

Lewisham’s Local Democracy Review

Literature Review

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Executive Summary of the Literature

1. Enhancing public engagement and participation depends for its success on the commitment of any council undertaking such an approach to decision-making
2. Resources and organisational and administrative support are required on an on-going basis to ensure the effectiveness of any method of public engagement
3. Any system or approach to enhanced public engagement must be seen to be legitimate by councillors
4. In current structures of local government effective public participation is achieved through employing approaches and techniques that are congruent with and supplementary to contemporary forms of local representative democracy
5. Effective and enhanced public engagement and participation which leads to improved decision-making can challenge current patterns of political behaviour, especially the primacy of the political party group. Councillors and officers must be prepared for that challenge and to respond positively to it
6. A range of mechanisms exist for citizen participation, such as citizens' panels and juries, but these are often used to inform council decisions rather than transform the nature of local democracy
7. The complexity of contemporary policy problems experienced in local government requires a good mix of participatory mechanisms and methods to draw out the expertise and experiences within communities that can inform policy and decision-making
8. Local Government has long experienced pressure from central government to engage more with local citizens and to provide participatory opportunities and such pressure was particularly acute under the Blair government and the modernising agenda
9. Many central government attempts to structure how local government should enhance citizen participation often misunderstand the nature of local politics and the relationships between local government and citizens and communities.
10. Councils need to create their own approaches and policies towards public engagement that suit local circumstances, rather than be directed into certain approaches by central government
11. There is a danger in any attempt to enhance citizen participation of failing to respond or inadequate responses to issues that arise from communities which simply serve to increase alienation and distance
12. A choice exists for all councils between improving consultation to inform policy-making and a more radical approach to sharing decision-making and deliberative space with citizens and communities
13. Communities are not homogenised units and greater engagement and deliberation will expose differences of opinion and attitude towards particular policy problems. Councils must

arbitrate between those views to forge a more consensual approach, rather be seen to than take sides

14. If the aim of a council is to empower citizens and communities then that requires that decisions are shared and developed with those communities through a range of practices and approaches before any final decision is taken
15. Ensuring that there is a culture of participation and engagement across all policy domains and departments of the council is a vital ingredient to ensuring effective engagement
16. Local self-identifying neighbourhoods provide a solid base for engagement and participation and the council should be structured to be able to support such communities in identifying problems, developing solutions and taking action within their neighbourhoods
17. Many communities will look to physical and environmental improvements in their areas as a priority to create clean, green and safe urban space and environments.
18. Councils can work with communities to facilitate and support local projects (see 17 above) to develop community capacity, social capital, community cohesion and stronger feelings of neighbourliness
19. Local action by citizens and communities can be fed into a wider policy and decision-making process and used to stimulate greater public engagement
20. Councils need to identify active local citizens and work with them to develop further engagement
21. Successful engagement, leading to improved decision-making rests on links between councils and individual citizens, communities, organised and unorganised groups to stimulate local activity and wider political engagement
22. A strong and vibrant citizenry and set of local communities enhances the quality of local democracy and the quality of local life but will only be successful with political and resource support and a commitment by the council to either using a set of mechanisms to enhance engagement or to a more fundamental change in local democracy and local government which is based on sharing decision-making with citizens and empowering local communities
23. An important decision for any council is to choose which approach (22 above) they are most comfortable with undertaking and then develop a strategic approach to working with citizens and communities and particularly reaching beyond existing networks of citizens and communities to embed that approach in council decision-making

1. Introduction

The purpose of the report is to review the literature relevant to Lewisham Council's Democracy Commission and its investigation into public participation and engagement with the council. The report highlights ways in which the council could strengthen public engagement so as to promote effective decision-making. The report draws on a range of international literature to set out how best to employ the results of research in the field of contemporary public engagement to strengthen local democracy in Lewisham.

While the review conducted for the report does not address specific questions set by the commission the themes that emerge, the pertinent factors identified and the issues explored in the literature on public consultation and engagement, in an international context, provide material of relevance to the commission's inquiry. The literature explores a range of issues related to enhancing and improving public participation and engagement with local government rather than addressing specifically the three main areas of focus for the commission, which are:

- Open and transparent decision-making
- Public participation in decision-making
- Effective decision-making

These concepts are not necessarily linked in literature or in practice and so to provide a sharp focus to the review of the literature attention has centred on material which examines the relationship between public engagement and participation and improvements in local decision-making and the quality of local democracy. Otherwise three separate reviews of three separate areas of literature would be required as each area bullet pointed above is often treated separately in the literature and varying amounts of research therefore exists across the issues of transparency and openness, public participation and effective decision-making and that is reflected in the structure of the report.

