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Representing the future

The report of the Councillors Commission

December 2007

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December 2007

Product Code: 07 PR004963

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foreword

This review, as its name makes clear, is all about councillors. Except of course, it isn't just about councillors. Nor should it be. For those of you who have had little time for local government and councillors (and although misguided, you are many), read on.

The backdrop to the work of the Commission has been the widespread uncertainty and debate about the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state. To some extent, this is part of the healthy, iterative and continuing dialogue that will always be necessary between the governed and governors: contexts and relationships are ever changing. But there are legitimate grounds for more anxiety about and rethinking of the issue of how we are governed, with the degree of disenchantment, disengagement and, at times, mutual incomprehension that exists now between the citizen and the state.

While fuller consideration of this issue was not the remit of our Commission, it has been an important context. Moreover, our key message is that local democracy is a key part of the solution to this wider malaise. Indeed, without a vibrant and thriving local democracy, we cannot envisage that there can be the greater coherence, understanding and meaningfulness in our governance that is so imperative.

The Commission was set up by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government earlier this year as an independent review to look at the incentives and barriers that encourage or deter people from standing for election as councillors. Essentially, the Local Government White Paper in October 2006 offered a quid pro quo to local government: devolution to the town hall (and beyond), but on the understanding that serious attempts were made to attract many more able and talented people from a wider spread of backgrounds to become councillors.

We could, of course, have confined our thinking simply to matters of, for example, the support to and remuneration of councillors. But we could not possibly make sensible recommendations on these issues unless we were to step back and understand more clearly the role of councillors in the modern context. This too required a further step back to consider the wider changes that have taken place affecting local democracy over recent decades and hence our interest in the wider concerns about governance.

Our work has taken us all around England and Wales: we have listened to and talked with many hundreds of people, some councillors, some not; we've held regular on-line discussion forums; we've reviewed existing research and commissioned more; and we've received over 200 written submissions.

Thank you to all those who took the time to contribute – it has all been taken into account and been much appreciated. Our deliberations throughout have been much informed also by a number of recent reports concerning local government, most notably, of course, Sir Michael Lyons' masterful inquiry published in March 2007.

Non-evangelical by nature, I remain an evangelist for local government. The best of local government without question far outstrips the work of much of central government; and local government generally has shown some of the most impressive improvements in performance within the public sector over the last decade. As we illustrate, however, this is very far from the general perception. This is deeply problematic for both local government and democracy as a whole. But nor should we blind ourselves to real problems in the culture of local government and local political parties in some areas too: a reluctance to attract new blood, a resistance to be challenged.

We have been mindful of the ever present tension between the "uniformity" and the "diversity" in local government about which Professor John Stewart so eloquently writes. Local government depends on difference. It is tricky then for any national commission concerning local government to avoid being too prescriptive. We have tried to tread that delicate balance with care, leaving many of our recommendations to be decided locally, and encouraging experimentation. We've made clear our underlying principles in recognition that these could and should be applied differently in different areas.

Those principles are:

- Local authorities are key to promoting local democratic engagement;
- Promoting a sense of efficacy – the feeling that an individual is able to influence the democratic process and the course of events – is key for better engagement;
- Councillors are most effective as locally elected representatives when they have similar life experiences to those of their constituents;
- Key to effective local representation is the relationship and the connections between councillors and their constituents;
- It should be less daunting to become a councillor, better supported once elected as a councillor, and less daunting to stop being a councillor.

There is inevitably no one magic bullet that will encourage more able, talented and representative people to become councillors and for the work of councillors to be better recognised and valued. Our recommendations come therefore as a package with a strong theme throughout of the importance of communication in the broadest sense – and in this, the newer digital technologies offer hitherto undreamt of possibilities. As Professor Stephen Coleman writes, "Both politicians and citizens want one another to enter their realities: to see the world as the other experiences it". Indeed so.

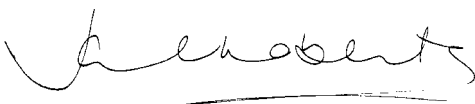
Local government is intrinsically political. And over 90 per cent of councillors are drawn from one of the three main political parties. Accordingly, as Chair of the Commission, I wrote to the Chairman of the Conservative Party, the Chair of the Labour Party and the President of the Liberal Democrats with two requests:

- To provide written evidence on what each party had done to reduce the barriers and increase the incentives for suitably able, qualified and representative people to stand and serve as councillors, and to improve the public perception of them;
- To consider in principle if they would suggest a minimum of two councils under their party control which would agree to implement a package of the Commission's recommendations. The membership of these councils could then be tracked over a period of time to ascertain if any significant differences could be seen.

The responses we extracted were varied. Nonetheless we shall pursue them all and they will inform our views when we reconvene in one year's time.

Enormous thanks are due both to my fellow Commissioners, Yaseer Ahmed, Cathy Bakewell, Jessica Crowe, Margaret Eaton, Ben Page and Matthew Taylor. Each has brought goodwill, humour and a valued but different perspective to the task. Our thanks also go to the Commission's immensely hard working secretariat, and to Alan Pike who wrote the bulk of the final report.

One last thought. I loved my years as both a ward councillor and council leader: it was endlessly fascinating, demanding and exhilarating. We know that the majority of councillors say that they derive "enormous satisfaction" from their role. Why on earth do we not shout this from the roof tops?



Dame Jane Roberts

Chair of the Councillors Commission

introduction

There is much current anxiety, uncertainty and debate about the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state in Britain.

Some issues, including global economic turbulence, climate change and international security, demand action at wider levels such that the nation state and citizens may feel that they have little influence over them. Other issues are resolved much closer to home but people feel even here a sense of disconnection from influence and power, a diminishing interest in collective action and a profound cynicism about party politics.

The local state may well be viewed ambivalently. It is not necessarily seen as benevolent any longer by, for example, dispensing housing and social care, but can appear to be denying, withholding or at worse persecutory, with a watchful eye on behaviour. Yet, at the same time, the public has greater expectations from public services and, certainly, less deference. Such factors are complex and raise crucial issues about the mutual responsibilities of the individual and the state.

None of this is a uniquely British problem, and it is certainly not one which is confined to local government; but neither is the local level immune from its impact. We have discovered the public's view of local government to be a dispiriting combination of poor awareness and understanding, distaste for organised politics and negative perceptions of councillors and their motives for seeking election.

Our Commission was established in the light of last year's *Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities* (Communities and Local Government, 2006) to seek ways of encouraging able, qualified and representative people to come forward for election as councillors, to secure public interest and recognition for the work they carry out. Able people are unlikely to come forward in ample numbers while local government remains so undervalued.

Terms of reference for the Councillors Commission

The Commission will submit a report to the Secretary of State by November 2007 making recommendations regarding the incentives and barriers to:

- Encouraging suitably able, qualified and representative people to be candidates to serve as councillors of principal authorities
- Their retention and development once elected, or appointed under the Local Government Act 2000; and
- Their being able to secure public interest and recognition for the work they carry out for their communities.

The review will be launched in February 2007 and the Commission is expected to commence its work soon after. The detail of the Commission's work plan will be agreed with a joint Communities and Local Government/Local Government Association project board but it would be expected to examine the following issues:

- Within the roles set out in the *Local Government White Paper* the requirements and time commitments expected of councillors and cabinet members
- Support for councillors to develop the necessary skills for their role
- The way councils operate to facilitate councillors to function effectively and confidently in carrying out their responsibilities
- The current restrictions on who can become a councillor
- The problem of getting time-off work
- Whether the allowance and remuneration regime for councillors:
 - delivers value for money;
 - takes account of comparable increases in public sector pay;
 - takes account of constraints on local government resources; and
 - maintains public confidence.
- The public perception of the strengths and weaknesses of councillors
- The communication of councillors' roles and impact on the communities
- The real or perceived barriers faced by many sections of the population to get to become a candidate.

In the light of the conclusions and recommendations for the councillors of principal authorities, the review is to examine and make recommendations for parish councillors, having regard to the substantial differences between the roles and responsibilities of such councillors and those of principal authority councillors and the potential impact on parish precepts.

Since the setting up of our Commission in February the Government has published the Green Paper, *The Governance of Britain*, making constitutional reform a central policy issue (Ministry of Justice, 2007). This is important as well as timely because, as we shall argue, no effort to clarify relationships between the citizen and the state can succeed without progress at the local level. While it shares with national institutions the symptoms of democratic disconnection, local government is the most promising starting point for a solution.

Lack of public trust in politicians is nothing new but, while it persists at a high level, it certainly forms a barrier to voluntary elected public service. An Electoral Commission's audit of political engagement published earlier this year showed that 71 per cent of the population – approaching three quarters – trust politicians 'not very much' or 'not at all' (Electoral Commission, 2007). Since councillors are identified predominantly as politicians rather than community activists, and most people distrust politicians, it is hardly surprising if newcomers hesitate to join their ranks.

This is in spite of the fact that public approval for local government's services is increasing, with the performance and rate of improvement of local authorities often outstripping central government. Local democracy cannot thrive in a political atmosphere of distance between the public and decision-makers. People need a sense of efficacy – the notion that they can, if they wish, have some influence over what happens to and around them. Professor Stephen Coleman, professor of political communication at Leeds University, concludes that according to most of the theoretical literature on participation "there is a close link between the extent of citizens' political participation and their sense of political efficacy: ie their beliefs about how influential or powerful they are as actors within the democratic polity." (Coleman, 2003).

While we can never all get our ideal choice of outcome in any collective system of deciding priorities, people need to feel that their input will at least produce a considered response.

The debate in local government is shifting from service delivery and how people can get their bins emptied on time, to councils' role as an institution of government – "a place for debate, discussion and collective decision making" as Sir Michael Lyons puts it in his seminal inquiry (Lyons, 2007). Yet understanding of local government is so low that many people fail to appreciate how it connects with their lives and affects what goes on around them.

In a centralised state such as ours, where an exceptionally influential London-based national media concentrates overwhelmingly on London-based national political issues and controversies, local government's image problem is not all its own fault. It may depress councillors that the fallout from national political controversies damages the way they are viewed, but most of the solutions must come from local action.

Since launching the Governance of Britain Green Paper the Prime Minister has expanded on the theme of relationships between the citizen and the state. In a speech to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in September he called for a new type of politics built on engaging with people, “perhaps most of all a politics that draws upon the widest range of talents and expertise, not narrow circles of power.” We endorse that as a definition of the type of local politics we want to see. But it is disappointing that local government did not feature much at all in the Green Paper, let alone as a crucial part of the solution. Our strong message is that local government is a key link in the governance chain.

Although the Green Paper comes from a Labour Government, the debate about renewing democracy embraces all parties. David Cameron, in a speech to the Young Foundation in November, spoke of the need to “move from an age of bureaucratic control to an age of democratic control,” and argued that local control can bring national benefits because “diversity strengthens the country as a whole.” That is a view which we also endorse.

We hope the opportunity will be seized in the current focus on constitutional reform to consider our recommendations in a wider context than local government. Without serious consideration of the place of local democracy in this wider debate, the aspirations reflected in the governance Green Paper cannot possibly be realised.

It is at the local level, in the places where people live, that they have much of their personal contact with public services and most opportunity to share in their governance. Place still plays a significant part in most people’s identity and, even in a more mobile age, many people who move do so within a small geographical area. Experiments can be piloted locally, fitted to a recognition and celebration of the fact that places differ profoundly from each other. So, linking people more securely and confidently with the governance of their own communities at a local level is a key part of the wider governance infrastructure of which local government is an integral part.

None of the issues we are addressing is unique to this country. The Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy, an exceptionally extensive five year academic-led exercise initiated by the Norwegian parliament and completed in 2003, identified many of the same signs of disengagement from conventional forms of political participation as exist in the UK, leading to a void between the public and their representatives (Norwegian Official Reports, 2003). It concluded that the power of the people in the chain of governance had been weakened. One of strong trends identified by the report was a decline in the influence of Norway’s once-powerful local authorities.

Professor Stein Ringen, professor of sociology and social policy at Oxford University, in a commentary on the study published in the Times Literary Supplement on 13 February 2004, that if a vote for the national legislature was the only thing tying people and governance together, governance would be distant and citizens' influence small. In an observation which is highly valid in the context of our own investigation he commented: "It is a function of local democracy to give citizens a reasoned feeling that they are included in the system of governance in the long period between elections".

Before reaching our recommendations, we will explain the background to our report and the approach we have taken by posing and answering some key questions. More detailed information can be found in the notes on the recommendations, which present findings from the extensive programme of evidence gathering that informed our deliberation. Evidence included a specially commissioned programme of social research including an international overview, a series of regional events, an on-line discussion forum and over 200 written submissions.

