



## **Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group**

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

#### **1. Background and context**

Digital technologies enable ordinary citizens to get their voices heard and create opportunities for us to work together to create social good through collaboration.

There are opportunities for our councillors to work with existing civic networks and active citizens online and to help grow the civic conversation.

We want both councillors and citizens to have the digital skills, confidence and content that are needed for a strong local democracy in a networked society.

Council 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.

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 that we can help citizens and councillors to collaborate effectively.

The work contributes to these recommendations from the [Growing a stronger local democracy](#) report:

- 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

## **2. Working Group expectations and progress**

The Working Group agreed an approach based around these key principles:

- Networks – focus on the councillor role in local networks
- Relevance – focus on what's relevant for both citizens and councillors
- Confidence – acknowledge that we need informal ways of building confidence
- Content – create relevant and engaging content to help people participate
- Outcomes – outcome-focussed activities (about what we use digital *for*)
- For all councillors – recognise that councillors are at different stages
- Working in the open – share the work as it happens, embrace digital culture
- Telling the story – tell the story of why digital matters for our local democracy

The key stages of activities commissioned by the Working Group are:

1. Understanding what we have, and what we need
2. Working with citizens to develop our democratic content
3. Piloting different ways of learning and collaborating
4. Creating new tools and approaches

We have progressed with key activities one and two.

Activities three and four are dependent on completion of our research (activity one).

## Understanding what we have, and what we need

### Networked Councillors survey

We created and shared our Networked Councillors survey. This asks councillors about their confidence, skills and experience with using digital technologies to connect with citizens in their wards. This gave us some insight about four of the areas we identified in our project plan:

- 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.
- What community networks already exist in our wards, what their activity is, and how strongly our councillors are connected with these networks.

We used a digital survey format, shared via direct emails and advance messages from Councillor Support. We also offered a paper version and shared reminders.

Our target was for a third of councillors to take part, which we reached ahead of the pre-election period as planned. We then contacted newly elected councillors. In total:

- 29 councillors (42%) responded –  
25 via SurveyMonkey, 4 via the printed survey
- 15 Labour, 6 Conservative, 5 Liberal Democrat, 1 Green, 1 Independent, 1 Heavy Woollen Independent

Some of the findings of our survey are:

- Participating councillors said they feel generally confident using digital tools to connect with citizens. The average score for confidence was 6.9 out of 10.
- Councillors who gave the same score for confidence had varied online activity. This may suggest that we don't have a consistent understanding about what good digital engagement looks like. It also shows that different approaches suit our local places.
- Some councillors told us that they lack confidence and basic digital skills.
- The digital tools used most by our councillors to connect with citizens are: Social media, Photo sharing and Text messaging.
- The digital tools used least by our councillors to connect with citizens are: Blogging, Video chat and Collaborative working.

- The things councillors said they would most like to learn more about are: Social media and Blogging.
- 35% of participants (including many with high confidence) said they were not willing to share skills with other councillors. 35% said they were unsure about sharing their skills. 30% were happy to share skills, preferring an informal setting for doing this.
- Participants were interested in all of the options for activities, with each activity being found useful by more than half of the councillors who answered this question.
- The activities councillors said would be most useful are: Examples of good content, Practical sessions, Themed sessions and Templates.
- Some participants gave specific examples that will help when planning activities.
- There's a need for improving understanding about digital culture (not just the tools).

The full survey results are available as an Appendix.

### Digital content audit

We are reviewing our current channels and approaches for sharing democratic content (including our web content, social media channels, methods of content management, and third party systems), and the content reach. This work gives us a starting point for more in-depth discussions with our citizens about setting new standards and developing our approach. It is also helping us to identify gaps in information provision, and areas where we could consolidate our efforts.

### Insight about networks

We asked some councillors about local networks in their wards as part of our research activities around supporting councillors in their changing role. We have also begun to gather some insight about effective local networks as part of our Place Standard engagement activities. We have recognised the need for a more systematic approach, so that we can have a good understanding of what networks are active in each ward. We need to grow those networks and support councillors in being at their heart.

### Collating examples of good digital content

Our survey shows that councillors would find examples of good digital content particularly useful. We are developing a method of collating and sharing examples of good digital content, using an online social bookmarking tool called Wakelet.

## **Working with citizens to develop our democratic content**

### Democracy Seekers

We ran a recruitment campaign for [Democracy Seekers](#) in February 2019, as part of our ongoing commitment to focus on the aspirations and experiences of our citizens. Participants will have the opportunity to work on specific tasks aimed at improving our democratic content, so that we can strengthen our local democracy.

The initial recruitment was mainly via email bulletins and social media posts, using some new, quirky photographic imagery. We also produced promotional cards. Further recruitment took place in September 2019 ahead of our first practical activity.

