would be very large, and whether it would cause resourcing issues, particularly in rural areas. Another suggestion is that elections could remain on a Thursday but those days be designated as public holidays. The House of Commons approve of the notion of a special 'Democracy Day', as it fits their notion that 'greater esteem and excitement should return to the electoral process'.⁹⁰
- Advance voting in some way so that voting can be stretched over a number of days (65% support)
- Voting anywhere
 - Voters could be allowed to cast their vote at any polling station in their local authority, or indeed anywhere in the country. This would require changes such as having electronic poll books.⁹¹
- Online/electronic voting (63% supported).
 - There is significant evidence and support in favour of online voting, suggesting that it would improve turnout.^{92,93} Concerns relate to fraud and

⁸⁸ House of Commons (2014)

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Wainwright, D. (2016)

- problems with guaranteeing secrecy. Multiple surveys strongly suggest that non-voters would be encouraged to vote if they were able to do so online.
- The National Union of Students (NUS) has particularly highlighted that online voting presents a good opportunity for the democratic process to better reflect the practices used by young people and students. When online voting was introduced in union elections at the University of Sheffield in 2009, the number of people voting increased by 50%, and continued to increase each subsequent year. By 2011, paper votes were abandoned as so few votes were cast offline. 85% of University of Sheffield students said they would be more likely to vote in governmental elections if they were able to do so online.⁹⁴
 - Democratic Audit has recommended that a sustained, serious and large-scale experiment of using online voting should take place.⁹⁵ A commission set up by the Commons Speaker John Bercow has stated that by 2020, secure online voting should be an option for all.⁹⁶
 - Electronic voting is currently used in Estonia, where around 30% of participants vote online. 'E-voting' has grown in popularity, from 30,275 users in the 2007 parliamentary elections to 176,491 people in 2015, and overall turnout has risen from 61.9% to 64.2%. This rise cannot necessarily be attributed to the availability of e-voting. Whilst the online option makes voting easier, 'it does not address the underlying causes of turnout decline', i.e. it will not engage those people 'for whom the problem lies in politics as such'.⁹⁷
 - Greater emphasis on postal voting
 - In the 2010 general election, a higher proportion of people registered for postal votes than those who were due to vote at a polling station. The House of Commons report recommends that postal voting should be made more accessible in a bid to increase electoral turnout.

Improving the provision of information about elections

The House of Commons report highlights lack of awareness/information about elections as a key factor in people failing to vote, both in terms of the system i.e. how to get on the register and being able to make an informed choice. Better information on all aspects should be easy to deliver given new technologies. For example, use of mobile apps has been recommended as a priority for parties and governments to give as much information as possible about elections and make participation more attractive.⁹⁸ This could be particularly valuable for engaging young people. Other recommendations for improving information provision include:

- Voting advice applications i.e. online election quizzes which help users find the party/candidate that is closest to their political views.

⁹⁴ House of Commons (2014)

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Wainwright, D. (2016)

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ House of Commons (2014)

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

- An online forum to enable members of the public to ask candidates questions during the lead up to the general election.
- A weekly email from the local Council to registered voters.
- Better advertising of elections on the day.

Campaigns encouraging people to register and to vote can have a positive impact on voter participation. This includes non-partisan campaigns as well as those run by political parties.¹⁰⁰ The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) described local authority campaigns to encourage registration and participation in the May 2015 general elections. Information about registration was particularly important following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2014. Measures taken by local authorities included the following, all of which could be applied to increasing uptake in district elections:¹⁰¹

- Maximising use of the materials provided to local authorities by The Electoral Commission – to support their public awareness work in encouraging voter registration and providing information on elections locally. These resources were provided for use by electoral administrators and their communications teams and included advertising templates and press releases. Practical materials were also available to encourage public participation e.g. posters, website banners, template tweets and a guide to using social media on polling day.
- Using local press and social media to communicate with voters, particularly monitoring Twitter on election day so that any issues/comments could be responded to.
- A polling station search facility on the local authority website, advising the voter of their allocated polling station. This was said to have worked extremely well in London, with 14,876 searches made between 1 April and 7 May 2015, and 6,032 made on polling day itself.
- Focused work on voter registration and cutoffs, including a video on the completion of the postal vote pack.
- Taking campaigns into colleges and universities. In the South West, this included a 'number 10 selfie booth', amongst wider campaign materials e.g. bus and cinema advertising, TV and radio interviews, and social media.