We acknowledge that some of our recommendations will have resource implications. While these should be balanced in part by opportunities for local authorities to conduct their business more efficiently, we recognise that local democracy must necessarily involve some resource.

key questions

1. What are the problems we need to solve?

We shall consider each of the three major problems, drawn from our terms of reference, in turn but in reverse order.

Public recognition and value

As we said at the outset, the public image of local government is poor and confused. The public has little idea at all about what local government is, and even less about how it works.

Public understanding of local government is low. An analysis by Ipsos MORI for the Local Government Association shows that a negligible 5 per cent of the population claims to know a great deal about what their council does. Even when those claiming to know a fair amount are added, the total reaches only 32 per cent (Ipsos MORI, 2004).

Frequent submissions to the Commission refer to public confusion over which services councils control, and some of those people who approve of council services but not of their council presumably do not appreciate that they are council services. Despite the considerable evidence linking effective communications with the reputations of individual councils, of 300 local authority heads of communications in a study commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA), one in five said that informing residents was not a priority (Karian and Box, 2007).

There is a worrying disparity between the reputation of council services and of councils themselves, with satisfaction with most councils much lower than that of the services they provide. The 2006-07 Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) surveys show that satisfaction with a wide range of services provided by councils is rising, for example, with satisfaction with that most visible service, cleansing, up 8 percentage points since 2003 to 68 per cent (Communities and Local Government, 2007). This general improvement, evidenced by independent inspection by the Audit Commission, is a much-deserved tribute to the effort that has been put into service improvement over many years: and levels of satisfaction with many services are well over 60 per cent or more. Yet, when asked, only just over half the population say they are satisfied with their council itself. In other words, it is the democratic heart of local government that has the weakest public image.

Some public perceptions of councillors are very negative. This is confirmed both in research and evidence gathering by the Commission (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007; Hands et al., 2007) and survey evidence. For example Ipsos MORI's research conducted for the LGA highlights that whereas only 7 per cent of councillors think

they are out of touch, 43 per cent of the public think they are. Similarly 69 per cent of councillors believe they make decisions that are in touch with local views, whereas only 19 per cent of the public agree. While 58 per cent of the public (and 24 per cent of councillors) agree that councillors put party political interests ahead of the needs of local people. More generally, elected members are often regarded as inaccessible, driven by ego or self-interest rather than a desire for public service and seeking to make personal gains from their office (Ipsos MORI, 2001). Qualitative research shows, that when people actually do come into contact with a councillor, they are often pleasantly surprised by how helpful and responsive the councillor is.

A prevailing atmosphere of public mistrust with formal politics, political parties and institutions of government leads to councillors being viewed in negative terms. A particularly alarming aspect of our research was to discover that most community activists involved with local voluntary organisations – the very people who might be expected to make natural and strong candidates for council office – feel they are more effective by remaining outside local government (Hands et al., 2007).

The following two remarks to our researchers by community activists illustrate the point:

“We are in it to do good, councillors are in it to play politics.”

“I ain’t interested in power, I want to see results. I’m not interested in spending half the (time) slagging off the other party. Why am I interested in that? It’s just wasting my time.”

If the public perception about the overall calibre of councillors is not high, justified or not, this must be tackled head on, as we describe more fully later, both by local authorities and by the political parties.

Representativeness

It is widely acknowledged that councillors are significantly unrepresentative of the population as a whole in a descriptive sense. Today’s councillors are not drawn from across the social spectrum as a few examples demonstrate.

The average age of councillors in England is 58.3 years, which is itself a significant increase since ten years ago when it was 55.4. Younger councillors are becoming rarer: in 1985, 26 per cent were under 45 and by last year this had declined to 13.5 per cent. A negligible 3.5 per cent of councillors are under 30, even though one third of the country’s total population is in this age group. Younger disabled councillors are notably absent from most council chambers. Although the proportion of female councillors has doubled over the past 40 years, the increases over the last decade have been very small and women still comprise only 29.3 per cent of the total even though women form the majority – 52 per cent – of the population.

Only 4.1 per cent of councillors come from ethnic minority backgrounds, less than half the 9.5 per cent of the adult population who describe themselves as belonging to ethnic minority groups. Councillors are less likely to be in employment than the population at large: they are overwhelmingly more likely to be retired or self-employed (see Chapter 2 of Haberis and Prendergrast (2007), for a more detailed analysis).

Tellingly, one of the most significant changes over the past decade has been a decline in the percentage of councillors with one or more caring responsibility, from 34.2 per cent in 1997 to only 24.2 per cent last year (IDeALGA/LGAR, 2007).

A note of caution is needed about the use of the term representative. The concept of descriptive representation is said to have occurred when the make-up of political organisations broadly resembles that of wider society. On this measure, very large groups including women, people from ethnic minorities and the young can be said to be descriptively under represented in council chambers. There may, of course, also be under-representation reflecting other factors such as socio-economic class, disability, social class or sexual orientation. Furthermore, different black and minority ethnic groups have divergent experiences and, in some areas, ethnic minority community elders are seen as being out of touch by younger members of the same community. The issue is then more nuanced than it might at first appear.

We do not seek to suggest that councillors of any particular age group, gender or ethnic background are capable of representing only people whose personal and social attributes they reflect descriptively. Neither do we argue for council seats to be filled according to a precise, mechanistic demographic headcount of local populations. We are arguing however that councils benefit from having a range of age, background and human experience among their elected membership which reasonably reflects their population, on two broad counts: symbolically, for notions of fairness, the importance of role models of resemblance, and enhancing trust and legitimacy in the political process; and substantively, different core interests and concerns can be fed directly into the democratic process, be reflected in policy making and can be important for social cohesion.

Families with young children, for example, depend enormously on the services that county, metropolitan and London boroughs commission or provide. However good councils become at involving user-groups in decision making, there is benefit in at least some of their councillors having recent and direct experience of what the key issues really are.

Councillors are very different from the populations they represent in terms of socio-economic background too, particularly in some areas of England and Wales. 49.8 per cent of English councillors hold a degree level qualification and above compared with 30.1 per cent of the adult population (IDeALGA/LGAR, 2007). There was once a strong connection between trade unions and council membership in urban areas with traditional mass-employment working class industries such as coal, steel and shipbuilding, and union activity provided a training ground for potential new councillors. With the decline in the number of communities, both urban and rural, which are based on such organised collective experiences, there is an

increased need for local authorities and political parties to support and nurture individuals of all backgrounds who may wish to participate.

Councillors from a wide variety of different backgrounds not only bring a range of voices directly into the council chamber but also enable a richer myriad of networks to be connected with council members, useful not only for the council but in turn also to maximise people’s sense of efficacy and engagement which we have identified as a crucial ingredient of effective participation and local democracy.

Academic opinion bears us out. As, for example, Professor Jean Hartley and Professor John Benington of the Institute of Governance and Public Management at Warwick Business School have argued, if elected representatives are not as diverse as the populations they represent it is likely to “reduce the quality and variety of debate and to reduce legitimacy in the eyes of constituents” (Hartley and Benington, 2006).

There are some striking examples internationally, often in the newer democracies, where concerted efforts have been made to start afresh, thus enabling radical change. Rwanda, for example, leads the world in its representation of women at a local level.¹ We cannot, of course, transpose systems from one country to another, but it is an illustration that change is possible, even if it is likely to be more gradual within a longer established political system.

Quality and ability

Our terms of reference asked us to find ways of encouraging ‘able’ and ‘qualified’ people to become councillors. These terms are obviously open to greater differences of interpretation than ‘representative’. Let us say first what we do not understand them to mean. In order to be able or qualified, we are emphatically not saying that potential councillors must be educated to a particular level or, for example, have managerial or leadership backgrounds. The richest qualification of good ward councillors is their ability to reflect and represent the experiences of the communities in which they live. They achieve this by listening with respect, talking with and not at their constituents, and basing decisions on deep local knowledge.

How else can we define councillor quality? The IDeA political skills framework defines councillor skills under six headings: local leadership; partnership working; communications skills; political understanding; scrutiny and challenge; regulating and monitoring. There will inevitably be a different balance of skills required depending on the responsibilities within the council, notably of course between executive and scrutiny roles.

The range of skills required by councillors is perhaps broader than it used to be, covering both a very astute strategic sense and sound political judgement to bring to decision making, especially for executive councillors, as well as more local sensitivities and softer communication skills too. It should be the aspiration that a wide range of such skills should be developed in all councillors but at the very least, we should be looking for a balance across the council membership as a whole and across wards and divisions too.

¹ Source data: www.ipu.org/wmm-e/classif.htm

Political parties should not shirk from acknowledging issues of competence where they exist, nor hesitate to address them effectively.

Incentives and barriers to being a councillor

There is a series of complex and intertwined factors that work to encourage or deter people from standing and serving as councillors. We mention them in turn in the following sections but it is important to appreciate that it is the cumulative effect and interaction of these factors that is most important in undermining participation in local government. A more detailed version of the analysis below is available in the research review carried out for us (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

2. What are the incentives?

The Commission has examined a range of research and considered submissions on the important question of what motivates people to become councillors.

The available evidence suggests that people become councillors for a variety of reasons, most commonly:

- serving the community;
- improving the local area;
- strong feelings about a particular local issue;
- support for a political party;
- a family tradition of political activity and public service;
- being asked to stand; and
- frustration with a council or serving councillors.

Seeking to serve the community is the most familiar driver. This was selected as a motivating factor by 86.9 per cent of councillors questioned for the 2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England, followed by a desire to change things (52.3 per cent) and, thirdly, political beliefs (51.5 per cent) (IDeA/LGALGAR, 2007).

Being asked to stand is an effective incentive in many cases – 29.4 per cent of councillors questioned in the survey identified ‘because I was asked to’ as one of their reasons for serving. We shall return to this straightforward measure later, not least because there are some significant differences between different groups: being asked to stand was an important factor for more women than men; and approximately half as many councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds reported having been asked to stand as a motivating factor, compared with their white counterparts.

There are some noteworthy differences in motivation between different age groups. Although serving the community is the main driver, regardless of age, a far higher per centage of those aged under 30 cited political beliefs as a reason for becoming

a councillor (68.9 per cent) compared with 47.9 per cent of those aged 60 and above. A similar pattern is discernable in relation to a desire to “change things” as a motivating factor with 62.9 per cent of younger councillors, aged under 39, compared with only 47.1 per cent over 60.

It is worth highlighting that financial reward is not often stated as a motivating factor.

It should be stressed also that most councillors report deriving “enormous satisfaction” from their role as a councillor, often enjoying it more than their employment, and over three quarters would recommend the role to others. It is often achieving success in individual casework that gives councillors what they describe as a real buzz. One contributor to our on-line forum posted:

“Everything possible should be done to help people enter a public service such as this as it has been the most rewarding, enjoyable, invigorating thing I have ever done. You really can wake up with a smile on your face and count your blessings.”

3. What are the barriers?

There are too many. Our research evidence provides a compelling and comprehensive picture of the difficulties but we shall highlight some of the most pertinent here. Many of the issues in this section are examined in more detail as we turn to our recommendations later in our report.

Lack of awareness

The lack of awareness of what councillors do creates a weak starting point for recruitment. Teenagers, in particular, seem to know almost nothing about councillors, to the extent that discussion with one group as part of our research revealed obvious confusion between the roles of ‘councillor’ and ‘counsellor’ (Hands et al., 2007). Even among older groups, however, there is very little awareness and understanding, as we demonstrated earlier. Hardly surprising then that it simply does not even occur to most people to think of standing. Even if it did, people have little idea about how they could get selected, and what support might be available. The lack of awareness is compounded by the virtual absence of local government from national political discourse as we have lamented earlier.

Culture

Local government itself and local political cultures can be a serious barrier to newcomers. Our evidence and conversations up and down England and Wales repeatedly draw attention to the negative perceptions of councillors, of local government and of the political parties that leads to an ever tighter vicious circle of disinterest and disengagement. But these perceptions are fuelled by aspects of culture and behaviour within some councils and local political parties.

Over-confrontational, “yah-boo” styles of political discourse in the council chamber can be severely off-putting to many people, particularly women. We were given accounts in one authority in the north of England of women being told they would not be allowed to join the all-male executive, and in another, in the Midlands, of where a female group leader and her colleagues were repeatedly subjected in person and on the web, to bullying and personal abuse. A female civic mayor was prevented from travelling with her baby in the mayoral car, ostensibly on health and safety grounds. The resulting sex discrimination case that she took against her authority understandably attracted widespread national attention. We were told in another authority of a (now former) Chief Executive having told one female councillor that she should have waited until her children had grown up before ‘getting involved in politics’. While these cases may occur in only a minority of councils, examples such as these unhelpfully fuel suspicion about local government more widely.

