



**Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group –
Wednesday 29 August 2018**

Networked councillors - digital skills, confidence and content for civic good

Background

An important part of the Commission's work involved looking at the councillor role in the context of a networked society. Digital technologies enable ordinary citizens to get their voices heard and create opportunities to work together to create social good through collaboration. Citizens already use the internet as a place to collaborate for civic good. There are opportunities for our councillors to work with existing civic networks and active citizens online and to help grow the civic conversation.

Council have agreed the following outcomes in the context of this work:

- ***Councillors have the confidence, skills, support and capacity to lead the changing relationship between the council and local citizens. They are placed at the heart of the Council.***
- ***Councillors are accessible and confident in their role in a digitally networked society.***
- ***Democratic content is accessible, digestible and delivered in a way that considers the needs of the citizen and councillors alike.***

The Commission believes that the principal focus of a councillor's time and energy should be on working closely with the citizens and communities they represent. Councillors should be developing dialogue and networks from the ground up, within their wards – and they should have the time, tools, support, skills and confidence they need to be able to do that.

Using digital tools and technologies to create and share relevant, timely and accessible democratic content with our citizens is important for building trust and for strengthening our local networks. This is one of the ways we can help citizens and councillors to collaborate effectively.

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It will also help our councillors to grow their digital confidence and skills, which is important in the context of the networked society that we live in.

If we are serious about engaging our citizens in local democracy we need to work harder to look at innovative ways of presenting and sharing our content. This is consistent with the views we received from our councillors and their political groups. We believe that digital technologies provide us with the opportunity to prototype different ways of working, which will benefit both councillors and citizens by growing our networks and by making our democratic content more useful and easier to understand.

In light of this, the Commission has made the following recommendations:

- Kirklees Council should support all our councillors to understand and embrace digital technology. Digital literacy should be a core expectation of the councillor role. It should be part of new councillor induction and councillor development, so that we support councillors in developing their digital skills and confidence, and enable them to play an active part in explaining our decision-making processes to our citizens. Commission members should pilot this approach.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION

- Kirklees Council should review our approach to creating and sharing democratic content. This should involve exploring different and innovative ways of developing content to facilitate dialogue and engagement before, during and after the formal decision-making process.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION

- Kirklees Council should provide our councillors with a live social media audit that provides details of social media use, online networks and connectivity for the ward they represent.

LINKED RECOMMENDATION

- Kirklees Council, in partnership with key providers, should develop a set of democratic content standards which should be used as a basis for all content that we produce and publish as part of decision-making. These should include using clear language, helping people to understand what point we're at on the decision-making journey and making sure that our content is based on citizens' needs;

LINKED RECOMMENDATION

This report sets out a suggested approach to developing digital skills, confidence and content for civic good.

The Theme Lead for this work is Diane Sims.

Suggested approach

The key elements of our approach will be:

- **Networks** – We will focus on local networks and the councillor's place at their heart. It's about creating an environment in which the civic conversation can grow. This is different from looking at digital skills in isolation, so our approach to learning will involve networks and partnerships.
- **Relevance** – We will be led by what's relevant for our citizens, and what's relevant for councillors.
- **Confidence** – We know that confidence with digital technologies grows from understanding their relevance, taking some simple first steps, exploring what works for each of us, and learning in informal settings, often from our peers. It's a gradual, ongoing process which involves working with tools that change all the time. This means it's important for us to develop a flexible approach.
- **Content** – Relevant and engaging content is what helps us to participate, and helps to grow connections, so we must develop our approach to digital content as part of this work.
- **Outcomes** – Our activities will be outcome-focussed. For example: digital for collaboration, for influencing, for developing policy, for raising your profile or for being an ambassador for your area. We will explore how digital tools and approaches can help in response to specific identified needs.
- **For all councillors** – We recognise that councillors are at different stages, including those who are reluctant to engage with online networks, those who have specific things they would like to learn more about, and those who are advocates of using digital technologies. We will offer a progression route for councillors at each stage, from encouraging initial interest to becoming a digital champion.
- **Working in the open** – This work particularly lends itself to sharing and developing ideas online, and we will take opportunities to do this wherever appropriate. We will also encourage councillors to engage with the open culture of digital, as well as making use of digital and social media tools.
- **Telling the story** – We must tell the story of why digital matters for our local democracy, but also clearly demonstrate how this can complement and enhance offline activity. The nature of the work presents an ideal opportunity to show that we are upholding the Commission's key principles. We should be keen to share our learning and to involve local and national partners in the work.