Research has shown that contacting people in person, by telephone, or by mailshot, encouraging them to vote, can positively impact turnout. These positive impacts can continue in subsequent elections, even when there has been no further intervention. Non-partisan efforts are likely to have a wider, less biased reach than party campaigns. One specific suggestion is the use of some kind of pin-on token, which voters can wear once they have voted. It is thought that this makes voting 'feel more social', which draws on social norm theory – the idea that people are more likely to perform a behaviour if they sense that those around are doing the same. The

¹⁰⁰ House of Commons (2014)

¹⁰¹ AEA (2015) Elections and Individual Electoral Registration – The challenge of 2015 [online] available at: <http://www.aea-elections.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/aea-report-elections-and-ier-challenge-of-2015.pdf>

positive impacts of this have been seen on social media, where the “I have voted” button on Facebook has made a significant impact on voter turnout amongst younger people.¹⁰²

WPP have analysed international evidence of successful turnout campaigns to conclude that effective communication can improve voter turnout. They highlight the following best practice for voter turnout campaigns:¹⁰³

- i. **Deep data and insights** into citizens’ voting barriers, values and attitudes
 - o Going ‘beyond elections’ to connect with the electorate’s future vision is important in qualitative research – what are their connections to the democratic process? How do they define their relationship to public life? What are their aspirations in this area? This was put to good effect in the 2012 Obama campaign – instead of asking voters about politics, the research team focused on their lives – satisfactions, disappointments, hopes and fears. The research revealed an important shift in the middle class mind-set (stability and security as key new values), which later translated into a winning message strategy.
 - o Community groups can be useful for mobilising voters, but are also an important source of additional insights about particular groups’ attitudes and behaviours. The challenge is for authorities to tap into their vast knowledge. Elections Canada has launched ‘Inspire Democracy’ (#inspiredem) – a campaign and digital platform to share and discuss local expertise and research findings. This reflects a unique philosophy – electoral participation is a shared challenge, so campaigns are decentralised and run at grassroots level.
 - o Context matters – Successful campaigns thoroughly analyse the actual political context of elections to turn them into an asset for voter mobilisation. For example, the 2014 EU elections campaign utilised the fact that voters could for the first time impact the selection of the next European Commission chief. The message “this time it’s different” was highly visible in media coverage and evidence suggests that this message helped to increase the salience of the election.
 - o Multiple stages of testing of content is, naturally, very important.
- ii. **Clear strategic decisions** about which citizen segments to focus on and how
 - o Using deep data and insight can help answer the following questions re: prioritising who to target:
 - Which group of potential non-voters are closest to mobilisation?
 - Do we want to prioritise certain types of potential non-voters (e.g. young voters)?
 - Which barriers to voting do we want to address?
 - Which barriers can be effectively addressed through communication?
 - Which barriers do we have the time and resources to address effectively?

¹⁰² House of Commons (2014)

¹⁰³ WPP The Government and Public Sector Practice (2015)

- WPP give examples of traditional barriers to voting around the world and how communications have successfully been used to tackle them. The UK examples given are:

Table: Barriers to voting and communication solutions

Barrier	Examples	Communication response	Facilitating mechanism
Apathy and disengagement – 'I don't care'	No interest in politics; Voting seen as irrelevant	Inspire & engage: powerful messengers, partnerships with celebrities, brands, media	Social contagion Peer pressure
Lack of effort – 'It's too complicated' or 'I didn't realise. I haven't got round to it'	Home-movers; some young people	Driving awareness; Educating; Providing guidance and making it easier	Sense of urgency

- iii. **Campaigns** with a nuanced, evidence-based choice of message and channel
 - Have a **central theme** that can be communicated repeatedly and effectively to 'whip up' interest. This should be the most dominant theme that speaks to a wide range of voters but can be adjusted for different segments. Having a central idea. During the 2012 Queensland State election, for example, the campaign presented a speech bubble that all voters – both younger and older – carried around with them. Each person's bubble represented their unique opinion. Various media portrayed how people go about their lives with their speech bubbles. They also showed them taking these to vote. The aim was to have something catchy, easy to memorise and visualise that everyone can relate to.



- **Issues-based communication** – i.e. multiple themes that appeal to various audiences, e.g. economy, money, jobs, quality of life.
- **Cultivate a sense of community** – Language and imagery should convey the sentiment that 'I am a voter and this is what everyone does on Election Day', thus creating a social norm with an aspirational component. This can include

engaging ‘surrogates’ – famous or influential in particular communities. Relevant messaging could include ‘this is what you do as a Kirklees citizen/resident; this is part of the Kirklees experience’, as used in the 2012 Obama campaign in relation to America. Such messages tap into pride and sense of community, and can work well combined with basic educational messages about voting – we want people to know that voting is easy and everyone is doing it.