We heard during visits around the country of authorities or local political parties where the atmosphere can be exclusive and ‘club-like’ and operate in ways which are actively or passively unwelcoming. Such attitudes can be a particular barrier to people from new and minority communities, but are more generally likely to discourage anyone lacking previous experience of politics or governance activities. Personal communication through informal social networks is a highly significant way in which new recruits are found and conscious efforts need to be made to seek out new and different faces to avoid an inevitable tendency to remain with the status quo.

Local political parties have been too slow at seeking out the widest possible range of people to stand as candidates. ‘Waiting for someone to die’ has been described to us as the procedure for succession planning and candidate selection in a number of places. There is evidence of reluctance of some local political parties to select women or ethnic minority candidates, so-called “selector hostility”. Selection is often seen as more of a barrier than election. In one Yorkshire council with predominantly male councillors, two Muslim women were elected despite initial scepticism at the selection stage that this would be possible. And, back to being asked again, only 16.7 per cent of ethnic minority councillors had been asked to stand, for example, compared with 30 per cent of white councillors (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

We have been told how in some areas, highly able councillors, once elected, are often seen as a threat to the leadership, and are passed by as other less able colleagues have been promoted on the basis of longevity and patronage. Younger councillors especially perceive that barriers are erected by their older colleagues to prevent them from entering the inner sanctum (Brand, 2006; Canavon and Smith, 2001). In a number of authorities, there is fierce resistance to any reconsideration of the timing and organisation of meetings to enable those with work or caring responsibilities to participate easily.

There may be particular difficulties for ethnic minority councillors who make concerted efforts to avoid being perceived solely as ethnic minority spokespeople, despite pressures to do so both from their ethnic minority constituents and white councillors (Andolino, 1988).

Political party membership, declining across the board, is exceptionally low among young people, which is a rocky foundation for efforts to recruit younger councillors (see Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

Confidence

While putting yourself forward and particularly standing for election can be nerve racking for anyone, there is evidence to support the view that some people, and especially younger people and those from minority ethnic communities, may be deterred from standing for election because of a basic lack of confidence. We were told by women in the north east of England that lack of confidence had played a significant role in their initial reticence to stand for election and it is implausible that this would not apply also to women elsewhere. Work undertaken as part of Oxfam's Engender project in Scotland confirms that women at a grassroots level need support, persuasion and confidence-building to convince them that they have skills that can be used in their communities and that it is worth getting engaged in the processes.

Time commitment

The simple fact of time poverty represents a significant barrier to many people becoming councillors (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007; Hands et al., 2007). Long working hours, lone parents or both parents working, and an ever-widening range of opportunities for filling spare time can act to deter people from undertaking any form of voluntary activity. Local government, however, faces an additional problem. While the negative public perceptions of local government prevail, many of those people who do decide to undertake voluntary activity will commit their time and energies elsewhere. Indeed, a proliferation in bodies such as boards of school governors, NHS trusts and numerous partnerships has offered those who are interested in public service alternative routes for their energies.

The perceived and actual pressures on time, combined with the possible consequent effect on employment, family and private life, emerge from our research and consultations as a major barrier to recruitment and diversity of new councillors. This is compounded in many rural areas where travelling time can add many hours to a councillor's day. There is no evading the fact that the problem is a real and growing one, since evidence indicates that the average amount of time councillors spend on their duties has risen through the years, having nearly doubled from the 52 hours a month in 1964 quoted by the Maud Committee (cited in Widdecombe, 1986) to just under 95 hours by 2006 (IDeA/LGA/LEAR, 2007). These averages, however, disguise significant variation between councils and within councils, between executive and non-executive councillors.

Women are often discouraged from becoming involved in politics by the competing time pressures of domestic and caring duties and by the presence of cultural attitudes which leave these duties continuing to be seen as women's responsibilities. While some councils offer high quality support for child care, we were told of others where allowances were unduly restrictive or non-existent.

The apparently open-ended nature of the time commitment can deter many good potential candidates from putting themselves forward for election. We shall return to this theme later to illustrate how councillors' time needs to be treated as the precious resource that it is.

Employment and employers' attitudes

We have indicated that one grossly under-represented group in council chambers is people in employment, and hostile attitudes by some employers are an obvious barrier to recruiting more working people. While the evidence suggests the majority of employers are supportive of their councillor employees, a significant minority are not and there is widespread lack of appreciation of the potential benefits a councillor can bring to a business. Despite the requirement that employers should make 'reasonable' provision for employees who are councillors, there is very wide interpretation of what this means in practice. As we have discovered, it cannot be taken for granted that even other public sector organisations will be helpful about allowing their staff to discharge public duties. One newly elected councillor working in a general practitioner's surgery, told us about how she was accused of not being committed to her job after she had requested three and a half hours off a month to perform her public duties.

The rules: legal restrictions and local government structure

Institutional barriers such as politically restricted posts and the electoral system itself take their place also in the lengthening roll call of barriers. The first-past-the-post electoral system is seen by some as favouring incumbents and discouraging the emergence of more diverse types of candidate; the selection processes of the main political parties which often have a similar effect; and publicity restrictions on local authority efforts to promote the role of councillors and recruit potential new ones (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

The structure of English local government may act as a deterrent for a number of able potential candidates: dissatisfaction for some with the political management arrangements since the 2000 Local Government Act, dividing executive and non-executive functions; and the concern expressed to us by many about the erosion of local government powers and influence. Non-executive councillors feel distanced from council decision-making and even more so from Local Strategic Partnerships. There is a profound scepticism in local government, cutting across party lines, that national politicians are seriously dedicated to devolving power from the centre. It is unsurprising, supporters of this view argue, that after a long era of central control, restricted financial freedom and tight national targets, people may not want to become councillors.

These barriers are immensely powerful because, if an individual does consider becoming a councillor, they are likely to become entwined and reinforce each other.

4. What are we attracting people to?

Local government has changed greatly in recent decades and without doubt will continue to do so. The days when local authorities ran huge water and transport undertakings and were near-monopoly suppliers of social housing are gone. Local government is no less important or, in any way, a less interesting place for councillors to serve – but it is different. The modern tasks of a locally elected representative (to engage with those that they represent, to take into account the many different voices and interests in their patch, to come to a view about how best to take forward those concerns and aspirations, to exercise leadership, and to orchestrate the activities of other partners), require far more flexible and complex skills than supervising direct services ever did.

The case for a far stronger local dimension in our public life has been advanced by a number of recent inquiries and reports. Last year's *Power to the People* report called for an unambiguous decentralisation of powers from central to local government on the basis of findings which mirrored our own research (Power Inquiry, 2006).

Sir Michael Lyons' inquiry (Lyons, 2007) evolved into the most extensive examination of local government in recent times. His term place-shaping – a similar concept to what others call civic leadership – describes his view that “the ultimate purpose of local government should not solely be to manage a collection of public services, but rather to pursue the well-being of a place and the people who live there by whatever means are necessary and available.”

Local government is the institutional embodiment of the community of place. In contemporary society, which is mobile, fast changing and driven by instant electronic communication, it is sometimes argued that communities of place – geographical communities – may not always occupy the all-embracing importance in individuals' lives that they once did. Social, ethnic, religious, employment-based or internet-based communities of interest will sometimes, for some people, become more significant than geographical ones. The distinction, of course, is false. We all have multiple overlapping identities. Geographical communities will contain numerous communities of interest and it is the responsibility of councillors to represent both their geographical patch with its many smaller neighbourhoods within, and the different communities of interest.

The view that place matters, and that all localities have unique qualities, was a strong theme of the final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which reported in June (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). As Sir Michael observes, the fact that communities are more complex than in the past may well accentuate the need for local knowledge and understanding.

Lord Best's independent commission set up by the Local Government Association to examine its relationship with government, members and partners picked this up in its report earlier this year, commenting: "If place-shaping is to be the central driver of the modern local authority, then the challenge of building the public's understanding and recognition of the role of a locally elected council and its members in that activity is a critical one" (Local Government Association, 2007). Our evidence strongly endorses this view.

5. So what does this mean for councillors?

Elected representatives remain the indispensable link between the public and decisions which have to be made in the collective interest: but such a system of representative democracy does not exclude additional forms of democratic engagement and in recent years there has been a renewed interest in participatory (or participative) democracy. Apart from its other advantages, the encouragement of a more direct engagement with the democratic process sits comfortably with today's more consumer oriented attitudes and efforts to promote more personalised public services.

We see no tension between representative and participatory democracy at local level. The modern councillor should recognise and embrace the interface and act as a link between the two, recognising that representative democracy is informed and enriched by participatory democracy. Not everyone will ever want to get participate in the democratic process: indeed, that is the whole point of representative democracy. But people do need to feel able to get involved and have some influence, should they choose.

There is a plethora of different ways in which people can make their views known between elections. There have always been public meetings, advice surgeries and petitions but there are many more opportunities now for deliberation and dialogue, not least involving newer technologies that enable a richer network of connections.

In case we are suspected of having been carried away by a current and possibly passing academic fashion it is worth quoting the words of two respected local government academics – Professor George Jones and Professor John Stewart of the London School of Economics and Birmingham University respectively who made a passionate case for participatory democracy as part of a series of Local Government Chronicle articles ten years ago.

"The role of the elected representative is to seek to reconcile, or if that is impossible, to balance and to judge. This task requires that they be informed by citizen participation. A participatory democracy can only be built at local level. That is where citizens are most involved. The task of local government should be to foster a habit of citizenship." (Jones, 1997).

We see the modern councillor using a rich mixture of ways to link the different communities that she or he represents to the formal decision-making processes. Councillors need to look outwards into the community as well as inwards to the formal processes of the council. Their function is that of two-way translators, communicating public feelings into the council's priority-setting and decision-making structures, and explaining and making sense of council decisions and the reasons for them to the public.

It is a view that puts a high premium on communication skills. Communication by councillors involves much more than the faithful delivery of messages between citizens and the town hall. The quality of the interaction is key: the proactive offer of information, explanation and dialogue; the openness to different voices and views; and the responsiveness and reciprocity of the interaction. Professor Stephen Coleman (2005) underlines the importance of this; "the public appreciate what the experts and politicians often forget: that a system that scores high on qualities of formal representativeness might, nevertheless, fail to represent, precisely because citizens and politicians fail to connect."

The public expect to be engaged in the political conversation with respect. The challenge for democratic politicians is to be, as in Professor Coleman's powerfully resonant phrase "seen as ordinary enough to be representative, while extraordinary enough to be representatives."

Let us not forget that councillors are politicians (whether formally 'independent' or not). In local government, this is predominantly party politics although in some areas there is a proud tradition of independent councillors. More than 90 per cent of councillors on principal authorities represent one of the three main parties (IDeALGA/LGAR, 2007). Politics is a necessary and unavoidable part of governing. Decisions will always have to be made about the allocation of resource and people will always have conflicting views about how this should be done. Reconciling conflict in the way that is judged to be best for the collective is what it is all about. It is the very stuff of human nature that we have different values and different views. Yet we are diffident about talking openly and unapologetically about politics, so sensitive are we to public distaste for politics. It is a laborious task, for example, to work out from many council websites even which party is in control of the authority.

A distinction, however, needs to be made between the language and tone of some political debate, which appears to be the source of public concern, and the importance of the political process. A reasoned defence, even a celebration, of the need for politics is required, at all levels of governance.

Professor George Jones, whom we have quoted above, captures the point well when he reminds us in a submission that the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments treats political activity within the previous five years as a basis for disqualification from other public office. That is hardly calculated to promote a sense of council service being a better or even equal option to undertaking an appointed or voluntary sector role.

Professor Gerry Stoker, professor of politics and government at Southampton University, argues convincingly in his book “Why Politics Matters” (Stoker, 2006) that part of the disenchantment with politics is not only that it is designed to disappoint, but that citizens simply do not understand politics. They do not understand the political process and hence their inevitable disappointment is made that much harder to bear. “Many citizens fail fully to appreciate that politics in the end involves the collective imposition of decisions, demands a complex communication process and generally produces messy compromises.” Surely then there is a crucial role for both local authorities and councillors to play their part in promoting more understanding of the local political process?

6. So what does this mean for councils?

To create fertile conditions for participatory democracy and citizenship to grow and to connect more coherently with representative democracy, the local authority must reach out beyond its direct service responsibilities and more actively facilitate democratic engagement locally. Ideally we would like to see it as the hub for democracy locally. Local governance is complex, the more so today when many former local government service responsibilities have been outsourced or removed to other utilities and agencies. Who can blame people if their understanding of local governance is limited? Accountability arrangements are often vaguer and less coherent than they once were with a proliferation of partnerships and the private and voluntary sectors involved in service provision. And as we have seen, many local authorities and other agencies are poor at explaining themselves.