To provide a review of value to the commission the report assesses which literature, whatever its focus, best addresses the broad concerns and issues around transparency, public participation and effective decision-making. It does this to draw the links between the three areas and to explore the factors which stimulate and those which hinder the development of a healthy local democracy and relationships between citizen and councils.

The review quickly identified a wealth of material of relevance to the general issues around how to promote effective citizen engagement and how to sustain that engagement over time and a systematic approach was taken to assessing which literature was most appropriate for addressing the three issues that are the focus of the commission's inquiry. The next section briefly sets out the methodology employed in producing the report. The third section looks at the important role of councillors and their attitudes towards enhanced citizen engagement. The fourth section examines the mechanisms and process available for citizen engagement. The conclusion draws out the main findings of relevance to the commission's inquiry into enhancing citizen engagement with Lewisham Council. The report does not include quotes and comments from all the material reviewed in order to keep the document as concise as possible. Rather, exemplar quotes and comments are produced from material which is itself indicative of the general thrust of the findings of the literature and its relevance to the three main areas of focus for the commission.

2. Methodology

The report results from a systematic literature review of the relevant literature on public participation and engagement with local government. A systematic literature review approach was employed in order to establish the best understanding of the available evidence base. In turn it provides a framework within which decisions about the appropriateness and value of any literature or literature source, to any given set of questions or purpose, can be made. Systematic review methodology is particularly useful where the data is contested, extensive and produced by a variety of sources and therefore is most appropriate to the inquiry by Lewisham Council into effective public engagement and effective decision-making.

The systematic review process involves:

1. Establishing a set of questions to be answered
2. Identifying and summarising all relevant literature appropriate to those questions
3. Assessing the quality and value of each item of literature and on this basis filtering out those of poor quality or with low relevance
4. Putting the accepted studies, research and findings in context
5. Drawing conclusions in terms of the original questions or areas of exploration

The systematic review enables an assessment to be made of the generalisability of the material and where material is assessed as not being generalisable the appropriateness of its evidence can however, be analysed. The literature that the review explored has been assessed for its validity, that is its: success in measuring the issue, case or concept that formed the study; and, for its reliability, that is: the likelihood that when repeated, the research would produce the same results.

The stages of a systematic literature review allow for an assessment of how far literature addresses and responds to not only the very specific questions set by an external sources, but also to what extent literature and research is relevant to, and concerns, a broader set of questions and issues. Such an approach is particularly relevant to the context of the Lewisham review as the inquiry has specific areas of concern and interest which are linked to each other but also set in the broader context of enhancing citizen participation and engagement more generally and therefore can benefit from a range of wider studies in that field.

Such a framework approach is a valuable tool for assessing literature that addresses a range of questions and topics – academic and practical – that are related to but does not address a set of specific questions from a specific source - such as the Commission, in this case. Thus, it allows the reviewers to draw on a wide range of material and therefore to expand on what would otherwise be an unduly restricted source of reference.

In addition, the review also employed the following approaches:

- Contact with international networks of local government researchers and academics based in overseas universities to assess the existence and findings of contemporary studies
- Following-up citations and references from material identified in the review and references received from experts referred to in the bullet point above
- Key-word internet search

The next section sets out the main findings of the review.

3. Enhancing Citizen Engagement in Local Government

Attempts to assess the efficacy of public participation and political protest have taken into account whether those conducting action, of one sort or another, believe their actions to be effective in influencing political decisions (Almond and Verba, 1963). Indeed, Young (1985) describes political efficacy as 'people's expectations of being able to wield effective political influence'. Approaching efficacy from the perspective of the powerless, or rather those less powerful than holders of political office, has the potential to distort our understanding of the political processes. Such distortion occurs because those attempting to influence representatives may view the effectiveness of political action very differently to the representatives themselves. Moreover, councillors, as holders of political office, have views about participative and engagement activities and the participatory techniques

available to citizens, which concern issues of legitimacy. As a consequence, councillors will respond differently to those activities seen to be more, or less legitimate.