- **Strengthen voter identity** – people are more likely to vote if reminded of their identity as a voter.
 - **Commitment mechanisms** encourage people to make a public pledge to vote. This commitment can be reinforced through follow-up communications to hold people accountable. Obama’s campaign, for example, asked people to sign a simple ‘Commit to vote’ form online. By doing so, people also shared personal details e.g. their email, phone number and location. This enabled regular targeted communications to encourage people to follow through their commitment.
 - **Design the channel mix effectively** – Using a combination of reach, context and efficiency. Make the most of the channels you have.
 - **Partnerships** can be a powerful way to reach potential voters, taking the message out directly into their lives and delivering it through a trusted messenger. Youth groups, schools, university, sports clubs and religious groups can all be potential partners for mobilisation.
 - **Campaign dynamics** should be guided by strategic decisions on audience prioritisation – e.g. disengaged voters need interaction over a longer period, while incidental voters should be approached nearer the registration deadline. Campaigns may have distinct phases e.g. a ‘pledge’ phase followed by a ‘reminder’ phase.
- iv. Constant feedback and **evaluation** of what works best – throughout any campaign.

WPP describe how designing an effective turnout campaign requires understanding the different types of potential non-voters, their barriers and drivers, and mobilisation tactics that work. For habitual non-voters, for example, the goal is typically to create a desire to vote, whilst for intermittent non-voters the aim should be to facilitate voting by removing barriers. Specific voter mobilisation techniques that they recommend include:¹⁰⁴

- i. **Language of identity**
 - Framing voting as a means of shaping your identity can be used to motivate socially valuable behaviour
 - A small change in wording that framed voting as an expression of self rather than as a behaviour (e.g. being a ‘voter’ vs. ‘voting’ can increase voter turnout
- ii. **Voting plan**
 - Phone calls to help people make a voting plan (forming implementation intentions) can increase turnout. People are more likely to perform an action if they have visualised doing it. (This only worked among those living alone;

¹⁰⁴ WPP The Government and Public Sector Practice (2015)

- multiple-eligible-voter households are more likely to make a plan on their own).
- No evidence that calls to remind people of the election/ask them whether they intend to vote have any impact.
- iii. **Voter report cards**
 - A pre-election mail-out including the voting history of a voter and their neighbour was found to be ten times more effective at increasing voting propensity than a standard pre-election mail out.
 - Even a softer tone – e.g. expressing gratitude for past voting without mentioning neighbours - combined with a message that voter habits are being monitored has been effective, e.g. 'our records indicate that you voted in 2008 and we hope to be able to thank you in the future for being a good citizen'.
- iv. **Door-to-door canvassing**
 - In person canvassing has been found to have a greater impact on voter participation than direct mail, email or phone calls.
 - Voting is highly contagious. A person who might be 25% likely to vote would become 85% likely to vote if a cohabitant decides to vote because of door-to-door canvassing, possibly due to lowered cost of voting or social pressure.
- v. **Group mentality**
 - Voters respond better to 'everyone is doing it' messages (e.g. "turnout is going to be high today") than to negative messages about expected turnout e.g. "don't be part of the problem".
- vi. **Trustworthy messengers**
 - Voters respond better to letters in less 'shiny' envelopes, similar to what they may expect from a tax authority.
 - Emails and text messages with less lively 'from' fields (e.g. Election Centre) also do better.

Target young people¹⁰⁵

Electoral Commission data shows that the council ward with the lowest turnout in 2012 was Liverpool Central. The city council has blamed 'voter apathy' for local elections specifically amongst the high proportion of students registered in the ward. (Higher turnout was seen in 2015 when the local and general elections coincided). Anecdotal evidence suggests that a problem does exist regarding some young people not even knowing that a council election is taking place. However, the impartial campaign group 'Bite the Ballot'¹⁰⁶ who encourage young people to vote say that many students are not apathetic, but feel that councils don't want to consult with them:

"Young people are not apathetic. They do care deeply about the area they live in, about the standard of housing, the number of police officers and so on. Local

¹⁰⁵ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹⁰⁶ <http://bitetheballot.co.uk/>

democracy needs to be repurposed and made more accessible, with more online consultation and more use of social media."