- 81 people in total have now signed up to be Democracy Seekers (with the vast majority signing up during the campaign).
- At least 32 different geographical areas in Kirklees are represented through these participants.
- There is a good spread of ages, although we only have 1 participant in the 17 to 24 age group so far.

The first practical activity for our Democracy Seekers is: “What do councillors do?” Participants in a discussion workshop on Wednesday 2nd October 2019 will work on 3 tasks related to citizens’ understanding of, and connection with, councillors:

- What do you want and expect from your councillor?
- How do you find out what your councillors do?
- And how could councillors make better use of digital tools to connect with us?

An online version of these tasks will also be offered. The learning will contribute both to this project and to our work on the changing councillor role.

An update on the practical activity will be given at the Working Group meeting on 10th October 2019.

If this approach proves useful for citizens, future tasks would contribute to other aspects of our work. We are also considering ways of enabling more citizens to participate in Democracy Seekers tasks, in their own community.

The next activity could potentially focus on Open meetings & Webcasting.

The main outcomes of our activities so far are to give us a better understanding of what both citizens and councillors want, and how we might create new connections. Importantly, we have also established a method for citizens to work with us on our practical activities.

### **3. Next steps and issues to consider**

The next stages of the work are:

- Piloting different ways of learning and collaborating
- Creating new tools and approaches

The Working Group are asked to consider and discuss the options for potential pilot activities in response to what we've learned from the Networked Councillors survey and from our citizens.

Next we need to use this learning to design and develop activities to strengthen the role of councillors as active participants in local networks, as part of their changing role in a digitally networked society.



## Networked councillors survey

### What's useful for you?

#### How we introduced the survey to councillors

As part of our response to the Kirklees Democracy Commission's recommendations about [Local democracy in a networked society](#), our 'Networked councillors' project will be helping you to connect with citizens online.

Many citizens already use the internet as a place to collaborate for civic good. We want to make sure that our councillors are part of this civic conversation and can help it to grow.

There are opportunities for councillors to work with existing civic networks and active citizens online. You may like some support to develop your digital skills and confidence so that you can be more active in these networks. Or you may already be confident doing this, and have advice that you can share with other councillors.

We're asking you to answer a few quick questions, so that we can better understand what's useful and relevant for you. We'll use the information you tell us to help design opportunities for you to learn, share and connect with citizens online.

#### How we shared the survey

- 05/03/19 Advance email from Councillor Support
- 06/03/19 Direct link sent to each councillor via SurveyMonkey
- 13/03/19 Reminder email from Councillor Support
- 18/03/19 Reminder direct link sent to councillors who hadn't taken part yet
- 02/04/19 Printed version supplied to Councillors theme leads
- 27/06/19 Direct link sent to each newly elected councillor
- 23/08/19 Reminder direct link sent to each newly elected councillor

#### Who participated

- 29 councillors (42%) responded – 25 via SurveyMonkey, 4 via the printed survey
- 15 Labour, 6 Conservative, 5 Lib Dem, 1 Green, 1 Independent, 1 HW Independent

## Survey results

### Q1. In general, how confident are you with using digital tools to connect with citizens?

[on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is the highest]

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	1		2	2	3	2	2	4	8	4

Average score = **6.9**

### Q2. Which of these do you already use for connecting with citizens, or would you like to learn more about using?

	Don't use	Use a little	Use a lot	Would like to learn more about
<b>Text messaging</b> (SMS, WhatsApp etc)	4	12	11	2
<b>Photo sharing</b> (taking photos with a phone or tablet and sharing online)	6	9	13	4
<b>Video chat</b> (Facetime, Skype, Google Hangouts etc)	19	6	1	3
<b>Social media</b> (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc)	3	10	14	5
<b>Blogging</b> (WordPress, Blogspot etc)	21	4	2	5
<b>Collaborative working</b> (Google Docs, Sheets, Slides etc)	19	6	3	2

Do you use any other digital tools? If so, please tell us which ones:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what's app</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• i am using the new casework program which I am finding now easy to make work for me</li> </ul> |
|---|



**Q3. If you're interested in learning more about any of these tools, can you give us an example or two of how you'd like to be able to use digital tools in your role as a ward councillor? We are particularly interested in what outcomes you'd like to achieve in your ward, and how we can help with that.**

- main outcomes for any tools to use it to be more efficient, quicker turnaround, prompt results (in the eyes of the resident) any tool has to be easy on the eye - UX. It has to be collaborative meaning the resident, on most levels, should be able to use it.
- The fact that I do not use all these tools does not mean that I don't know how to so I am comfortable with my knowledge of technology.
- The photo sharing would be extremely useful contacting officers from various departments with local issues
- blogs / wordpress outcome as another form of newsletter type communications
- I often have to rely on others to get information e.g. re a public meeting or activity in the ward, into social media. There are also various groups that I do similar work with who I would like to be able to contact in 'one go' rather than laboriously repeating the information e.g. news of funding.
- I would like to be able to talk about decisions made in the council, and the reasoning behind them, either in the form of an electronic leaflet or a blog
- Google Docs would be immensely helpful when working with fellow ward councillors on joint initiatives. Blogging would be helpful in maintaining a connection with residents. Additionally I would like to know more about YouTube
- would like to use facebook to get to more people in targeted posts Need to be able to use word press and one note
- Getting message out to residents, using the observatory collating data - used to be able to access ward profiles with easy to read information now overcrowded - Better training.
- Having the appropriate device to use all social media effectively
- I would like to be able to present digitally, create a kind of newspaper
- Most villages have some sort of community page or website I'd like to use, but often it just generates negative comments from trolls which puts me off using