People are unlikely to feel a sense of engagement with something they do not understand. The starting point for facilitating democratic engagement locally is through communication. Local authorities need to become expert at explaining what they do, which services are the responsibilities of other agencies, and how do they relate to one another. Who is accountable to whom and for what? How can people have influence? How can they get involved, individually or collectively? How do they get things changed?

It may not be easy for people who work for local authorities or are active members of local political parties to appreciate the extent of the problem that needs addressing. There are individuals in every community who understand the structures of local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships, NHS Primary Care Trusts, Learning and Skills Councils and the plethora of other bodies involved in local service delivery or governance – but they are a tiny minority. More typical, we suggest, is this response to us from someone who wanted to stand for council office:

“I have often thought of running to become a councillor and even got to the stage of gathering enough signatories but failed to proceed any further, due to the time constraints of submitting my name. One of the main flaws in the system of electing new councillors is not enough is done to pre-advertise to

citizens upcoming elections and how a citizen can run for election... having investigated my way through the minefield of information and websites I discovered the deadline for submission had long passed."

While this is partly a responsibility for the local authority as an institution it is equally a task for councillors. All councillors must share a conviction that linking members of the community to the institutions of local democracy is an intrinsic part of the role. Local authorities should support them in fulfilling this responsibility, recognising that councillors are thereby playing a crucial part in helping the council meet its democratic responsibilities.

Councillors, as the elected representatives of the whole community, are uniquely entitled to act as the interface between representative and participatory democracy. Some are good at doing this already, although they would probably not recognise the fact when described in such dry terms. They shuttle between taking up individual cases, working with single-issue local groups all the way through a variety of other activities to formal decision-making by councillors serving on cabinets or quasi-judicial committees. The package of skills which this demands from councillors – individually or working as a team – is extensive: listening; negotiating; probing and scrutinising; handling contradiction; lobbying; campaigning; community development; conflict resolution; mediation; and of course decision making. Few individuals will have all these skills in equal measure, hence the usefulness of gauging the balance of skills across the council as a whole and across wards and divisions: complex perhaps, but it is this that makes the role of the councillor so intriguing, demanding but enormously enriching.

Who councillors are, who they are seen to be, and the skills that they have, are fundamentally important to a vibrant local democracy and thus to the wider concerns about governance. We hope that we have built a persuasive argument to convince you.

towards our recommendations

A core viewpoint behind our recommendations is that local government is simply that – local – and those who serve and work in it often complain of excessive national prescription. Priorities vary around the country, and we have sought to frame most of our recommendations to allow local discretion over the method of their implementation. The majority of Commissioners felt that the recommendations do, however, come as a package. As we have said, the barriers to new councillors are often entwined and reinforce each other and the same applies to our recommendations, which need to be digested and implemented as a whole. Adopting only the easiest, or a selected few, would not be enough to bring about the fundamental shift in perceptions, attitudes and culture that is required.

Our terms of reference ask us to make recommendations for parish councils, having regard to the substantial differences between the roles and responsibilities of parish councillors and those of principal authorities. We have gathered a significant amount of evidence about the parish and town council tier and have worked closely with the Commission on Rural Communities (CRC), which is examining the role of councillors in rural areas and will report early next year. The CRC is making similar discoveries to our own, including lack of public understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors at all levels and an overwhelming public view that councillors need to be visible in the communities they represent. Evidence suggests that public recognition of the work of parish councils is currently lower than for other authorities.

Parish councils, where they exist, vary hugely. While some of our recommendations apply to parish councils alongside other authorities we have not sought to pre-empt the CRC inquiry, which is examining rural parish councils with a wider remit than ours, by making specific recommendations about them. We do, however, stress the importance of parish councillors being recognised as part of an overall councillor resource. Sir Michael Lyons' report emphasised his view that local government is part of a "single system of government" and parish councils must likewise function as part of a more integrated system of local government.

We have linked sets of recommendations into four general groups (listed below from A-D), although a number overlap between these headings. Behind the four groups of recommendations sit five core principles.

1. Local authorities are key to promoting local democratic engagement.
 2. Promoting a sense of efficacy – a feeling that the individual is able to influence the democratic process and the course of events – is key for better engagement.
 3. Councillors are most effective as locally elected representatives when they have similar life experiences to those of their constituents.
 4. Key to effective local representation is the relationship and connections between councillors and their constituents.
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5. It should be less daunting to become a councillor, better supported once elected, and less daunting to stop being a councillor.

A. Making councillors central to local democracy

Powers

Unless the perception that councillors lack power changes, nothing else will. Many key figures in local government repeatedly advance the case for less centralisation, less standardisation and greater financial and other freedoms. We know this is a strongly-held view as one forum contributor, pleading on behalf of councillors expressed it:

“They need freedom to make local decisions. At present this is almost entirely circumscribed. Local councillors coming in on a wave of enthusiasm soon find that in almost every area of service delivery they are merely agents of Government policy and unable to do what the electorate would like and believe they voted for.”

While the overall issue of local government’s powers is outside our remit, it is one which may influence many people’s decision about whether it is worthwhile serving as a councillor. So it is necessary to stress that, within existing powers, local authorities do have widespread influence and opportunities to shape their localities to an extent which is sometimes under-estimated. Few councils have, for example, seized the opportunities offered by the power of well-being introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, which allows considerable scope to act to promote economic, social and environmental well-being.

Sir Michael Lyons assessed the problem reported to his inquiry by local authorities as not necessarily a lack of powers, but a lack of flexibility to do what was needed locally. He pointed out that councils had become dependant on central government not only financially, but in many cases also for guidance, encouragement and permission to innovate. Local government, as Sir Michael saw it, needed to gain what he termed a sense of powerfulness, with confidence and capability driven from within the local government community itself.

That said, central government would do well to recognise its often conflicting messages and take a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to areas concerning local government across Whitehall departments.

Negative attitudes

We have been told repeatedly by respondents that negative public perceptions have been aggravated by government policies such as creating alternative agencies and partnerships outside the traditional channels of local democracy. In addition, councillors and council officers blame national players such as parliamentarians, civil servants and the media for stoking up the poor public view of local government by ignoring or worse, disparaging its role. There is a sense that governments of all colours and civil servants keep local politicians at arm’s length, with the “elite contempt” about which Professor John Stewart memorably writes.

Despite the fact that councillors are the only community representatives who face election by the whole electorate, their unique status is rarely acknowledged and celebrated. At times, the councillor's role is perceived as having been sidelined and diluted. We have heard examples of such sidelining of councillors and their role coming from some senior council officers. That is completely unacceptable. Local councils gain their legitimacy and their role in community leadership precisely because of the election of councillors.

Promoting democracy

We must emphasise the importance of both central and local government recognising that it is the democratic process which underpins and legitimises not only the service activities of local authorities but also their leadership and convening role as 'first among equals' with other local public sector agencies. There is also little point in imagining that sufficient able candidates will want to be councillors unless they can see that people returned to office as the democratic choice of the public can make a difference.

To demonstrate the importance we attach to this, we make our first recommendation a call for local authorities, alongside political parties, to be charged with an explicit duty to facilitate local democratic engagement; to explain local governance; to actively promote civic participation; and to promote the role of councillors. This would build on the Electoral Administration Act 2006 which enables local electoral officers to promote participation by electors. As part of that role, **recommendation 1** would require principal authorities to provide information and facilitate engagement in parish and town councils.

The exact way a council chooses to exercise the statutory duty will vary according to local circumstances but we view the overall approach as having four layers:

- proactively disseminating clear and accessible information on how local governance works: what councils do; what the responsibilities of other agencies are; how local agencies relate to one another (or not); even how to register to vote and explaining exactly how to vote;
- facilitating more active civic participation in a range of areas, eg school governorship, tenant and resident associations. This may well require a more specific capacity building/community development approach directed at under represented groups;
- raising interest and providing information on how to become a councillor and advising those who consider doing so;
- proactively promoting the role of elected councillors and their activities.

Our recommendation includes a call for local authorities to provide pre-election information on candidates to the electorate. Although most councillors stand as representatives of political parties there is a substantial body of independent members and groups around the country: this proposal would particularly benefit independent candidates, who may lack the resources of political parties to assist with their candidacies.

We also call on central government departments to work more effectively together, to ensure a consistent and positive approach to local government.

In **recommendation 2** we propose that the LGA/IDeA should develop a framework of advice and best practice guidance for the new function.

In **recommendation 3**, we state that the role of a councillor must be compatible with full or part-time employment. Councillors have to be confident that they are in touch with shifting community priorities, and be enabled and supported to ensure strategic decisions take these into account. Bear in mind too that the councillor is in a governance role and not elected directly to manage.

This core viewpoint has implications for a number of our recommendations. We commend the large number of hours that many councillors devote to their duties and the community benefits greatly from it, but not everyone can carry out the role in such a demanding way. Some council leaders fulfil their duties full-time and might choose to continue to do so, but we do not accept the presumption that this should be a requirement of leadership. It must be made easier for people, including those who are busy in other fields, whether personal or professional, to serve as councillors.

There are two objections to full-time councillors. One flows from the argument we have advanced that, if we are to make a reality of making more coherent the links between representative and participatory democracy, councillors must remain in touch with those who they represent. The full-time, career politician can easily become, or at the very least become regarded, as part of a separate political class. We know that this is already to some extent the case and would only be aggravated with full-time councillors. This relates to two of our underlying principles, that councillors are most effective when they have similar life experiences to those of their constituents and that it should be less daunting to become a councillor.

Our other objection, paying heed to our terms of reference, is that people considering becoming councillors need to see the role as service to the community rather than as an enforced life change. A widely representative range of candidates is unlikely to come forward if people fear they may finish up having to choose between career, family and council.

Having said that, we appreciate that many employed councillors would say they are already in the position of having to make such a choice. Respondents speak of the difficulty of juggling full-time employment with council work, and of unsympathetic attitudes by employers towards allowing time off for council duties (Hands et al., 2007). Other councillors who may not be employed may equally have extensive domestic or caring responsibilities.

If councillors are to be able to continue with other commitments, then we must make it possible and ways must be found of making more effective use of councillors' time, reducing the pressures on it and making clear to the public what the limitations are.

Councillors provide two-way links between their councils and their communities. They must not be by-passed in councils' community empowerment activities – as some have told us they are at present – but must instead be given the tools to support this work and strengthen the connections between representative and participatory democracy, for example by leading local participatory activities, consultations and community engagement initiatives as we call for in **recommendation 4**.

Councillor's role

But is everyone clear of a councillor's role? We think not. As one of our forum submissions commented:

“There is no outline of what is required of a councillor, so how could anyone coming from a background not familiar with local government know whether they would be any good at it or would want to do it?”

There have however been a number of helpful inquiries that have looked at this issue in more depth, for example the all-party Parliamentary group's report, 'The role of councillors' (Dungey, 2007) and research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, most recently, 'Ward councillors and community leadership' (James and Cox, 2007). It is not a job: it is a representative and governance responsibility. Individual councillors will always adopt different styles and the requirements upon them, such as executive or scrutiny members, differ considerably although all share the responsibilities of ward councillors.

The complexities of the role have also grown with changes such as the increasing demand for council representatives to serve on joint boards and partnerships. We believe there should be greater clarity about the role of councillor and in **recommendation 5** propose the development of role descriptions. Some authorities, including East Northamptonshire, Gateshead, Kirklees, Rotherham, Shropshire and Teignbridge have done so for some or all of their members, and there is a joint role description in the London boroughs.

We do not envisage a much greater standardisation of the councillor's role in future, and individuals will continue to combine aspects of it in different ways. But we believe that the use of role definitions in each local authority could be valuable in advancing councillors' skills and prompting better time management. Another value would be to help potential councillors understand what would be expected of them.

Structure

One of the most striking features of UK local government is its exceptionally large scale. As Chris Game of Birmingham University expresses it in a submission to this Commission, what most people think of as local government is “today about as remote from their daily lives as it is possible to be while still daring to call itself ‘local’”. When compared with other European countries, the UK's principal local authorities are large and the number of people represented by each councillor is

high. This striking feature obviously affects the way councillors work and the amount of time needed to perform their duties. At an obvious level, the more electors per councillor, the harder it is for elected representatives to develop personal contact.

The Local Government Act 2000 has left some councillors heavily occupied with executive responsibilities, and we cannot hope to reconnect representative and participatory democracy and greater community engagement unless there are sufficient elected representatives to carry out that role.

Suggested starting point for a locally developed Councillor role description

Councillor roles need to reflect their council and their communities. We therefore suggest that the role description is developed and shaped locally. It is helpful to have best practice models on which local role descriptions can be based. We would expect any councillor role description to cover these areas.