Members of BBC Generation 2016 – a project designed to ensure that younger people's voices are heard regarding elections and political events – agreed that there is an issue with student engagement, perhaps due to them being more interested in their home time than their place of study. This raises the question of whether students are aware that they are entitled to vote in local elections in both their hometown and their place of study.¹⁰⁷ This could be something worth promoting in Kirklees, where the University of Huddersfield has around 23,000 students. Previous efforts have included writing to tenants of halls of residence to encourage them to remind them to vote. These days, engaging with students on social media is likely to be more effective. (See section on digital technologies below.)

When targeting younger people, it is important to use an 'engagement' approach, rather than a preaching or lecturing tone which is less likely to be effective: 'inspire, don't preach'.¹⁰⁸

Citizenship education¹⁰⁹

Related to targeting young people is the importance of providing citizenship education in schools to improve voter engagement, specifically covering:

- The importance of voting
- The practicalities of registering to vote and participating in elections
- How to engage with politics more broadly.
- Specific discussion of the political and governmental structures and electoral systems of the UK.

There is a sense that such education provision could have wider positive implications for tackling the broader question of political engagement. Managing Director of Bite the Ballot has described an ideal scenario where this education is provided from the age of 14, and so by 16 the recipients feel empowered to register to vote, at 18 they are waiting to vote and play an active role - "not just once at every election but in between, going through the communication channels to the right people to voice their views and take a stake in their society. It could be wonderful for our country."

Some argue that a focus on the citizen duty element of voting is important, and even suggest that a 'citizenship ceremony' where newly eligible voters are presented with a certificate to commemorate their being able to participate in elections.

¹⁰⁷ Law Commission (2016) Electoral Law: Summary of Interim Report [online] available at: http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/electoral_law_interim_report_summary.pdf

¹⁰⁸ WPP The Government and Public Sector Practice (2015)

¹⁰⁹ House of Commons (2014)

Electoral reform^{110,111}

More substantial changes to the electoral system which have been suggested in order to increase turnout include:

- Compulsory voting (including just for first-time voters)
- Reducing the voting age
- Changing the First Past the Post electoral system

Compulsory voting^{112, 113} - International experience suggests that compulsory voting results in consistently high election turnout. In Australia, where people are fined if they don't vote, turnout in the 2013 general election was over 93%. Luxembourg also consistently sees consistent turnout rates of over 90% - consistently higher than turnout for any UK election in decades.¹¹⁴

Some commentators argue that compulsory voting is the only way to avoid any inequality in turnout, whilst others feel that it would treat only the symptom (i.e. low turnout) rather than the underlying problem (i.e. why people don't vote). Other concerns/potential risks relating to compulsory voting include:

- Potential political difficulties with introducing it in a country where it has no precedent.¹¹⁵
- Relatively high rates of 'spoiled' papers (5.9% of ballot papers in Australia were 'spoiled', compared with only 0.2% in the UK.)¹¹⁶
- People without strong views being coerced into voting a certain way by others.
- A sense that people should have the right not to participate and to abstain.¹¹⁷

Several sources including the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) – the UK's leading progressive thinktank – recommend compulsory voting for first time voters, based on the fact that voting is an acquired habit, and a belief that early experience has a lasting impact.¹¹⁸ It is felt that being forced to vote in their first election could begin the habit and break the cycle of non-voting which is often passed down through generations, and thus could have a significant and sustained impact on turnout. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council have similarly recommended compulsory voting for 16-18 year olds.¹¹⁹

Some commentators, however, advise against treating first time voters any differently from others.¹²⁰ Others recommend an option for 'none of the above' on the ballot paper if voting is compulsory, or indeed whether voting is compulsory or not, so that people do not feel compelled to vote for one of the candidates. The House of

¹¹⁰ House of Commons (2014)

¹¹¹ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹¹² House of Commons (2014)

¹¹³ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹¹⁴ House of Commons (2014)

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹¹⁷ Lever, A. (2009) 'Is Compulsory Voting Justified' in *Journal of Public Reason* 1,1.

¹¹⁸ WPP The Government and Public Sector Practice (2015)

¹¹⁹ House of Commons (2014)

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

Commons report recommends that a public debate regarding compulsory voting should be launched, with an option to vote for none of the above/to abstain included if it is introduced.

Reducing the voting age to 16¹²¹ - Reducing the voting age from 18 to 16 could increase youth turnout in the short term and overall turnout in the medium to long term. Some stakeholders claim that doing so has not had a significant impact on turnout (e.g. in the Isle of Man where the voting age was reduced in 2011, or the 2014 Scottish independence referendum). Others argue that it may have a positive impact, and that it should occur both as a matter of principle and to encourage parties to consider younger people's views more directly in their manifestos. There is also a sense that becoming eligible whilst at school might encourage higher proportions of people to register, as there would be a more seamless transition from citizenship education to putting the knowledge into practice. Because voting is habit forming, if the franchise was extended to 16 and 17 year olds it would be important that they actually exercise the right; consideration to the broader question of political literacy of young people would thus be important, e.g. with regard to citizenship education as already discussed.