Councillors are more likely to respond to public participation conducted in ways seen as congruent with the principles of representative democracy, as they experience and understand it, and congruent with the role of political parties within representative democracy (Mabileau et al, 1989, Game and Leach, 1995, Copus, 2004, Leach, 2006, Egner, et al, 2013). What we see in a range of research project findings on public participation is that it can only be effective if councillors operate in a culture which accepts public engagement as a legitimate part of the decision-making process. Moreover, councillors need to be prepared to share deliberative and decision-making space with the public and, in some cases, devolve decision-making to the public (Sintomer et al, 2007, Medina, 2007, Vetter, et al, 2016, Graham and Wales 2018).

Bohman and Rehg (1997: ix) pose a question of interest to all councillors and indeed all elected officials:

Given the complex issues that confront contemporary societies, is an intelligent, broad-based participation possible? In societies as culturally diverse as our own, is it reasonable to expect deliberating citizens to converge on rational solutions to political problems? Does deliberation actually overcome or only exacerbate the more undesirable features of majority rule?

In the practices of decision-making in local government, the 'majority rule' referred to by Bohman and Rehg can be set in the context of the party politicised nature of local government and the party group system.

Councillors can be seen as 'governors, representatives, or delegates' as well as advocates of the communities they represent (Karlsson, 2013). They are rooted in their communities and are charged with pursuing local interests and concerns and with articulating community opinion to the council from an increasingly assertive community (Batley, 1972, Lambert et al, 1978, Glassberg, 1981, Parkinson, 1985, Parry, et al, 1992, Heinelt, 2013, Lidstrom et al, 2016). As a consequence of the group system, councillors are more and more likely to find themselves faced with the prospect of pursuing a course of action which places them in conflict with the decisions or perceived interest, of their own political party group. The success of public engagement in council decision-making rests on recognising the salience and resilience of the political party group in local political decision-making. Moreover, of equal importance to the success and effectiveness of public participation are the attitudes that councillors hold about political representation, their role as a representative and about citizen participation more generally.

An early lesson of the review is the challenge that enhanced and effective public engagement in decision-making has for current patterns of political behaviour and that the attitude of councillors is essential to ensuring the effectiveness and efficacy of public engagement.

A task for the council's overall review of public engagement is to assess the willingness of councillors to be challenged as public elected representatives, by local citizens. If the culture of the council does not support enhanced public engagement then a cultural shift will have to take place before any planned changes.

Local Government has long been under pressure from central government to enhance citizen participation but such central pressure ignores the innovative approaches to citizen engagement that has taken place in local government, certainly since the 1960s (see, Prior, et al, 1992, Parry et al, 1992, Burns et al, 1994, Rallings et al, 1994). The Blair government's modernisation of local

government focused on enhancing citizen participation, but much of that agenda sought simply to spread practices that were already happening in local government across the country.

Local Democracy and Community Leadership, (Detr, 1998), *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (Detr, 1998), *Local Leadership: Local Choice*, (Detr, 1999), the Local Government Act 2000, and the white paper: *'Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services'* (dtlr, 2001), displayed how the Government at the turn of the century was encouraging all councils to modernise local political decision-making and enhancing citizen engagement. Ironically, many of the changes propagated in the modernising agenda had previously been trailed in councils such as Lewisham.

One of the lessons from enhancing citizen participation is that it can be a way of compensating for issues of legitimacy of local decision-making experienced by local government as a consequence of declining electoral turnout (Rallings and Thrasher, 1997). Participation also aims to enhance the citizen's ability to engage with the councils and the councillors that represent them. Indeed, as far back as 1998 councils where: *public participation in debate and decision-making is valued, with strategies in place to inform and engage local opinion* (Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People para.1.2.) where seen as exemplars of good practice.

The choice for councillors is about the time they spend engaging with the public or the time they spend on internal town hall matters. Indeed, the idea of the councillor as the conduit of public opinion into the council has been described as an approach where councillors should:

spend less time in council meetings and more time in the local community, at residents meetings or surgeries. They will be accountable, strong, local representatives for their area. They will bring their constituents' views, concerns and grievances to the council through their council's structures. Their role will be to represent the people to the council rather than to defend the council to the people (Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People, para 3.42)

Even though the challenge is an old one, it still has a relevance to the current review in Lewisham, as the effectiveness of public participation with the council depends on a shift in the balance within local representative democracy towards participatory democracy. Gyford (1986) notes that a diverse and fragmented society exerts pressure on representative democracy to take on a greater participatory form, in other words the difficulties often experienced in attempts to enhance the diversity of council membership can be compensated for by the skilful development of a strategically aligned public participation policy.