- To represent constituents by actively seeking out their views, taking these into account when considering policy and taking decisions, and feed back to constituents council decisions that impact upon them.
- To help individuals and community groups understand local governance.
- To deal with constituents' enquiries and concerns.
- To contribute to the formation and scrutiny of the authority's policies, budget, strategies and service delivery by attendance at council meetings and by being a member either of the executive or a scrutiny panel.
- To maintain high standards of conduct and ethics.
- To work constructively with council officers.
- To represent the Council on and to outside bodies.
- To work with partner agencies and other stakeholders as part of local governance.
- To campaign politically.

Reorganisations of English local government between 1995-98 reduced the number of councils by less than 6 per cent but cut the number of councillors by more than a quarter (Knox, 2002). Moves are now in progress to introduce unitary local government to some further parts of England that are at present represented by both county and district councillors. It is not part of our remit to become involved in the merits of the unitary/two-tier debate and we would be unwise to tread on sensitive toes, but it does have implications for our work: there is evidence that public confusion over local government's responsibilities is exacerbated in two-tier areas, and when councillors serve at both county and district level the demands on their time intensify. In any trend towards larger councils, however, the ratio of councillors to citizens needs to remain sufficient to ensure that community engagement is not squeezed out by other duties.

Direct contact

Parish councillors are, for understandable reasons of geography, likely to be known personally to a higher proportion of their constituents than members of bigger authorities. In spite of the added difficulties for members of larger authorities, personal contact between councillors and constituents remains important. With use of newer digital technologies and social networking, there are unrivalled opportunities for many different ways of making almost immediate direct contact, no longer just in face-to-face meetings.

Our research evidence shows that people are likely to value councillors more highly if they have met and dealt with them, while direct contact is also a potential route to new recruits (Hands et al., 2007). Similarly one submission we received described how a small-scale study by the Centre for Women and Democracy found that increased contact with a councillor was one of the factors most likely to influence young women to consider becoming councillors themselves. Councillors need to 'converse' with the public in a variety of formal and informal ways.

Many councillors, of course, already give this aspect of their duties a high priority. One respondent from Lancashire County Council described to us the use of regular walkabouts with county and district councillors to meet people, provide information and identify problems. Details of problems raised and the solutions are then posted on council websites. Lancashire County Council also has a mobile unit, staffed by councillors and officers, which visits venues such as shopping centres and festivals and has dealt with more than 20,000 inquiries in four years.

A more formal way of taking local democracy into communities is through area and neighbourhood committees and devolved budgets. Although there is no statutory requirement on local authorities to have such arrangements, census data shows that 52 per cent of councils have some form of area-based structure and, where they exist, 58 per cent have decision-making powers (Gains et al., 2007). Such decentralisation from the town hall can involve allocation of budgets to individual ward councillors, an innovation supported by the 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' White Paper (Communities and Local Government, 2006).

We recognise that such structures are not appropriate everywhere but successful area arrangements can advance participatory democracy in appropriate locations. This is reflected in **recommendation 6** which calls on local authorities to recognise the need for providing and supporting opportunities for councillors to maximise direct contact with the public.

B. Making the role of councillor more widely known and better appreciated

The public eye

Able and qualified people are unlikely to be tempted to devote their time to any institution that has a poor or incoherent image and we have reviewed earlier many of the elements of that image.

But all is not lost. Research conducted by Ipsos MORI over many years and submitted to the Commission shows that, all other things being equal, councils that are effective at explaining the services they provide are better regarded by residents than those that are poor communicators.

Ipsos MORI's analysis of the London boroughs in 2003-04 shows that no top performing council in the Audit Commission's CPA indicators was a poor communicator – those rated most highly by the Audit Commission were also those that were the best at explaining what services they provided to residents (even though the inspection process was not looking at this aspect).

South Tyneside Council offers one of the best examples of effective communication. Their 'We asked... You said... We did' listening campaign is based on effective two-way communication. "We love listening to you" is the encouraging welcome to the campaign on the council's website, accompanied by a declaration that "shaping current services and the overall future of the borough is a two-way process." This understanding of the importance of reciprocity is delivered by the campaign website explaining how residents' input has led to action on the lines of:

We asked you about our parks.

You said restore our parks to their natural beauty.

We listened and starting with South Marine Park we're investing £3.8m lottery funding.

This is followed by an internet link to further information about parks improvement.

Respondents to the Commission point to the power of the media in spreading such negative and sometimes wild perceptions of local government. Sir Rodney Brooke, former Chief Executive of Westminster City Council, illustrated too the long history of unfavourable portrayal of councillors in the arts and literature in his booklet, "Councillors: Victims or Vulgarians?" (Brooke, 2005). Negative perceptions are disputed not only by councillors themselves, but by others who work with them. One officer with experience in a number of London boroughs told our on-line forum that in his experience councillors do not follow the media stereotype, but take on the role out of a commitment to make things better for the communities they serve.

"One sees surprisingly little of the cynical councillor depicted in the pages of most newspapers or on TV. Councillors devote many hours mostly for little financial or other reward. I see it as a core piece of the Commission's work to try to influence that stereotype – if people believe that councillors are corrupt/self serving/in it for the money of whatever the latest stereotype is, why would they wish to stand?"

Brickbats against the media, even justified ones, will not help. The remedy can lie only in local government's hands. As part of their efforts to promote local democracy, councils must become more active in challenging media perceptions of local government that distort reality. Some of this, as we propose in **recommendation 7**

can be helped by local authorities actively promoting the role of councillors not only in the local media but in ways that are in their direct control: through council newsletters and other publications, and by harnessing new technologies to reach particular local audiences.

Public service broadcasting

There are, however, particular and additional issues in respect of public service broadcasting. If the Government is seriously concerned to encourage the public to focus on issues of democracy and constitutional change, public service broadcasting has a significant contribution to make. From a local government perspective BBC local radio is of enormous importance and, unlike the BBC's network coverage, it features a great deal about local councils and their activities. During this summer's floods in England local government and local radio worked proactively and very constructively together. BBC local radio is listened to each week by around 19 per cent of the 15 years and older population – an equivalent proportion of the population to Radio 4's audience². When it comes to Radio 4 or BBC television, however, broadcasts of programmes such as Any Questions and Question Time from regional centres are far more likely to include local MPs than even the most distinguished council leaders. Why?

In order to encourage public service broadcasters to recognise their responsibilities we specifically call on them in **recommendation 8** to ensure that they fulfil their remit to facilitate civic understanding, and that this includes coverage of local government. Better local coverage would do more than merely expand local political and current affairs coverage for local communities. Local government contains numerous examples of innovations which are of national interest, but become lost in the London-centric approach of so much political reporting.

The public is entitled to know how well public service broadcasters are delivering their responsibilities. We therefore propose in **recommendation 9** that Ofcom should require them to demonstrate how they discharge their responsibilities specifically in relation to local democracy. Media images are immensely influential and it is reasonable that public service broadcasters should be held to account.

Campaigns

The LGA and IDeA launched a Reputation Campaign two years ago to try to narrow the worrying gap between the public's relatively high approval for council services and the lower rating of councils themselves. The campaign includes five 'core actions' for communications. These are effective media management; providing an A-Z guide to council services; publishing a regular council magazine or newspaper; ensuring that the council brand is consistently linked to services and good internal communications.

We are pleased to note that more than 250 authorities have signed up to the campaign and in **recommendation 10** call on all others to join it. But this is only the starting point. Meeting the objectives of the campaign, and of promoting better communications more broadly, must be tailored by all councils to local priorities and properly resourced.

² Source data: www.rajar.co.uk/listening

It has been suggested in submissions to us that there should be a national advertising campaign to present the activities of councillors in a positive light and help attract new candidates for office. Any such campaign would need to be carefully constructed. The Local Government Leadership Centre (LGLC, 2007) in a report examining how to attract talented Londoners to become councillors which shares our emphasis on the need to improve the image and perception of the role, concludes that large, generalised campaigns on the lines of those used to attract magistrates or Territorial recruits would not be the answer. It suggests that a targeted approach would have more effect and that such a campaign would need support from political parties, central and local government and agencies.

There is undoubtedly a need to actively promote opportunities to become councillors to under represented groups and we call in **recommendation 11** for further work on this at a national level. This chimes with the priorities set out by Harriet Harman, MP, Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Women in July 2007 that include specific efforts to increase the number of black and minority ethnic women councillors.

National initiatives apart, there is much to be done at the local level where campaigns can focus on distinct local circumstances and promote an area's councillors. The power with which perceptions are communicated and reinforced through the media is one of the defining features of the modern age and all our recommendations in this area are designed to produce more effective communications.

New technologies offer widespread opportunities for local authorities and councillors to communicate more easily. Not all council websites are as good as the best in terms of being clear, informative and easy to use and few are genuinely interactive. For individual councillors, the internet offers opportunities to extend contact with constituents in innovative ways; the possibilities offered by social networking have hardly begun to be explored. MySociety.org, the charitable organisation which promotes ways of using the internet for civic purposes, this year launched Fix My Street – a web-based system which passes on to councils residents' environmental concerns. Another of MySociety's initiatives is Hear From Your MP, which maintains e-mail contact between members of parliament and constituents. An extension of this approach to Hear From Your Councillor could offer a breakthrough in communications.

While we recognise that not everyone has internet or digital broadcasting access or mobile phones, new technologies are producing a communications revolution. Local government as an institution, and councillors, must not take a minimalist approach to this sweeping change but enhance the opportunities to the full. As Professor Coleman whom we have quoted elsewhere rightly comments (Coleman, 2005), e-democratic trends are emerging whether we want them or not.

“The choice is not between governing in an age of the internet or not, but how contemporary governance can utilise and behave in step with the digital opportunities that surround them and the digital expectations of an increasingly on-line generation.”

Alongside improvements in the way local government presents itself, we are keen to see councils make specific efforts to communicate with potential new councillors. Some do. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council ran 'A Councillor... ..Who, Me?' public sessions ahead of the last elections. This included a cabinet member and ward councillor going through their diaries for a week and explaining what each entry had involved, and information packs were sent to all prospective candidates. Similar schemes operated in the last elections in other authorities including Leicester City Council, Bristol City Council and Lancashire County Council.

There is no reason why all local authorities should not be making similar efforts to actively recruit potential candidates for office and reach into under represented communities; these efforts can be very positive as the example of Bristol City Council illustrates. Working in collaboration with Operation Black Vote, a non-political voluntary organisation, the council is helping members of black and ethnic minority communities experience the life of councillors through a shadowing scheme. Participants spend a minimum of eight days over six months working with a mentor councillor, and are helped to form new informal networks. A BTEC-based certificate in local governance has now been attached to the programme and, since it started, nine shadows have expressed interest in standing for election or public appointment. Some have joined political parties or become more involved in community activities. This method of recruitment would be beneficial across all communities.

Such initiatives illustrate what the power of individual nurturing can achieve. Yet many local authorities shy away from actively encouraging candidates from under represented groups to stand for election, fearing that publicising the role of councillor will be deemed as involvement in political activity. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity has introduced uncertainty. As we say in **recommendation 12** this must be examined, with a view to its amendment or withdrawal, in order to free-up councils' efforts to publicise the work of their members. If the council is to function as the hub of local democratic activity, promoting councillors and seeking and supporting potential new ones is an example of precisely what it should be doing. There is a related role for political parties in such activities, which we shall address later.

Councils also have opportunities to use their formal processes to give members of the community a chance to sample local government activity. Half of all authorities have non-councillor co-optees involved in their overview and scrutiny activities, and evidence presented to us by the Centre for Public Scrutiny shows how beneficial this can prove in spreading experience and understanding of local government. There is a double advantage to this approach. Bringing members of the public into scrutiny arrangements clearly strengthens a council's links with the community. It also offers interested participants a gradual introduction to local government, giving potential councillors a chance to dip their toes in the water before deciding whether to fully commit themselves. This type of activity is a practical illustration of what we mean in our underlying principle when we say that it should be less daunting to become a councillor.

Young people and citizenship

Our research shows that knowledge and understanding of councillors among teenagers is particularly low and only 3.5 per cent of councillors are aged less than 30: if there are recruitment problems now, the future looks bleaker still (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Lack of generational renewal is looming as one of local democracy's most severe challenges.

Citizenship education was introduced to the curriculum in 2002 and is still becoming established. Yet a report by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee this year concluded that, while inspiring programmes exist, the quality and extent of citizenship education is inconsistent across the country (Education and Skills Committee, 2007). The committee sought a clear Government signal that citizenship is valued as much as other national curriculum subjects. It also pointed to the absence of a truly lifelong citizenship education strategy which linked activities at various levels of education and training into a coherent programme with common aims and purposes.