Change the electoral system^{122,123} - The Electoral Reform Society¹²⁴ has noted that countries with proportional representation (PR) rather than the 'first past the post' system typically have higher turnouts, as people feel that their votes count. However, alternative systems are not without their criticism and there is no clear evidence that any would lead to higher turnout.¹²⁵ Many submissions to the House of Commons' consultation called for the implementation of some form of the Single Transferrable Vote system (STV), at least for local government elections initially.¹²⁶ It is felt that this would make results reflect voters' preferences more closely and make voting more positive. Others recommend that there should be greater public debate about possible electoral reforms.

The House of Commons report states that as centralisation increasingly gives way to devolution, the more that electors at national, regional and local levels will wish to exercise more right over their electoral systems. As such, they accept local debate and decisions about electoral reforms should increasingly take place, which will in turn positively impact engagement and participation.¹²⁷

Work out what voters want¹²⁸

Research from Survation has shown that non-voters tend to have the same concerns about political issues as voters, i.e. creating a stable economy, promoting jobs,

¹²¹ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ House of Commons (2014)

¹²⁴ <http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/>

¹²⁵ Wainwright, D. (2016)

¹²⁶ House of Commons (2014)

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Wainwright, D. (2016)

reducing poverty, reforming welfare and protecting the NHS. The key difference is that non-voters do not make the connection between those issues in principle and the electoral system in practice. When asked what might make them more inclined to vote, respondents tended to want better candidates to vote for or more information about parties and candidates; better candidates to vote for. Unfortunately, many also commented that there was nothing that would persuade them to vote.

APPENDIX 6: LGA's Thinking Toolkit for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements¹²⁹

Step 1: Plan your approach and assess your current position

- Establishing the purpose of the work – why do you want/need to change your governance arrangements?
- Establishing the scope for the work. The scope might consider the following issues:
 - How will the authority ensure that this work – from the consideration of options, to the implementation and review of new arrangements – will be led by elected members?
 - How will be make sure that this review of governance gets the views of all interested parties?
 - How wide should we look? Is this a review just of internal council decision-making, or are there knock on impacts on partners, who may need to be involved.
 - How can we ensure that the broad democratic expectations of local residents are built into the study?
 - Who will lead the review?
- Assessment – Assessing how you currently make decisions is not just about drawing a map of your systems or processes, or looking at individual bits of your governance arrangements separately. It is about taking an approach to the way you make decisions which recognises that the systems you adopt for member decision-making have an impact on everything you do. It is also about considering how you engage a wide range of stakeholders in that decision-making process. If you are considering a significant change such as a formal shift in your governance arrangements, which could lock you into a new decision-making structure for five years, you need to have carried out this fundamental exercise beforehand. It is potentially intensive, but will have benefits that reflect that good governance is not just about democratic services or even the internal workings of the council; it is also about the relationship between your authority, its elected members, partners and the public. Some of the things that you might want to consider will include:
 - How do we involve all members – not just in the way that decisions are made, but in the way that policy is developed?
 - How is the public voice integrated in the way decisions are made – at neighbourhood and authority-wide level?
 - What decisions are currently delegated to officers, and what decisions (under leader/cabinet and mayor/cabinet) are currently delegated to individual cabinet members?

¹²⁹ LGA (2014)

- How are members involved in the evaluation and review of decisions once they are made (in particular, in-year performance management and budget monitoring)?
- How can we improve our forward planning arrangements to open out decision-making, and policy development? Are there ways in which we can make things like background papers more easily accessible?