The literature shows that an effective way of responding to pressures emerging from communities for participation and the needs of diverse communities is not to replace representative democracy with a participative variant. Rather, it is to employ a diverse range of participatory, consultative and deliberative tools to provide a flexible and a wide range of mechanisms by which the public can engage with both councillors and officers (Lowndes, et al 2001, Elcock, 2001, 2011, Pattie, et al, 2003, Kersting, 2013).

A range of mechanisms exist which can be employed to supplement and inform the final decisions made by councillors, or to provide deliberative space in which citizens, citizens and councillors or citizens and officers can meet to explore policy problems and develop local solutions. Use of mechanisms such as citizens' juries, panels and conferences, focus groups, opinion polls, referenda and other mechanisms, can inform councillors in their political activities (these are explored in more detail in the next section).

Effective public engagement rests more on the participatory rather than *consultative* approach, with citizens having enhanced opportunities to inform the political decision-making processes rather than

seeing power transferred from representatives, to communities. Arnstein showed as long ago as 1969, that public consultation can be used to manipulate and misinform and in itself does not provide citizens with the ability to influence or shape local decisions. If the final decision-making power continues to rest with elected representatives and as a consequence with political parties and party groups, which therefore remain the 'aggregator' of local interests, little will have changed no matter how much engagement takes place (Mabileau, Moysen, Parry, Quantin, 1989).

If consultation is enhanced but little deliberation between citizens and the council takes place then what is on offer is more liberal representative democracy, rather than a fundamental shift in the representative nature of local government (see Phillips, 1994).

Yet, despite all this, local government represents very fertile ground for citizen political participation. Indeed, as Parry et al (1992) points out: 'direct involvement of the ordinary citizen is largely limited to the local sphere'. Local government is widely recognised as having far greater potential for effective citizen involvement than its central government counterpart; the strength of local democracy often rests on this assumption. It is an assumption however, which itself rests on citizen willingness to become involved and on citizens' belief in the efficacy of their involvement to influence local affairs (Almond and Verba, 1963, Marsh, 1977, Parry, et al, 1992, HMSO 1967, HMSO, 1986). Effective participation will rest on Lewisham's ability to build on the pools of participatory behaviour that already exist across the borough and support communities in developing their participatory capacity (see next section). Indeed, a vital part of enhancing citizen participation is to identify, within the borough, where such potential for community engagement and empowerment exists.

A number of surveys have considered community assertiveness when communities have been faced with unpopular decisions. These studies noted: a decline in political passivity; growing confidence amongst the electorate in the ability to affect the political process; and, the increasing importance of the local arena for enhanced citizen protest (Young, 1984, Heath and Topf, 1987, Bloch and John, 1991, Young and Rao, 1995). Indeed, councillors were seen as an *effective* focus for protest activity. Yet, Young and Rao (1995, 109) also report that the majority of citizens 'appear to have a wary cynicism about their councillors, saying that they can be trusted only some of the time'.

More recently, Lowndes et al (2001, pp. 450-451) indicate the existence of very negative views held by citizens about councillors, who were often seen as 'inaccessible and unlikely to be interested' in citizens' concerns. Indeed, amongst those that had contacted a councillor, 'the dominant experience was one of disappointment'. Yet, much local participation occurs when communities are mobilised around matters in which they have an immediate interest, these local issues can rouse an otherwise quiescent citizenry into local action (Batley, 1972, Lambert et al, 1978, Glassberg, 1981, Parkinson, 1985, Parry, et al, 1992).

Local participation acts as a motivational trigger to further and more sustained citizen participation and here is a clue to widening the pool of participation. Councils which build, strategically and as a deliberate policy, on the experiences of communities in protesting (normally about some council decision) and provide opportunities for citizens to channel that energy into a more on-going engagement with the council, can ensure that such tides of activity do not recede after a local issue has been resolved (Boaden, et al, 1982). Local campaigns, or protest on issues of common concern, are an important part of democratic activity and popular involvement in local government (Cochrane, 1986, Sun and Chan, 2016). But, the effectiveness of popular involvement depends on whether councillors are willing to respond positively or not and whether councils can take community action – often aimed at a single issue – and use that activity to further develop social capital, local capacity and sustained engagement. The next section explores in more detail what the

appropriate literature has to say about the range of mechanisms and processes available to achieve those objectives.

