

APPENDIX A: Research & Examples Of Best Practice

Kirklees Democracy Commission

Kirklees Council set up a Democracy Commission in 2016, led by a cross-party group of councillors and an independent chair from the University of Huddersfield. It focused on three key areas:

- The role of councillors in a representative and participatory democracy
- Elections and the electoral cycle
- Governance, accountability and decision-making

The Democracy Commission's final report (['Growing A Stronger Democracy From The Ground Up'](#)), which was published in June 2017, identified several ways of building a new 'democratic relationship' with residents (as part of the 'Decision-Making' theme):

- Changing the culture so that engagement with residents does not only take place when there are problems or challenges
- Supporting residents to understand how decisions are made and what is happening at each stage, whether or not they agree with the final decision
- Ensuring Council business is genuinely open to all residents (e.g. reviewing the way that meetings are run, creating more informal opportunities for engagement)

It also developed the concept of 'active citizenship':

- 'Being an active citizen involves informal participation, community activity, informing decisions, campaigning, engaging with public services, petitioning, protesting and having a real stake in the place where you live. It means taking an interest in what happens locally and having a voice. You should feel able to influence your community's future and be willing to share what you know.'

Barriers To Participation

Increasing participation at community level improves local service delivery, raises local accountability, empowers communities and develops cohesive communities. It is also vital for reconnecting citizens with the process of government and improving satisfaction with electoral democracy. A study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (['Routes & Barriers To Citizen Governance'](#)) explored the realities of citizen governance through the testimonies of 50 women from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities actively engaged in Birmingham and Wolverhampton. It found that:

- Engagement with governance structures mostly stemmed from a combination of factors, such as personal interest, exposure to the community and voluntary sector, and background influences like faith, upbringing and life experiences
- Lack of broader community engagement was attributed to factors such as the complexity of local governance structures and excessive bureaucracy as well as lack of time, awareness, confidence and expertise
- Over three-quarters of the BME women had experienced gender, race and/or faith discrimination. They believed that race and gender stereotyping and the existence of 'glass ceilings' made it harder for them to access and progress within governance structures. Community attitudes and beliefs also impinged on the ability of some women of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background to participate

There may also be an opportunity to raise awareness amongst the public about the role of councillors and encourage a new generation to take part, building on the work of Lewisham's Barriers To Politics Working Group.

Digital Technology

Digital technology can encourage greater participation, better decision-making and improved levels of trust between residents and Councils – an example of where technology has been used creatively in decision-making is:

- [Let's Talk Newcastle](#). A bespoke online engagement and consultation platform which allows residents to have their say about Newcastle Council's spending priorities

However, digital exclusion (the inability to access online products or services or to use simple forms of digital technology) disproportionately affects vulnerable people, low-income groups, the elderly and the more marginalised communities in society.¹ In 2016, Doteveryone (a think-tank which champions responsible technology) launched [Go ON Lewisham](#), a pilot project which aimed to tackle digital exclusion and increase levels of basic digital skills across the borough. Yet, recent research by the ONS suggests that Lewisham still has a digital exclusion rate of 6.7% (i.e. residents who are lapsed or non-internet users)².

Collaborative Decision-Making

Several examples of successful innovation in decision-making collated by the LGA are outlined below:

- [Assembly North](#). A pilot citizens' assembly held in Yorkshire by Democracy Matters to discuss regional devolution
- [Tower Hamlets; 'You Decide'](#). A project where residents had control over the spending of £5million to shape the services which would be delivered in their local area
- [Nottinghamshire Police Force Preventing Demand Strategy](#). A community organiser working in an official capacity to help police look for new ways of engaging with disaffected communities
- [Lambeth Living Well](#). A platform of partners aiming to radically improve the outcomes experienced by people with severe and enduring mental health problems by co-producing solutions with a focus on early intervention and prevention

In 2014, Lewisham held a '[Big Budget Challenge](#)' which used a range of approaches (including an online budget simulator, discussions at local assemblies and a short survey online and at assembly meetings) in order to have an open conversation with residents about the financial challenges facing the organisation – overall, nearly 4,000 residents took part in the process.

Civil Society Strategy 2018

The government's new Civil Society Strategy ('[Building A Future That Works For Everyone](#)') contains a number of pledges which are directly related to local decision-making, including:

- Funding the training of 3,500 people in community organising by 2020

¹ <https://www.thetechpartnership.com/basic-digital-skills/digital-exclusion/>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/datasets/internetusers/current>

- Launching a new Innovation in Democracy programme to pilot participatory democracy approaches, whereby people are supported to take part in the decision-making that affects their communities
- Supporting the spread of Citizen Commissioners (local people supported to make commissioning decisions on behalf of their communities)