Step 2: Consider some design principles

- If you have undertaken an initial assessment you will have identified some strengths (practice and ways of working that you want to keep) and some weaknesses (ways of working that you want to stop or change substantially). These strengths and weaknesses might reflect the attitudes and behaviours of council decision-makers (both members and officers), partners, the public and others, as well as reflecting structural issues. Some examples include:
 - **Strengths and weaknesses in the member/officer relationship.** This might look like, for example, a commitment to involve all members in the policy development and decision-making process, through scrutiny, area committees, partnership boards and cabinet decision-making as appropriate, or conversely an officer-led process where only cabinet members are seen to have any stake in decision-making and non-executives are relegated to the position of passive spectators.
 - **Strengths and weaknesses in the way that forward planning/work programming occurs.** This might look like, for example, clarity and consistency in the way that officers approach policy development and decision-making, with plans being kept to and important, strategic decisions identified, or conversely a muddled plan composed of a mixture of operational and strategic decisions which reveals little about the priorities of decision-makers, or the way in which they formulate decisions.
 - **Strengths and weaknesses in the way that information about decisions (including background papers) are published and used.** This might look like, for example, proactive efforts to publish background papers as they are produced, and attempts made to respond positively when the assumptions in those background papers are challenged by others, or conversely an opaque system whereby attempts are not made to justify decisions and engagement is tightly controlled through consultation processes that are wholly divorced from the formal decision-making cycle.
 - **Strengths and weaknesses in the way that the council involves the public in major decisions.** This might look like, for example, a commitment on major policy changes to engage those most affected by those changes, or conversely a more defensive attitude that sees members or senior officers exerting control over the agenda for fear that the public will derail necessary decisions.
 - These strengths and weaknesses, and others like them, are not strengths and weaknesses in the various governance options per se. They are strengths and weaknesses in the way that your existing governance arrangements work in your council.

- You can use this to develop some design principles. These should not be vague, general aspirations such as making the council operate more democratically or enhancing transparency. They should be tangible aims that you can return to in future to help you to come to a judgment on whether your new systems are working or not. For example, you could state that any new governance system should:
 - involve all councillors in the development of key policies
 - identify key evidence sources for major decisions and demonstrate how they are being used to inform the substance of that decision
 - focus member involvement on strategic decision-making; design officer delegations to focus on operational decisions – design the budget and policy framework to reflect this fundamental principle
 - provide a key role for councillors in performance management and in-year financial monitoring that takes account of their unique perspective as elected politicians.

These are just examples to demonstrate the clarity you need in your objectives; there may well be others that are particularly important for your council.

Step 3: Think of ways to meet these objectives and put a plan in place

- How will you get there? What changes to the way you work might be necessary in terms of both culture and structure? Some issues to think about that relate to culture and attitudes include:
 - How to establish clearer, more consistent and less arbitrary rules to define what does and does not go on the forward plan as a key decision.
 - How to ensure that the procedure for dealing with key decisions contains provision for involving all members and members of the public.
 - Whether such provision can be made under your existing arrangements (assuming that you operate the leader/cabinet model). This would involve consideration of whether moving to a new governance option (for example, the committee system) would provide members with the assurance that they will be involved in making decisions on strategic issues.
 - How to tighten up (in terms of methodology) and open out (in terms of transparency) performance management systems – including the potential for more member involvement. Greater transparency for the public is a useful by-product of such an approach.
- Different design principles, and different approaches to meeting the requirements of those principles, will require different structural solutions, for example:
 - minor changes to the constitution to strengthen the existing forward plan
 - more major changes to schemes of delegations, financial procedures, performance management systems and/or systems used to engage with the public, within your existing governance option
 - formal changes to member decision-making structures that stop short of a formal governance change – for example, the adoption of a hybrid system

- an all-out change from one governance option to another under the Local Government Act 2000.
- You may find that your objectives and design principles can be met without a formal change in governance. You may, for example, be able to meet them by bolstering the role that councillors play through the overview and scrutiny process. As part of this process, you may find it useful to consider the risks in taking either formal or informal action to change governance arrangements, and to establish how you will seek to mitigate those risks.

Step 4: Making the change

The following council processes and systems may need to be looked at when you are amending your decision-making arrangements, and any relevant legal issues should also be considered. You will need to think about the way you design these changes, and the way that members make decisions on their implementation (which will usually be at full council):

- financial procedures, including the operation of audit
- access to, and publication of, performance scorecards and quarterly financial monitoring information
- the forward plan and corporate work programme
- changes to committee structures (which can happen at a time other than at Council AGM)
- formal changes in governance, which incorporates all of the above changes.

It is important that the way in which these changes are made itself reflects the design principles which you have established for your new governance system. You might also want to consider a risk plan so that you can be aware of issues or situations that could negatively affect your proposed arrangements. The formal move from one governance option to another will take effect following the council's AGM, with a resolution of full council having to have been made beforehand. This earlier resolution needs to be made in good time, to allow for the council to undertake any necessary consultation with notice requirements set out in the Act.

Step 5: Return to the issue after a year and review how things have gone

It is important to evaluate how things have gone after a year or so, in order to see whether the resources you have expended in making the change in governance have made the difference you hoped.