4. Methods and Mechanisms of Enhanced Citizen Engagement

Public participation in local government decision-making widens ownership of the policy process, informs decision-making and develops capacity, enhances community confidence which in turn feeds into more public participation, enhances feelings of responsibility for public affairs among communities and engages citizens with a diversity of opinion on local issues (see, Stoker, 2004, Delwit, et al, 2007, Elcock, 2011). The danger is however, that engagement can be limited and have little if any effect on local decisions but only provide information for those (councillors) who make the final decisions (Michels and de Graff, 2010). Indeed, the literature clearly identifies the dangers of public participation descending into a mere information or intelligence gathering exercise and this has been a long known phenomenon (Arnstein, 1969, Chandler, 2001).

Cuthill (2002) warns of the dangers of 'tokenism' in public engagement and stress the importance to effective public participation of citizens empowering themselves to take responsibility for local activities and decisions. Cuthill emphasises the importance of a clearly articulated and defined set of processes which will support and facilitate public engagement, rather than simply declaring a vague commitment to engaging more with the public. Thus, participatory mechanisms may in themselves not result in a participatory democracy. Rather, the use of various ways of engaging the public can result in little more than a means of collecting opinions and views on certain issues and providing a veneer of participation in the policy process.

Carson and Hartz-Karp (2005:122) identify three criteria that are at the heart of successful participation and particularly deliberative participation:

1. Influence: The process should have the ability to influence policy and decision-making.
2. Inclusion: The process should be representative of the population and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, providing equal opportunity for all to participate.
3. Deliberation: The process should provide open dialogue, access to information, respect, space to understand and reframe issues, and movement toward consensus.

It is vital that these elements are built into the small number of participatory techniques which the literature shows are prevalent in local democracy, across Europe, and which are employed with varying degrees of success to engage, enthuse and then empower citizens in tackling local policy issues and developing solutions – few though result in a transference of decision-making power to citizens, or if they do, little real policy power or budgetary power is involved. The mechanisms popular for engaging with citizens are as follows:

- Citizen juries
- Citizen panels
- User panels and user group deliberation
- Opinion polls
- Co-production of policy
- E-democracy
- Neighbourhood forum (with or without devolved budgets or decision-making ability)
- Deliberative events and conferences, polls and forum
- Consensus conferences
- Stakeholder deliberation

(see, Rowe and Frewer, 2000, Lowndes, et al, 2001, Franke, et al, 2007 passim, Ozanne, et al, 2009, Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010, Kuhlmann and Bouckaert, 2016 passim)

Each of these mechanisms have a number of benefits for the public and for any council implementing them as part of a strategic re-alignment to bring the council's decision-making processes closer to the public, as they provide:

1. A structured environment for processing, exploring and deliberating information
2. Opportunities for a wide range of participation across communities of place and interest
3. Multiple environment and forum for the public to experiment with and for individuals to develop a knowledge of those participatory mechanisms that best suit their needs and circumstances
4. Forum for citizens to engage with strategic and operational issues relating to specific services or policy development
5. Opportunities for citizens to deliberate among themselves or with experts, officers and councillors

Effective final decision-making comes from any one council employing a wide range of mechanisms and approaches and providing multiple opportunities for the public to engage with issues of relevance and interest to them. A popular approach is to create a number of forums, within and across an authority area, based on identified geographical communities and to employ all of the techniques above within those areas to collate a sub-authority view of particular issues, or to use such forum as deliberative mechanisms for public engagement.

In their exploration of neighbourhood governance Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) found that four main reasons could be identified that stimulated the creation of sub-authority consultative / deliberative neighbourhood units by parent councils, as follows:

1. the empowerment of citizens and communities (the civic rationale);
2. the development of partnerships to forge an overall vision of the needs of an area (social rationale);
3. as a way of developing new forms of representation and participation within the context of local government (political rationale);
4. the management and improvement of more effective local service delivery and public service transformation (economic rationale).