Strong citizenship education led by committed, qualified teachers and occupying a proper place in the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools can help revive local democracy. Although new curriculum subjects are bound to take time to develop, there are concerns about the quality of some citizenship teaching at present. The LGA survey finding that barely one third of the population know much about their councils, points to a need for better local government communication, but suggests also that citizenship education should have been introduced long ago. One student told us that even in her AS Level politics course, local government simply did not feature.

A powerful feature of good, well-taught citizenship education is that it has immediate practical relevance to young people's own lives. It gives local government an opportunity to engage with schools in ways which contribute to citizenship teaching. Every school in the country is located in the area of a resource centre and case study of citizenship activities: the local authority. Schools are allowed a high degree of freedom in determining how to deliver citizenship education, and **recommendation 13** calls on the Government, working with the LGA and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to ensure that the role of councils and councillors and the value of local democracy is mainstreamed within the citizenship curriculum and strongly reflected in national guidelines and best practice.

Youth engagement

There are already inspiring examples of local authorities engaging with schools or using other initiatives to interest young people in local government.

In 2004 Lewisham's elected mayor introduced the country's first Young Mayor – an innovation that other authorities are now following. The Young Mayor serves for a year acting as spokesperson for the borough's young people, advising the borough's directly elected mayor on youth issues and overseeing a £25,000 budget. Anyone aged between 11 and 18 can participate and this year's election for Young Mayor achieved

a 45 per cent turnout – a marked improvement on the 33.8 per cent in last year’s conventional mayoral election. There is in addition, anecdotal evidence that electoral registration levels in Lewisham are going up.

Youth services provide a variety of ways of promoting democratic engagement with much innovative work outside the school system. Similarly, the Youth Parliament has done positive work in raising awareness of democracy through its regional networks.

Young people must be regarded as a fully-fledged section of the community and incorporated into the mainstream processes of the council – as the Lewisham scheme does – rather than merely treated to occasional one-off ‘initiatives’. Always consulting young people on traffic management schemes near their schools, for example, is an obvious starting point. So is creating opportunities for young people to meet councillors and discuss their concerns and interests. **Recommendation 14** calls for local authorities to be required to develop and implement such engagement strategies, ensuring that initiatives always involve councillors.

All Welsh schools have to establish schools councils and local authorities are required to support youth forums which feed into a national forum, the Funky Dragon. The Local Government Association’s Local Democracy Campaign has helped facilitate ‘political speed-dating’, a fun and innovative way of enabling councillors to meet young people and hear their concerns. The example of the UK Youth Parliament, where in England each local authority area forms a constituency, shows what such initiatives can do for diversity: last year the parliament reported that 53 per cent of its members were female, 21 per cent from black and ethnic minority groups, and 2 per cent had disabilities.³

Voting age

Any discussion about engaging young people in civic life inevitably raises the question of the voting age, and the majority of Commissioners have been persuaded that there is a case for reducing it. We are not the first to make such a recommendation – it formed, for example, part of the Power Report’s proposals – and a Votes at 16 Campaign group has the support of a number of young people’s organisations, charities and political groups. The campaign’s website features a picture of a young woman mechanic uttering the words “I can fix your car but not vote”, and that is part of the argument. From the perspective of our particular interest, however, the focus is citizenship.

As we have said, one of the strengths of citizenship as a school subject is that it has immediate practical resonances. Through local government, young people can be shown what citizenship means by discovering how councillors engage with the public or make decisions on contested issues. Allowing young people the chance of voting at 16 would give them a personal stake in citizenship at a time when they were studying the subject at school. We believe, however, that young people will be more likely to vote if they have been persuaded of its importance and have ownership of that chance.

³ Source data: www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/4655

The majority of Commissioners therefore propose in **recommendation 15** the introduction of voting for 16 and 17-year olds, so that those young people who want to exercise their vote can do so. If people start voting young they are more likely to continue doing so; we are convinced that, allied to an appropriate citizenship curriculum, many would exercise the chance to vote.

If the opportunity to vote is reduced to 16, should the candidacy age remain 18? It can be argued that this would merely introduce a new inconsistency. Many of the arguments made in support of lowering the voting age to 16 – that if young people are old enough to marry, claim benefits and pay taxes they should be able to vote – can be applied to standing for election as well. We propose in **recommendation 16** that the Government should review the candidacy age four years after the introduction of voting at 16.

Reserve candidates

Some potential candidates – and indications are that this applies to young people in particular in the early stages of their career – are hesitant to consider standing as councillors because of uncertainty about the likely time demands and also the commitment to a four year term of office. We discussed the possibility of some form of job-share candidacy, and also the possibility of variable term limits, to address this problem, but the barriers seem difficult to surmount. Instead, we are recommending an arrangement which would in defined circumstances allow a councillor to stand down during the term of office without the need for a by-election. A potential candidate might find it less daunting and hence be more willing to stand if she or he did not feel that they were letting down not only their constituents but also their colleagues in such an arrangement. Not all Commissioners supported this proposal. We recognise that the issue is likely to provoke strong opinions and, should alternative options be put forward for addressing the problem of a councillor taking office and then finding that they could not fulfil the requirements, these options should also be considered.

Under the proposal we are advancing, political parties would at the time of elections publish a list of reserve candidates who could replace a councillor who stood down during his or her term without the need for a by-election. A by-election would be required if an Independent member stood down, or if a petition demanding one was signed by ward voters representing the lesser of either 25 per cent of the turnout at the previous election or 10 per cent of the total ward electorate. It would remain, as we explain in **recommendation 17** (which was supported by a majority of Commissioners), within the power of the incumbent party to choose to hold a by-election.

C: Making it easier for everyone with the potential, regardless of background, to come forward and for a more diverse range of councillors to be elected

Changing rules and structures does not necessarily change behaviour and, even more rarely, attitudes. (Rao, et al., 2007) in their paper for our Commission point out from international evidence that measures, for example, to increase the supply of council candidates from under represented groups have only a limited impact where the culture of the society is unsympathetic to the progression of minority groups and women.

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced for councillors the alternative of executive responsibilities or potentially less time demanding non-executive service. Had this stimulated an interest in potential candidacy among a wider range of people there would have been no need to set up our Commission. In the event, the diversity and profile of councillors has barely changed and in some instances has worsened.

So we take a measured approach to structural change but where structures are less appropriate than they might be, they can form a barrier to the recruitment of a more diverse range of candidates and we have examined a range of options.

Electoral arrangements

We start at the point at which local democracy is at its most visible, at least to the minority of the population that chooses to turn out and vote – elections. All councillors are now elected for four-year terms, but clarity ends there.

English local authorities use two significantly differing electoral models, sometimes by statute and sometimes by choice. London boroughs and counties are legally required to have ‘all-out’ elections of the whole council every four years, and most unitary authorities and districts choose to operate this system as well. It most frequently entails multi-member wards.

Metropolitan boroughs are required to hold elections in three out of every four years, electing their councillors in rotation, and a minority of unitary authorities and districts choose to use this system. It usually involves the election of one member per ward per election.

Each system has its admirers. All-out elections are said to appeal to voters because they have a greater chance of changing a council’s control, while advocates of partial elections point to the superior regular accountability they produce.

While we are not concerned about the existence of two different systems as such we have concluded that, as a means of raising the visibility of local government and the local political process, four yearly all-out elections win the argument and we believe they should become the norm. We call in **recommendation 18** for elections to take place on well publicised regional election days, with the political parties putting real energy and effort into running interesting campaigns around local issues and maximising opportunities for publicity.

All council elections in a region, including those for parish and town councils, would take place on that same day but not all regions should stage their election days at the same time and local elections should never coincide with national or European Parliament ones. It is our hope that this might help focus council elections on local issues, and reduce their current function as a referendum on governments and national politics. The Government is currently considering the best day of the week for holding national elections, and that examination should apply to local elections as well. We are also proposing that the costs of administering parish and town council elections should be covered by principal authorities.

Multi-member wards

Recommendation 19 sits in conjunction with our proposal for four-yearly all-out elections. We favour the adoption of multi-member wards throughout the local government electoral system. Single member wards provide a strong incentive for political parties to select the sitting member, or someone who resembles a retiring member. With multi-member wards there is an incentive for the parties to maximise their appeal to voters by fielding a more diverse range of candidates; this increases the likelihood of people from under represented groups being selected. Multi-member wards also offer councillors the possibility of balancing their skills across the ward or division, possibly to some degree specialising and the chance of reducing time pressures by sharing the work. We shall say more about the political party selection processes later in this section.

Voting incentives

As we have remarked previously, we have aimed to produce recommendations which enable local authorities to fit their implementation to local circumstances rather than forcing rigid approaches on them. In that spirit, **recommendation 20** proposes that where councils think it valuable to try to engage the electorate by offering an incentive to vote – perhaps by offering voters a chance to enter a lottery – they should be able to do so. The Commission discussed the case for proposing the introduction of compulsory voting but settled on recommending the option of an incentive instead. We also considered the potential benefits of postal voting. We know that in some, but not all, cases it has led to increased turnout while in other locations there has been abuse. Our view is that it is a matter for individual local authorities to decide.

Single Transferable Votes

Electoral systems have the potential for influencing the selection of under represented groups. Our research confirms that the first-past-the-post system used in most English local government elections contains the least favourable combination of factors likely to achieve this (Rao et al., 2007). The system coming closest to offering the best chance of promoting under represented groups is the Single Transferable Vote (STV) proportional system which was used for the first time in the Scottish local government elections earlier this year.

Among the criticisms made by opponents of the first-past-the-post system, is that such plurality of systems operating in small and often single-member divisions are least likely to produce a more diverse range of candidates.

It is argued that a potential benefit of STV, with its multi-member constituencies, is that it could provide a strong incentive for the political parties to field a diverse range of candidates in order to appeal to the widest cross-section of voters.

However, as has proved the case in Scotland, it reduces the likelihood of one party having overall control. The result of proportional representation elections can lead to weaker accountability, lack of public appreciation of how decisions are made, and disproportionate power for small parties or groups. It also brings no guarantee of immediate progress on diversity issues – this year's adoption of STV in Scotland did not lead to an increase in the proportion of women elected to councils. Nor has better representativeness been achieved in New Zealand in the ten local authorities that adopted STV in the 2004 elections.

The research reminds us that electoral outcomes arise from the interplay of cultural, institutional and behavioural factors (Rao et al., 2007). So, in any country, the impact of STV or any other electoral system will depend on the prevailing social and political conditions.

On the strength of current evidence, the Commission was not of one mind as to whether to call for the introduction of STV throughout English local government. The majority of Commissioners believe, however, in the spirit of encouraging local decision making, that any local authority wishing to pilot STV should be able to do so. We propose in **recommendation 21** that, since there is a view that STV could assist with broadening the diversity of councillors, local authorities wishing to do so, following a consultation and majority vote, should be able to pilot STV for a minimum of two terms. We believe the two terms minimum period is needed to prevent the public becoming confused by repeated pendulum swings from one electoral system to another, and to avoid the risk of a party seeking or gaining temporary political advantage.

Term limits

The next issue is one on which we do take a more prescriptive approach. Although there was not unanimity among the Commissioners, we believe that the number of consecutive terms a councillor can serve should be limited. We recognise that there are arguments against term limits. But, as we have said earlier, some local authorities and local political parties operate much as an exclusive club in which the same personalities reappear for long periods and new entrants are discouraged. Local government and local parties have to look outwards, and recognise that change and renewal is a regular process. Term limits are a way of challenging them in these areas.

Limiting the number of terms a politician can stand for election is not a standard feature of political life in the UK or in countries with parliamentary systems in general. We do not seek to belittle the arguments against term limits, the core one being that representatives should be allowed to serve for as long as the electorate is prepared to vote for them. Against this, however, must be set the opportunity to provoke local government into appreciating the importance of attracting new blood.

We do not dispute that some of the best councillors are older, long-serving, experienced ones. Yet local government needs a certain amount of guaranteed churn to help ensure local political debate does not stagnate and become inward-looking, which is a danger if the same personalities are dominant over a long period.

Councils and the political parties need to improve their succession planning to help them manage risk and change in leadership more effectively. A council seat held by the same person for an unduly long period, whatever the quality of the incumbent, can discourage an entire generation of potential successors and erode a local party's selection processes. There is little incentive for parties to go talent spotting if the same candidates are repeatedly re-nominated. Very long service can suggest to the public that council service is something done for life or not at all, when our wish is that it should be made easier to both pick up and put down the role of councillor. In cases of very long service, there is a danger that a community changes around its councillor, rather than councillors reflecting the changes in their communities and ensuring that the council responds to these.