This need not be a complicated bureaucratic exercise – just a short assessment of the position, informed by insight from councillors and any other interested parties. Doing this at the time of council AGM gives you the opportunity to make any necessary tweaks to the constitution.

If the changes have not resulted in the outcome you were trying to achieve, there are ways and means of addressing that. The detailed work carried out the previous year to plan and deliver the new governance arrangements will help with this. It may have

been that your plan was too ambitious, or there may have been factors – internal or external – that were not taken into account, or that were difficult to predict (political issues, for example). If you developed a risk plan it will be much easier to identify and act on any failings. You can review the likely reasons for the failure and take action to address them.

APPENDIX 7: Council governance reviews - case studies¹³⁰

Cornwall (unitary authority, South West)

Cornwall undertook an independent review of governance arrangements over the course of 2011 and 2012. This was a comprehensive exercise, chaired by an independent person, which took evidence from a wide range of sources. It should be seen in the context of Cornwall's creation as a unitary authority in 2009, which gave rise to a need to consider how governance would operate across a very large geographical area.

A member panel was established to lead the review, assisted by an external panel of experts from outside the council. The panels took evidence from a wide range of stakeholders from within the county, and from experts nationally, which they used to formulate a set of recommendations.

Transparency of decision-making was seen as a high priority, as was the need to ensure that decision-making was connected to people at local level through structures such as Community Network Panels and parish councils. The role of non-executive members was considered – in the context of their scrutiny role and engagement with the policy development process, as well as their training and development.

The member panel recommended no formal changes to the council's existing governance arrangements (that is, that the council remain under the leader-cabinet model) but did recommend changes to that model. In particular, changes were recommended around the role of those members in formal "cabinet support" positions, the engagement with the council with community structures and the strengthening of overview and scrutiny. The Panel felt that improvements to decision-making and governance were not necessarily predicated on a formal change to governance models.

Cambridgeshire (county council, East of England)

Following the May 2013 elections, a resolution was put to the council's AGM to adopt the committee system of governance, on the basis that the committee system was "the most democratic and representative form of governance". Originally it was planned that this would take effect from 2013 but advice was given that this would not be permitted under the Localism Act. As such the decision was made to change in 2014.

Proposals have been developed over the course of 2013, with detailed plans having been submitted to members for examination in October 2013. Members agreed to the creation of a small number of service committees, with a General Purposes committee to act as a "clearing house" to coordinate the role of those service committees.

Changes will also be made to officer delegation arrangements, whereby some decisions will be made in consultation with members, as well as the more traditional classes of decisions

reserved for members, and those delegated entirely to officers. There is also provision for the retention of a form of call-in, with the possibility – under strictly limited circumstances – of issues to be passed up for decision at full council.

¹³⁰ LGA (2014)

Stroud (district council, South West)

Following debate, the council resolved to move to the committee system in November 2012, following an executive-led commitment to pursue it in May 2012. A cross-party member working group was established to consider how such a change would happen, which resulted in formal proposals being put to council in April 2013.

Some design principles were established, submitted to council in November 2012 as part of a report on the relative features of the different systems, and used to develop the final arrangements, submitted to council in April 2013.

Delegations to committees and delegations to officers were looked at very carefully as part of these arrangements although ultimately no significant amendments to delegations were made.

The result has been a streamlined committee structure without a separate overview and scrutiny function.

Nottinghamshire (county council, East Midlands)

An undertaking was given in the 2009 election manifesto of the Conservative group that they would take steps to adopt the committee system when the legislation allowed. They started taking formal steps to change before the Localism Act was enacted, and formally changed in May 2012.

Nottinghamshire's approach was based on the presumption that a committee system would be a more open, democratic and transparent approach to member decision-making. The council has taken its pre-2000 committee structure as a model for its current approach. Officer delegations have not, however, been subject to any alterations. The council resolved that it would only undertake any change on the basis of that change being cost-neutral; there is no additional cost to the operation of their committee system over and above that of the leader-cabinet system.

Originally, Nottinghamshire planned not to have a separate overview and scrutiny committee, but since May 2012 the decision has been made to establish one, principally to carry out the authority's health overview and scrutiny functions (which cannot be carried out by its health committee, which acts as the county Health and Wellbeing Board).

Kent (county council, South East)

Kent operates what have been termed hybrid arrangements. While the council still operates legally under the leader-cabinet model, cabinet decision making is supplemented through cabinet committees, which are the de facto decision-making bodies. Committees receive officer reports and make recommendations, which are submitted to the executive for ratification. This system's success rests on the assurance by the executive that they will ratify recommendations made to them by committees; as long as that assurance exists, this ratification is purely a procedural matter and the decision is made in the committee itself.