Each of these particular rationales however, must be backed by the political will of the parent council to pursue the construction a sub-municipal unit as a solution to local civic, social, political and economic issues and to engage citizens and communities effectively in authority-wide decision-making.

Neighbourhood forum, if skilfully and carefully constructed, resourced and supported provide opportunities for those with expertise within communities and for interested citizens, within communities, to deliberate with councillors and to lend them their expertise and views before final decisions are made. What is provided by such settings more than anything is an opening out of local democracy and participation and the provision of officially sanctioned political space within which a wider group of citizens can engage with the council (Michael et al, 2004, Piotrowski and Van Ryzin, 2007). Community forum, where citizens come together to deliberate and sometimes decide separately or alongside councillors are a fundamental piece of the local political landscape for those councils committed to a strategic approach to public engagement and enhancing the effectiveness of

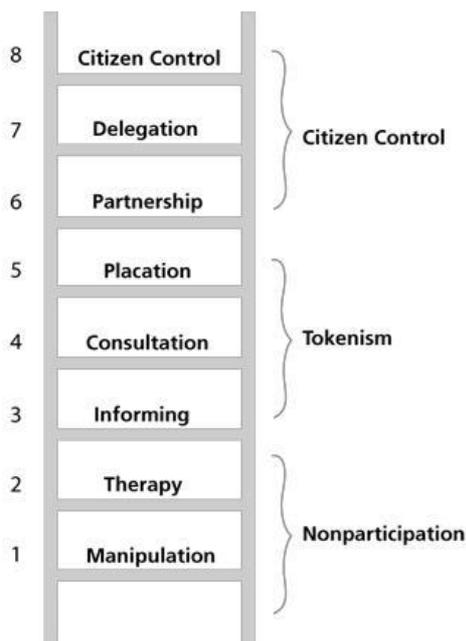
local decision-making (Morlan, 1982, Purdue, 2001, Barnes et al, 2003, Carpini, et al 2004, Smith et al, 2007, Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008, Somerville, 2011, Kleinhans, et al 2015).

The literature provides Lewisham with a number of mechanisms and methods for either engaging the public in deliberation, or providing opportunities for sharing decision-making processes.

The literature also suggests that various forms of sub-authority decision and deliberative settings can be used – e.g. neighbourhood forum – to enable communities and citizens interested in very local issues to engage with the policy process and to link those issues and citizens to more strategic concerns.

The inquiry might want to explore, in some detail, which mechanism for engagement fit with the objectives it has for citizen engagement and how to provide the best methods of engagement to match very local and more strategic policy issues.

A further necessary issue for the inquiry to consider, in the Lewisham context, is how radical an approach towards citizen participation and engagement would suit its needs. Such an issue needs to be addressed to ensure that any new participation policy is strategically located across all policy domains and that methods and mechanisms match the outcomes desired. Arnstein's ladder of participation indicates the difficulty of providing participatory opportunities that the public will accept as genuine and as a consequence be willing to engage with over a sustained period of time.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)

Degrees of Citizen Participation

While the ladder has been subject to critique and update (see, Connor, 1988, Tritter and McCullum 2006) its original power still lays in the clarity with which it presents policy-makers, and particularly those in local government, with the choices available to them for enhancing and expanding public engagement and the possible consequences of getting those choices wrong. Anything below the top three rungs of the ladder – six, seven and eight – risk alienating the public, generating frustration and anger among stakeholders, damaging future attempts at public engagement and prevents developing community capacity to enhance council decision-making.

The top three rungs indicate the choice the inquiry for enhancing democracy in Lewisham must face: are any new policy approaches to public participation about changing the policy-maker mind or the public mind?

What is clear from the literature reviewed for this paper is that public participation and engagement is something which is under the control of a local authority and that the local authority can, and more often than not does, decide the nature, shape, timing, processes and balance of power within the system that it employs. Another question for any council wishing to enhance citizen participation is: how far are we prepared to go in co-producing a system of consultation and engagement with the public? That question emerges from research conducted across Europe which has explored how the range of participatory reforms or opportunities for the public to engage with local government have expanded and been shaped over time and how citizens have been able to engage in very local and higher level policy issues. That literature identified the following as vital for sustained, effective and inclusive public participation:

1. Free and open access for citizens to information held by a range of public bodies
2. Use of a range of deliberative and decision-making forum, processes and events
3. A willingness by councillors and local leaders to challenge traditional local representative democracy
4. Involving citizens in all stages of the policy and decision-making processes, including the identification of local (or very local) policy problems
5. Citizen engagement having a demonstrable impact on policy outcomes and the existence of clear mechanisms to evaluate and assess the impact of citizen engagement
6. A public statement by the council of the balance between citizen deliberation and citizen decision-making – setting out where citizens and how citizens will decide and where they will deliberate only. In other words the balance between having a say and deciding
7. Resources and support provided to citizens for each deliberative and decision-making process and therefore a continued budget allocation for councils to a strategic policy of public participation
8. Use of new technology and e-democracy to facilitate engagement
9. Recognition of both individual and collective input by citizens
10. Developing community coalitions and cross community interactions to facilitate shared understanding and learning for communities and councils
11. A well-defined, clearly articulated e-democracy / social media policy linked to and integrated with the public participation policy

(see, Kersting and Vetter, 2003, Reyneart, et al, 2005, Denters and Rose, 2005, Vetter, 2006 and 2009, Delwit, et al, 2007, Khulmann, 2009, Smith, 2009, John and Copus, 2011, Hendriks et al, 2011, Krenjova and Reinsalu 2013, Juptner, et al, 2014, Diaz 2014, Haro-de-Rosario, et al, 2018)

While the eleven points above are by no means an all-inclusive or exhaustive list of conditions required for effective and inclusive public engagement in local deliberation and decision-making, they do provide the basis on which a sustainable approach to effective public engagement can be developed.

The literature reviewed so far also clearly identifies that the process of citizen engagement must be carefully developed and refined so as to overcome the reluctance of both citizens and councillors to engage together and that low levels of mutual trust can fatally undermine the process. Moreover, that experiments with public participation often only succeeded in providing more opportunities for those already engaged and energised by participatory opportunities, to engage even more, rather than address the need to widen out the public that were engaged. Such a process moves beyond the

current concerns with 'hard-to-reach' groups and extends the desire to offer participatory opportunities to all sections of the community beyond the already engaged.

A necessary ingredient to effective participation is a willingness on behalf of councils to experiment with new institutional devices. Moreover, there is a need to be innovative in combining participation, direct engagement by citizens in policy development and service delivery, with more traditional notions of local representative democracy and service provision and this is as much about a commitment to explore and maybe fail rather than seek safe but dull methods of engagement.

Some notable experiments with direct public engagement which may suit the long-term and strategic direction of the Lewisham review can be found in the Netherlands. Dutch experiments in developing community capacity and engagement have focused on the development of social capital (see, Putnam, 2000) within and across neighbourhoods to not only involve the public in decision-making but also in empowering citizens to take action and provide services for themselves (Michels, 2006, Van de Wijdeven and Cornelissen, 2007, Hendriks, 2010).

In what is referred to in the Dutch literature as 'vital citizenship' the processes of local democracy are merged with policies and actions aimed at improving urban life (Hendriks and Musso, 2004). Experiments in a number of Dutch neighbourhoods (sub-council level) have been focused on encouraging citizens to move from protesting – a council decision or inaction – to being empowered to make the local changes they wish to see to improve their areas. Much of the participation here involved citizens and citizen groups working closely with officers and councillors to decide on the allocation of certain budgets for local community projects and in working on such projects themselves. Councillors play a central role in the process as gate-keepers to resources and the officer structure of the council, while citizens take positive community action for themselves.

The Dutch approach to 'vital neighbourhoods' and 'vital citizens' is not just about off-loading council responsibilities and services to groups of concerned citizens. Rather, it is a process of empowering citizens, working with councillors and officers, to improve neighbourhoods, make local decisions, take responsibility for community improvement and to develop social capital, social capacity and community cohesion and integration. It is however, a process driven by citizens rather than a local authority (Van de Wjdeven and Hendriks, 2006 Van Gunsteren, 2018). The approach relies on the existence of a number of active citizens who take responsibility for linking community activity and needs to the council, working with their councillors.