The statutory term limit that a majority of Commissioners are advancing in **recommendation 22** is a generous one – a maximum of five consecutive terms – although we believe there is a strong argument for the political parties being encouraged to restrict their members to four consecutive terms. After a term out, allowing a former councillor time to re-experience life in the community from a non-councillor's perspective, individuals could, if they wished, seek to return to office.

We are recommending a tighter limit of three consecutive terms in the case of leaders and directly elected mayors. Again, this is no reflection on the capacity of some individuals to fill one of these roles in an effective way for longer. A single individual remaining in position apparently indefinitely can, however, inhibit the skills development of other able leadership candidates. And, as in any organisation, an unchanging leadership can sometimes create a human structural barrier to achieving necessary changes. It is rare in most fields for leaders of modern organisations to remain in post for extremely prolonged periods.

Term limits are our solution to the need to encourage turnover and succession planning, and as a way for local government to signal that it is an evolving, regularly changing institution. It was Thomas Jefferson in 1807 who said "That I should lay down my charge at a proper period is as much a duty as to have borne it faithfully."

If others believe there are more effective mechanisms for achieving the turnover, talent spotting and succession planning that we are convinced local government needs, these options should of course be considered.

Political restrictions

Legal restrictions on council employees standing as councillors have implications for our inquiry since those covered by the restrictions include people whose knowledge and experience of local government could make them exceptionally well-qualified councillors.

The restrictions are far-reaching by international standards and fall into two categories: a blanket ban on all employees being members of the council that employs them, and political restrictions based on salary levels on officers standing as candidates for any other principal authority.

In the earlier days of the blanket ban two-tier local government was more widespread than it is now, meaning that employees barred from serving on the council for which they worked could still stand for election to the other tier in the area where they lived. With the spread of unitary local government this is less often possible now. Additional ambiguities have emerged over the years, as a result of developments such as the expansion of the outsourcing of services, partnership working and councils supplying services to each other. There is no restriction on owners or employees of private companies that provide council services from serving as councillors. The chief executive of a housing trust can stand for council election, while the council's housing officer is barred not only from serving as a councillor but from campaigning for candidates in another authority.

We are not persuaded that the blanket ban on council employees serving as councillors on their own authorities should be lifted. In view of a lack of concerted demand for such a change, it would seem inappropriate to take a step which might have negative implications for public perceptions of accountability and conflict of interest. We do, however, recommend in **recommendation 23** changes to the restricted posts legislation in ways which would lift the existing salary level restrictions. And we wish to enable officers in restricted posts to canvass on behalf of a political party, but restrictions would be retained for very senior posts and politically sensitive ones – staff who regularly give advice to or have contact with councillors or speak on the council's behalf to the media. **Recommendation 24** defines restricted activities which we say should be limited to standing for election or holding office in a political party.

Equalities

Local authorities have duties to promote equalities in respect of race, disability and gender in all their functions (ie duties and powers) and our first proposal in this section is a call in **recommendation 25** for the Government to amend guidance to ensure that the new duty on local authorities to facilitate democratic engagement proposed in our first recommendation is covered in a council's equalities duties.

We also ask the Government in **recommendation 26** to amend legislation so that specific requirements for councillor equalities targets are made part of the race, gender and disability equalities schemes that apply to local authorities. Councillor equalities are not included in these at present.

Councils must address themselves to ways of trying to ensure that equalities powers are used constructively in efforts to increase the diversity of councillors. We propose in **recommendation 27** that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) should be invited to assess councils' compliance with the councillor diversity targets that we have called for in recommendation 26. In the 10 per cent of councils where the membership was least reflective of the community, the EHRC would assess whether authorities should be making more efforts to attract a more diverse membership and if necessary support initiatives to help them.

This would need to be a sensitive exercise: we said at the outset that we are not seeking to fill council seats on the basis of some mechanistic headcount of a local population's composition. It might be the case that a particular local authority had taken active steps to promote a more diverse membership, but was hampered by inactive local political parties or lack of public interest. It would be for the EHRC to form judgements on such issues, but we believe our proposal is needed to shift a log-jam of indifference that exists in some locations.

We also call in **recommendation 28** for revision of the Local Government Equality Standard framework to give authorities a clearer responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in the composition of elected representatives. Given the importance of making faster progress towards more diverse council memberships, **recommendation 29** proposes that councillor diversity should be formally commented upon in performance or area assessments. Since the issue is not entirely in a council's hands to resolve, however, we do not believe it should directly affect CPA/CAA scores. Recommendations 25-28 were supported by a majority of Commissioners.

It is important to recognise that the success of any efforts to increase the numbers of councillors from ethnic minority communities will depend in part on how existing ones describe their experiences. The issues were stated with clarity by one of our forum correspondents:

"It is necessary for the Commission to address not only the barriers preventing black people standing for election, but also to address why black councillors so often feel sidelined, discriminated against and pigeon-holed within local government. There is an overlap between improving numbers of black councillors, and improving the experience of black councillors once elected."

Councillors with disabilities are entitled to reasonable adjustments such as sign language interpretation at official meetings, induction loop systems and accessible meeting rooms. In a submission to us, the Disability Rights Commission has suggested that few local authorities publicise this entitlement or have specific

officers responsible for ensuring that provision is made. Unless people with disabilities are aware of the support which will be available, fears that they may themselves have to finance costly adjustments are likely to discourage individuals from standing as candidates. We propose in **recommendation 30** that candidates considering themselves to have a disability should be offered assessment by a trained officer in advance of taking up office. The Disability Rights Commission has also proposed that councillors should be considered in a similar way to council employees, which would extend adjustments to areas such as ICT equipment, support staff and the timings of meetings, and we agree.

Political parties

The selection processes of political parties are the route to council membership for the great majority of councillors. Parties are essential to a functioning democracy: they provide clarity of choice based on values, ensure a healthy degree of electoral competition and play a crucial role in upholding ethical standards and providing clear lines of collective accountability. Many members of the public appear to still appreciate the value of political parties: a Young Foundation report refers to an Ipsos MORI poll showing that 49 per cent believe parties enable people to have a choice and 45 per cent say political parties are good for the democratic system (McTaggart et al., 2006).

Yet only about 1 per cent of the total population belongs to a political party and even among this small group some sections of the population, such as young people, are severely under represented and poorly attended party meetings can easily become dominated by individuals or factions. A Liverpool University study of Burnley and Harrogate found that the political party system was kept going by as few as 100 people in each town. Parties are also associated in the public mind with current unfavourable attitudes towards organised politics (Wilks-Heeg and Clayton, 2006).

Even so, if a wider range of people are to serve on our councils, it is through the party selection processes that most of them are likely to emerge. Local examples show the extent to which progress can be made if the will is there. Lambeth Council told us that the Labour Party has addressed concerns about the borough's large black and ethnic minority community being under represented on the Council by working to identify a group of party members who might be interested in becoming councillors even though they were not necessarily attending ward meetings. Over two years, support and development opportunities were maintained with a group of about 15 people. The support continued during the selection process and, in last year's elections, nine new Labour councillors from black and ethnic minority communities won seats.

In another example, the Conservative group in Reigate and Banstead has a much higher proportion of younger councillors than the national average – eight are under 35. This resulted from a deliberate policy by the party group and encouraged by the council. The group of younger councillors have contributed to changing council procedures, including streamlining processes to cut back on bureaucracy and re-planning training arrangements.

Case study research undertaken for the Commission in five local authority areas – councils that have achieved good levels of social representativeness – shows that, in all five areas, local parties have been instrumental in recruiting under represented groups (John et al., 2007).

In one case study area, the Conservative Party advertised for candidates in a local newspaper with the aim of attracting Conservative-minded people who had not previously considered standing as candidates. The party also adapted its usual selection process to give candidates from under represented groups a fairer chance of being chosen for winnable seats. In the same area, the Labour Party's use of affirmative action plans had ensured that at least a third of all multi-member seats were contested by a woman and the party had both a woman leader and deputy leader. One interviewee explained the importance of a personal visit from a Labour Party member as a key factor in persuading him to stand as a councillor: he described "feeling that I was important enough for him to come and see me. He found the time and the effort". Again, being asked to stand as a councillor can make all the difference.

Elsewhere in a coastal area with a very low black and minority ethnic population, the Liberal Democrats had made a conscious effort to attract those who were not stereotypical 'political animals', including a councillor from a local Bangladeshi community. In terms of electoral contests they were also active in presenting choice to the electorate and in the recent elections three younger councillors had replaced relatively old and inactive ones.

The findings of this study were corroborated by panel voting at one of our regional stakeholder events in Warwick University in July this year. The top two recommendations from the audience for how parties could improve the selection process were greater publicity on the role of councillors and more open recruitment by the parties.

The three main parties have sought to address the need to attract a wider pool of talented people in different ways. The Conservatives have pioneered open primaries, with a number being held in the run up to the General Election of 2005. They have worked to actively encourage much greater ethnic minority and female involvement at all levels of the Party including that of local government candidates. They also quote David Cameron who has said that 'it's not enough to just open the door and say 'please come in' we have to get out amongst Britain's ethnic minority communities and find the brightest, the best and the most talented and get them in'.

The Liberal Democrats are working to produce guidelines on how to approve and re-approve candidates, and model selection rules, 'in which diversity issues are likely to be underlined even more firmly'. These will be published in summer 2008. Further publications on 'how to identify potential new candidates' and 'engagement with minority communities' are also expected, and the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors will want to take careful account of any recommendations from the Commission in bringing these forward.

The Labour Party say that they have been using positive action procedures for local government selections since the 2004 elections in a range of pilot authorities to work towards an equality of men and women Labour councillors. An analysis of the progress made between 2003 and 2007 in 19 of the pilot authorities shows an overall increase of 14 per cent in women councillors, but 'is short of the NEC's stated aim of 50'. There is a recognition that to achieve this 'positive action for all local government selections will be required for the foreseeable future'.

The cogently argued report of a Commission on Candidate Selection chaired by Peter Riddell for the Electoral Reform Society stressed that parties should not over-emphasise the value of long, past experience and party activity in the selection of candidates at any level (Riddell, 2003). It suggested that, in an age where people have so many competing demands on their time, there is a limit to what can be expected from membership drives. So party politics need to become less exclusive, and parties become more imaginative in trying to work with non-party groups in voluntary and community activities. They should act as catalysts for all sorts of activity in their communities and be willing to work with those who share similar values, interests and goals.

The ERS report was published in 2003 and, in spite of positive examples such as the Lambeth one, too little has changed since then. One of the report's recommendations was that national party leaderships should encourage local parties to recruit as candidates people who share their values and have demonstrated leadership qualities but who may not have a lengthy record of party activity. We fully endorse that recommendation and repeat it as one of our own as **recommendation 31**.

The ERS commission came to the view that the main solution to the problem of political parties' selection system producing too narrow a range of candidates was in changing the nature of the parties themselves. Although progress has not been conspicuous since the report appeared in 2003 its analysis remains sound and its approach is reflected in our own recommendations.

We need to ensure that progress is more widespread than it has been to date. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion has recommended that the EHRC and the Electoral Commission should seek a voluntary agreement from the political parties to behave as though they were bound by a positive duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act, and other equalities duties. A majority of Commissioners give their support to this in **recommendation 32**.

Our proposal in recommendation 19 to introduce multi-member wards throughout the local government system offers an incentive for the parties to present a more varied selection of candidates at election time. Standing as one of a group of a party's candidates in multi-member wards can also make the task of running for election less daunting for newcomers. We call in **recommendation 33** for the parties to take up the opportunity that multi-member wards offer to ensure that they select from among women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and other under represented groups.

Local initiatives prove that such action can, where there is a will, produce results quite quickly. Only 9 per cent of the Labour group on Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council were women in 2003. After strong pressure from women's groups, a woman candidate was found for every ward in the 2004 elections. This took the proportion of women Labour councillors to 33 per cent, and it has since risen to about 40 per cent. As we were told, "The excuse of there not being enough women is not acceptable because it is not true."

The question of public funding for political parties is in a state of uncertainty following the recent failure of talks between the parties. Local government appears to have been omitted from these discussions. If public funding were to be introduced we call in **recommendation 34** for any local-level provision to be dependent on political parties fulfilling their obligations under the race, gender and equalities duties and demonstrating progress on equalities targets. This recommendation was supported by a majority of Commissioners. Aside from state funding, we believe there is a need for public money to be available to political parties to support projects aimed at improving the recruitment, training and selection of candidates and propose its establishment in **recommendation 35**. Following the all-party Parliamentary Group on Local Government's inquiry into the role of the local councillor, we commend the approach used by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to providing state funding for improving democratic activity through political parties (Dungey, 2007).

We call in **recommendation 36** for political parties, in conjunction with local authorities to work with organisations such as the Fawcett Society and Operation Black Vote to develop training and outreach programmes to help them meet the new statutory duty proposed in our first recommendation. In **recommendation 37** we ask the LGA/IDeA to help local parties determine best practice in candidate selection.