**Q4. If you're not interested in learning more, please can you tell us why this isn't helpful for you?**

- Face to Face is important to me
- Do not approve of anti-social media!
- I am happy with the knowledge I have and it serves me well
- Know sufficient to do the job I feel
- I prefer people to ring me or email.
- Already know what I need to know.

**Q5. If you're already using digital tools to connect with citizens, would you be willing to share your experiences with other Kirklees councillors?**

Yes, I would take part in an informal session with other councillors	Yes, I would give a quick video interview to help others learn	Yes, I would talk to officers so they can share my learning	Not sure	No
5	1	3	10	10

Additional comment: "I would be willing to work with anyone, but my skills are minimal".

**Q6. Which of these activities would you find useful, to help you develop your confidence and skills with using digital tools to connect with citizens?**

	Yes, a little	Yes, a lot	Yes (total)	Not useful for me
Sessions focussed on a particular topic or theme	12	7	19	7
Something informal where you can ask questions	8	8	16	9
Advice and support from other councillors	10	3	13	11
Collaborative sessions with citizens and groups	6	7	13	12
Good examples of effective digital content	8	13	21	4
Discussion groups about using digital tools	9	7	16	10
Practical sessions – setting up channels etc.	9	10	19	10
Templates that you can use on social media etc.	8	10	18	6

Is there something else you'd like? Please tell us:

- digital tool workshops for off the shelf tools that could be used to better the experience
- I'd like to be able to edit videos
- Easy to use quick guides for all councillors
- I would like skills in all these areas, but I would like to practice in an elemental course.

**Q7. What active online networks are there in your ward? Please let us know about any facebook groups, community websites, email lists or other networks, and say whether you already participate.**

- all of the above, and participated when required
- birkenshaw - east bierley & surrounding areas the birstall & howden clough area (community group) birstall moans gomersal matters group birstall matters hunsworth village chat
- Various facebook groups focussed around villages.
- Golcar Cowlersley Milnsbridge Longwood facebook use but probably not enough
- multiple facebook groups, telegram groups, whatsapp, Instagram, twitter,
- Facebook community page
- HeckyLights, Heckmondwike Matters, Friends of Firth Park, Friends of Heckmondwike Library. I have to send emails to get info on.
- at least 7 local Facebook groups exist that i look and, and some times make comment on
- Positively Marsden, Marsden a local place for local people, Outlane Banter. Too numerous to mention. I participate in several.
- dalton community fb group (I created) dalton councillors page (I created) 2 x kirkheaton community groups
- Facebook sites in Gomersal, Liversedge and Roberttown/Hartshead/Norristhorpe. Not on them.
- Almondbury Information #MyLepton LeptonLink Almondbury Past and Present Almondbury Library Friends (ALFA)
- None that I am aware of only are own Councillors facebook page. Community groups have there own websites but there isn't a community group as far as I am aware.
- Facebook groups
- Several Facebook Groups
- Facebook groups - Dewsbury Matters, Dewsbury Crimes, Dewsbury Pictures Old and New. I do participate in these groups.
- Loads! Yes
- Grange Moor Facebook Community Page  
Flockton Facebook Community Page  
Flockton Bypass Facebook Community Page  
Shepley Facebook Community Page (there are several)  
Stocksmoor website  
Shelley Community Association  
Friends of Shepley and Shelley Community Page (I am blocked)  
Earnley Tye Facebook Community Page

**Q8. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about using digital tools to connect with citizens?**

- only that the councillor portal is still lacking in a UX that a case can be logged on the run and can be managed and updated simply. It could use an app` based experience so we could have residents that could add cases after being vetted via councillors
- the myth busting and training is needed as many cllrs think its a place where you will get a lot of criticism if you post your activities and council related information. the understanding and training is needed that its most appropriate to have a personal separate platform and a separate professional platform. platforms such as twitter can be linked for wider reach.
- ? I don't know what I don't know.
- the most frustrating thing for me is officers not using social media groups to share information.
- Ensure that the art of conversation is not lost that whilst digital is effective also

## **Results summary**

Some of the initial findings of our survey are:

- Participating councillors said they feel generally confident using digital tools to connect with citizens. The average score for confidence was 6.9 out of 10.
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