The citizen undertaking the link role with the council is not ad hoc and cut adrift by the council; the citizen has strong personal and working relationships with the local councillors for the area and these are essential to the whole idea of making rapid and demonstrable local improvements. Much of the projects undertaken by citizens in Dutch neighbourhoods were about rubbish collection or removal, street tidiness, community safety and environmental / physical improvements to local neighbourhoods. The activities are not about citizens simply complaining to the council; rather, they are about councils supporting and empowering communities to solve local problems. But the idea of vital neighbourhoods and vital citizens, in the Dutch context, is also to enable any community based activity to flow into and influence the overall policy-making and decision-making processes of the council.

The experiments carried out in some Dutch neighbourhoods are about improving the quality of local democracy, strengthening local decision-making and increasing the quality of public services (Tops and Hendriks, 2004, Verhoevan and Tonkens, 2013). Some Dutch municipalities have recognised that public decision-making is not an exclusive responsibility for public agencies, such as local government, but is shared between agencies – some elected and some not – and citizens and

communities. Three conditions have been identified as important ingredients to the success of the empowerment of citizens and communities in Dutch neighbourhoods:

1. Pressure from communities: The need for improvement and change being articulated and expressed within communities and neighbourhoods. Thus, councillors are a vital element in identifying where such articulated needs exist and working with communities to develop links with the council and take action. The first step however, must come from communities and not the council.
2. Providing space for those citizens who wish to take action: whether it is practical action to improve the neighbourhood, or to bring others together to develop community capacity. The council needs to support and provide space for such citizens to operate effectively within their neighbourhoods
3. Political and administrative support: councillors and officers must provide positive and mutual support for the actions taken by individual citizens so they are not exposed to unnecessary and unfair criticism or are prevented from taking action. Councils need to embed the 'vital citizen' 'vital neighbourhood' approach in their own administrative and political structures and decision-making (Van de Wijdeven and Corneliessen, 2007)

The challenges to traditional representative democracy and decision-making are clear in the Dutch vital neighbourhood experiments, but the potential to genuinely empower citizens both politically and practically, means that traditional decision-making processes can be greatly enhanced by this type of citizen engagement. It is also clear that such an empowering approach can supplement other approaches to citizen engagement such as citizens' panels, citizens' juries and other deliberative techniques while having the advantages of seeing local action taken quickly and effectively by local people and communities.

5. Conclusion

The report set out to review the literature and research as it is appropriate to the inquiry being conducted by the Lewisham Democracy Review and to present ideas, concepts and research findings that would inform the development of a strategic approach to public engagement with the council.

The literature highlights the need for any approach to public engagement to be genuine, well resourced, supported politically, strategically embedded within the structure and processes of the council and demonstrably used to inform and improve council decision-making. Moreover, there is a need to ensure that public engagement is not simply about informing the public of what the council intends to do, or even consulting the public about council policy and proposed policy. Rather it is about ensuring that there is some shared decision-making and shared control between the council and communities and citizens.

The question then arises as to when is it best to engage citizens in the policy cycle? The literature and research suggest that citizen engagement must certainly take place before any decision is taken and ideally takes place to identify issues and problems before any policy response is considered. There is a clear challenge here to traditional patterns of party political activity within local government and a challenge to the primacy of the party group within local government decision-making. Citizens may be given a say in the process, but the next step is sharing some decision-making space with communities and citizens and that requires resources and appropriate structures and processes to be put into place. It also means that councillors may be faced with a different set of priorities and approaches to problems from their own.

The Dutch experiments with creating vital neighbourhoods and empowering citizens in taking action and influencing policy provide some clues to how public engagement may be brought together with the role of the councillor and local representative democracy. As part of their role councillors can work with communities and citizens in identifying local problems, solutions and priorities and empowering citizens to take local action themselves.

The literature shows that the task for any council wishing to enhance public engagement is four-fold:

1. Deciding the purpose of enhancing public engagement
2. Being certain about how far the council wants to go in engaging with the public and decision-making and in sharing policy-making and decision-making space
3. Deciding how to resource and support a participatory strategy
4. Embedding participation and citizen engagement in the structures and processes of the council across all policy domains.

While the benefits in terms of the quality of local democracy, improvements in local decision-making and community cohesion, from citizen participation are many, getting it wrong can lead to disillusionment, distrust and a distancing of citizens and communities from the council. The task of councillors, officers and the council as an institution becomes one of integrating different views of democracy, arbitrating between different opinions across and within communities about how democracy should work and developing community support and resources for community action within the different interpretations of democracy that exist. The literature shows that this is by no means an impossible challenge.

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