APPENDIX 8: Opportunities for digital technologies in governance¹³¹

Using digital to inform and consult people

Digital technologies open up multiple new ways of creating two-way interactions or feedback loops between local authorities and local residents. They also enable communication to be more frequent and frictionless for citizens. Social media channels can merge with people's usual online habits, making local government easier to engage with. Similarly, dedicated apps for smartphones or desktops can be used for specific purposes, e.g. FixMyStreet which is used to report problems such as broken potholes or streetlights. This makes it easier for placeshaping activities to respond in a targeted way to the needs and preferences of local people:

- In Seoul, online and offline channels of communication give residents numerous ways of engaging with the city government. The Mayor of Seoul has over one million Twitter and Facebook followers, online channels have been streamlined for comments and complaints, and new apps have been developed by the city government. One example is the Open Apartment app which opens up data across all apartment blocks in the city about service charges, utility fees, and provides a way for residents to communicate with each other.
- In Tel Aviv, DigiTel allows the city to produce personalised news feeds for each person, based on their interests, location, transport preferences and activities. It also provides a means of sending personalised messages and notifications to people from the city government.
- In Moscow, the city has created an app to survey opinion from people about issues such as transport, healthcare and education. The app - Active Citizen - uses a points system which rewards people for voting, and can be exchanged for city services such as parking spaces or bike rental.

Digital to involve and collaborate with people

Digital technologies can be used by local authorities to crowdsource ideas, develop policies collaboratively with local residents, and enable citizens to deliberate on options and proposals. Examples include:

- [Loomio](#), an open source web application for deliberation and decision making. Its founders had been involved in the Occupy Movement and wanted to create an online tool that would replicate the consensus decision making processes that had taken place in the Occupy General Assembly. The tool has a simple interface; the screen is split into two sides, one for discussion and one to see how people are voting. It has been used by activists, political parties – most notably Podemos in Spain, and businesses. Unlike tools such as [Liquid Feedback](#), [DemocracyOS](#) and YourPriorities, Loomio was created for relatively small groups. However, it has been used at the city level by Wellington City Council as part of a public consultation on the city's alcohol management strategy.
- Another example from local government is [Better Reykjavik](#), developed by the non-profit Citizens Foundation in Reykjavik, which provides a platform for citizens

¹³¹ Benton, M. & Simon, J. (2016)

to propose, debate, and vote on ideas for improving the city and its services. Every month, the city council deliberates on the ten to 15 most popular ideas. Roughly 60 per cent of the city's residents have used Better Reykjavik, and the city has spent €1.9 million developing more than 200 projects based on citizen ideas posted through the platform.

- At the national level, [Open Ministry in Finland](#) crowdsources new legislation. If an idea posted by a citizen gets support from more than 50,000 people, policy experts draft a bill which is then put before parliament for a vote. Gay marriage was recently legalised through this process. Also in Finland, the Department for Environment experimented with publicly crowdsourcing a piece of legislation - the Off-Road Traffic Act - which regulates the use of snowmobiles. The legislation was drafted in three phases using a digital platform: problem mapping, ideas generation, and citizens and experts providing scrutiny over the ideas proposed.

Digital as a means of decision-making

In recent years city governments have been using digital platforms to allow people to choose how some public budgets are allocated:

- A notable example is 'Madame Mayor, I have an idea' where the Mayor of Paris allocated 480 million Euros (or 5 per cent of the city's investment budget) to be spent by the public between 2014 and 2020. During the pilot phase in 2014, the municipality received 5,000 proposals. All votes and proposals were submitted online. To make sure that the process included a broader range of people, in particular the elderly and ethnic minorities, the city organised meetings across the city to supplement online activities. The overall budget was divided across the 20 arrondissements of Paris but was weighted so that poorer neighbourhoods received more money.

Citizen engagement can bring the ideas, needs and preferences of people closer to the decision-making process and broaden participation – especially amongst the young. This is vital in the context of place-shaping where the objective is to make great places to live, work and do business. However, online methods will need to be supplemented by more traditional offline methods to make sure that some sections within society are not excluded:

- For instance in Seoul, a city which has made citizen engagement its main priority, the city government has combined digital communication channels with offline face-to-face methods, such as a mobile city hall which visits neighbourhoods to better understand residents' concerns.

APPENDIX 9: List of references

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