Our key activities will be:

1. Understanding what we have, and what we need

(Research: September. Personas: October)

Our first step will be to explore the current status of our local networks, councillors' current use of digital technologies, and attitudes towards developing skills, confidence and content. We will document:

- What community networks already exist in our wards, what their activity is, and how strongly our councillors are connected with these networks.
- What digital and social media tools councillors are using now, and in what way.
- How councillors currently rate their confidence with specific digital technologies.
- Examples of what councillors would like to learn, and what things councillors are aiming to achieve in their wards that digital technologies could help with.
- Our current channels and approaches for sharing democratic content, and the content reach.

We will use a combination of gathering insight from all councillors, and conducting some more in-depth interviews with councillors who have different levels of engagement with digital technologies. We will look for opportunities to conduct some of this research as part of ongoing work to explore the councillor role and how it is supported, and as part of our work to put councillors at the heart of the organisation.

We will use what we learn to create an audit of current activity, plus a series of personas (anonymised case studies) describing councillors who are at different stages and making recommendations about what would help councillors who are at each stage to progress.

Alongside this work, we will audit our current democratic content (including our web content, social media channels, methods of content management, and third party systems). This work will give us a starting point for more in-depth discussions with our citizens about setting new standards and developing our approach.

2. Working with citizens to develop our democratic content

(Recruitment: September to October)

We will bring together a group of citizens who are interested in working with us to improve our democratic content. Our suggestion is to involve citizens who have different levels of understanding and engagement, and to actively recruit those who are “not the usual suspects”. From this group, we will convene a panel to meet in-person only when there is a specific task or activity to complete, and we will select participants who can offer insight relevant to that particular task (for example, when looking at basic content about how local democracy works, it will be helpful to hear from citizens who don't already have this knowledge).

We also propose to ask for feedback via our online communications channels on a regular basis. This will act as a check and balance to our work around democratic content and will be a good way of gathering examples of how citizens would like to connect with councillors.

Once we have established this group of citizens, our intention is for the group to also become a useful source of insight for the wider Democracy Commission work programme, with willing participants who can be called on to offer feedback, challenge and ideas.

3. Piloting different ways of learning and collaborating

(October to March)

We will test out different ways of learning digital skills, which will be of benefit for both councillors and citizens. Activities will be outcome-focussed and will involve informal learning, peer-to-peer learning or networking where possible. These practical pilots will be developed in response to identified needs.

Some examples of the different types of learning activity that this could include are:

- Café-style social media surgeries, with one-to-one advice.
- Peer support sessions, with councillors offering advice to other councillors.
- Workshop on what makes engaging content.
- Demonstration of ways to connect with citizens (for example, a Skype ward surgery).
- Online ideas boards for democratic content.
- Templates for sharing good quality, useful social media posts.
- Case study examples of people who communicate effectively online.
- Get-together with local citizens who are using digital tools to collaborate, sharing their learning.

We will evaluate each activity, with the aim of identifying successful activities that could form part of a menu of learning options for councillors. We will work openly (for example, by sharing information about what we're doing online, and by working with partners) so we can test whether these activities will deliver useful outcomes for our citizens as well as developing skills and confidence for councillors. We will also evaluate the practicalities, such as costs of an ongoing programme, scheduling, venues and partnerships.

4. Creating new tools and approaches

(November to April)

We will use what we learn from our initial research, from our ongoing work with citizens, and from our pilots to develop useful tools and approaches. Our products will include content guidelines, a live social media audit, and learning options for councillors. We will develop new approaches to embedding digital skills for councillors in their changing role, and to creating and sharing democratic content.

Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group are asked to:

- Consider (and sign off?) the objectives and proposed approach for undertaking this project, in particular the key activities as set out in the “Suggested approach” section of this report.
- Identify and agree one or two members from the Working Group to take strategic lead responsibility for this area of work.

Report produced by Diane Sims, in collaboration with the wider Programme Team.