There remains the fraught issue of the public's attitude to party politics. Even though party membership has diminished, local government in this country is overwhelmingly organised on party lines. There are clear benefits of this, as we have argued, but the parties are in no position to ignore prevailing public attitudes which reject a confrontational, name-calling style of politics. As one of our respondents who has been asked on three occasions to stand for election told us:

"I was most recently asked to consider running as an independent ratepayer, but find the factional, childish infighting by local politicians, even those who are non-party, unbelievably parochial stuff."

Narrowly factional styles of expressing political differences may discourage many women, in particular, from participating. A number of submissions to the Commission argue that women may be put off by the aggressive nature of council debate and by a perception of male chauvinism. One comments that the kind of behaviour that is regarded as the 'rough and tumble' of politics would not be allowed in any other workplace.

Party groups have a responsibility to ensure that they resolve differences maturely and, as proposed by Sir Michael Lyons's report, we support in **recommendation 38** the view that party groups should extend exceptions to enforcing the whip on grounds of conscience to allow councillors greater leeway to represent ward issues. This needs to be accompanied by the development of more cross-party working by councillors. Evidence submitted to the Commission by the Centre for Public Scrutiny shows, for example, that cross-party scrutiny call-ins are more likely to be accepted and have an impact than single-party ones.

Obviously, the degree of political contestedness varies in different parts of the country and this will affect how the parties work together. In many parts of the country, particularly where hung councils operate, civilised debate can be the norm. However, we urge local parties to take seriously the impact of the quality and tone of their political culture on public perceptions of councils and councillors. We note that, in this as in other areas beyond our remit, the quality and tone of national political debate has a major impact on public perceptions at local level.

D. Making it easier for busy people to be councillors

Support

Time pressures dominate the list of potential barriers to people becoming councillors, particularly those with employment or caring responsibilities (Hands et al., 2007). Local authorities must make better use of their members' time. Meeting time flexibility has been identified as an important way of permitting increased participation (John et al., 2007). While day time meetings may be part of many councils' traditions, councillors who have jobs or caring responsibilities will often find evening ones easier to attend. Setting a maximum length for meetings offers an additional element of certainty and focuses attention on making the best use of councillors' precious time. Councils must see it as a priority to adopt modern business and meeting procedures and we summarise what we mean by this in **recommendation 39**.

Inventive use of modern technology, such as teleconferencing and allowing councillors to vote remotely, could eliminate some need for physical attendance. This could prove a particular advantage for councillors in rural areas, but also those with caring responsibilities or in full-time work. A majority of Commissioners call in **recommendation 40** for legislation to permit remote 'attendance' and voting at meetings.

Councillors must be adequately supported. This ranges from practical support from officers, administrative staff and IT to individual developmental support and tailored learning. The reality is that support varies widely between councils: some, for example, do not provide councillors with computer facilities or refund the cost of hiring space for surgeries with constituents. This is wholly unacceptable.

We call for the IDeALGA/LGLC to develop a charter determining minimum standards of support. As we set out in **recommendation 41**, these must at least include administrative and research support; IT equipment for use at home; help with arrangements and publicity for surgeries; arrangements to cover child and dependent care, and training and support in social networking.

The needs of particular groups must be met in bespoke ways. Women with young children have told us of their particular difficulties with childcare. Some authorities succeed in addressing this with Camden Council in London, for example, providing high quality child care in members' homes.

There is general agreement that induction training has improved considerably in recent years but there is still room for improvement (Hands et al., 2007). One submission from a parish councillor told us:

“We received a pack that showed that if we wanted to do a one day course we would need to travel nearly 40 miles away (with no public transport). Several of us don't have access to cars and most of us can't spare the extra two-three hours of travelling time and time away from family commitments.”

The demands of suddenly finding oneself a councillor can be daunting, and good induction training is a vital starting point. This then needs to extend into ongoing training and development, including training in approaches to community development as we say in **recommendation 42**, where we itemise a menu of necessary support from induction programmes, through personal development plans to opportunities for mentoring and self and peer review schemes. This development support should form part of the Support Charter proposed in recommendation 41.

The existing Member Development Charter scheme goes some way to giving recognition to good performance in this area but we would like to see its profile raised, along the lines of Investors in People, to recognise good service to representatives, as we propose in **recommendation 43**. Councils should be awarded Investors in People only if they can demonstrate a high level of service to councillors.

Since the need for training and development is paramount, the majority of Commissioners propose in **recommendation 44** that there should be an expectation that councillors will take advantage of opportunities offered to them and that this should form part of the support Charter which we propose in recommendation 41.

In addition to practical and developmental support, councillors should be supported by a properly helpful and respectful attitude from local authority officers. We urge the introduction of political awareness training in **recommendation 45** alongside arrangements for new officers to receive induction training to help them appreciate the role of councillors. Officers often have little exposure to, or understanding of, the political dynamic or councillors' motives, aims or expectations. We have been told of councils where officers regard councillors as a nuisance, or treat them as one

of many community groups to be consulted rather than as elected representatives at the centre of the local government system. Responses from officers to councillors' inquiries can be slow and dismissive. This recommendation relates to what is clearly a serious problem in some councils. One of the consequences of the introduction of executive leadership arrangements under the Local Government Act, 2000, is that many less senior officers now have less contact with councillors, perhaps exacerbating the problem.

The Government must clarify, as we say in **recommendation 46** which forms of support for councillors are non-political, and may therefore be funded by local authorities, and which are not. The clarification should make it demonstrably clear that support for councillors' surgeries and casework is always legitimate.

Employers

Support or opposition from an employer can make a vast difference to a councillor's potential effectiveness, and to the likelihood of new candidates coming forward (Hands et al., 2007; John et al., 2007).

There are examples of employers taking a positive and supportive attitude, such as British Telecommunications PLC and Rolls-Royce, although they appear to be exceptions. BT's Human Resources Special Leave policy sets out details of statutory rights to time-off for public duties. Under the BT policy such leave may be paid or unpaid, but it specifically allows 18 days a year paid special leave for employees who engage in local government work and 24 days for civic mayors.

But our submissions included complaints that even other public sector organisations can prove resistant to allowing time-off for civic duties. "If a public body, such as the NHS, is reluctant to allow time-off for public duty is it any wonder, or reasonable, that any other organisation should?" asked one respondent. Another correspondent seeking time-off from a GP practice was told "it was felt that this had been a test of my commitment to my job." Many submissions complained that employed or self-employed people were forced to choose between a career or council commitments with one submission suggesting that "becoming a councillor can blight a career."

Councillors are entitled to 'reasonable' time-off to perform their duties under the Employment Rights Act 1996 but a number of submissions say that employees are not granted time-off and that 'reasonable' is open to a wide range of interpretations. The increasing proportion of the workforce employed in small businesses, where it is often harder to cover the absence of a single person, may be adding to the problem. There are also implications for women, who are more likely than men to be employed in part-time, fixed-term work.

It appears that far too few employers have sufficient idea of what council work entails (Hands et al., 2007). Companies fail to recognise the benefits of supporting councillors as part of Corporate Social Responsibility activities, and do not appreciate the valuable transferable skills that a councillor can take back into the workplace. These are powerful potential business benefits.

Employers should ensure that they have in place human resources policies to cover time-off for public duties as we say in **recommendation 47**. Beyond that, we believe that engaging with employers locally and nationally to promote the benefits of council service is the best way forward. We call in **recommendation 48** for local authorities to step-up their engagement with employers, raising awareness of the advantages of employing councillors. Sometimes simple techniques, such as involving employers in induction events and remembering to acknowledge their support, will help to strengthen bonds. As we say in **recommendation 49**, there is a role for the IDeALGA in supporting this work with measures including the development of an information pack which is adaptable for local use, working with employers' organisations, and reintroducing a Good Employers Award.

It would appear that opinion among employers about having councillors on their staff is very divided. A recent Institute of Directors survey (forthcoming), on employing reservists and volunteers conducted in August, 2007, showed that 50 per cent of respondents would encourage their staff to take part in the role of councillor: in response to a separate question, 54 per cent said they would discourage their staff. There were however encouraging signs of potential flexibility on the part of these employers: a clear majority were willing to consider flexible working, or part-time working, for example. When asked whether their organisation had any formal human resources policy on employing councillors, 80 per cent said no and 14 per cent yes – but 69 per cent said they would welcome information on adapting their policies to provide information on councillors. These results point to the importance of our recommendation on human resources policies covering time-off for public duties, the need for an information pack for employers and the need for an information campaign.

In the particular circumstances of small businesses, where the periodic absence of a single employee is likely to cause greater problems than in large firms, we recommend in **recommendation 50** the introduction of a local-government administered financial compensation scheme. Rates would form part of our proposed national framework on allowances and would reflect regional variations in pay. Implementation of this would need to ensure that administrative burdens on small employers were as light as possible, and lessons should be learnt from similar schemes for reservists.

Accrediting and recognising service

The idea that the knowledge, skills and experience gained by councillors as part of their role should be publicly acknowledged is gaining strength. We call in **recommendation 51** for the IDeALGA to work with local authorities to develop a model of accreditation to validate councillors' everyday skills; but also to help those wishing to undertake more formal qualifications to do so. We are also anxious that the skills and experience of councillors who stand down or are defeated in elections are not lost to the community and ask the IDeALGA in **recommendation 52** to seek ways of celebrating such people's service and enabling them to remain civically active. As we say in **recommendation 53**, opportunities should also be explored for the national and trade media to recognise the contribution of councillors through schemes such as public service awards.

Parachute payments

Councillors do not have a job for life. Leaders or others holding special responsibility allowances who derive all or most of their income from council duties can find themselves in sudden difficulty if allowances suddenly cease as a result of election outcomes. In regular employment termination would normally result in a payment such as a redundancy package. A minimum of one year's salary is made available to Members of Parliament who lose their seats.

In closely defined circumstances, we believe some financial provision should be available for elected mayors, leaders and other executive members to receive 'parachute payments'. Apart from providing support to individuals at what may be a time of need, the knowledge that such a provision existed might give some comfort to those considering taking up executive office and sits with our views that it should be made less risky to both become and cease being a councillor. Such parachute payments would form part of a proposal for a national framework of guiding principles for members' allowances which we shall address in the forthcoming section on allowances. We stress in **recommendation 54**, however, that parachute payments should be available only when office holders lose allowances through the actions of the electorate and not for any other reason.

Exit interviews

Exit interviews conducted with all councillors who do not continue in office can capture information which could be valuable in enhancing future retention of councillors, in addition to giving departing members an opportunity to review work carried out during their time in office and validate the skills and experience they have gained. **Recommendation 55** proposes their use by all authorities.

As we have discovered during our inquiry there is a real need for a clear understanding of the profile of councillors, particularly so in view of the need to monitor progress on diversity. We call in **recommendation 56** for the census of local authority councillors to be continued and one for parish councillors to be introduced; a survey of candidates standing for election to be continued and for the IDeA/LGA to reinstate their former national exit survey.

Allowances

Under the legislative framework for members' allowances councils have to establish and have regard to the recommendations of local remuneration panels. No national limits are set. There is a strong view that councillors generally are poorly rewarded for the work that they do (Lyons, 2007). Councillors can sometimes be uncomfortable in setting their own allowances, which is a topic that often provokes local media attention (Hands et al., 2007). The creation of a London-wide panel in the capital has overcome some of these disadvantages and there has been convergence in the capital towards its recommendations.

Our view is that allowances should be set at a level that enables people to undertake the role of councillor while not acting as an incentive to do so. Allowances are not shown by polls to be something which influences councillors to take on the role although they are instrumental in making it possible for some people to do so. If it is important that there are no financial incentives to being a councillor, it is equally important that there should not be a financial disincentive.

We believe the national framework which we referred to in recommendation 54, setting guiding principles for members' allowances and recommended minimum levels for each type and size of authority would be a benefit and in **recommendation 57** we propose its introduction. It would not inhibit individual authorities from taking account of local circumstances, and they would retain the option of setting up their own independent panels. National principles and guidelines might, however, lead to a more temperate understanding of allowances issues among the local media and public. There appears to be a public perception that councillors' allowances are far higher than is the case. Figures from the 2006 Survey of Members' Allowances (LGAR, 2007) showed that councillors in England received an average of £5,648 in basic allowances, with special responsibility allowances for leaders averaging £16,356. The allowance system for parish councils is more restrictive than for principal authorities – parish councils are not, for example, allowed to pay special responsibility allowances to political leaders where they exist – and we propose that our suggested national framework should address this. In order to encourage participation in elections, however, parish allowances should apply only to elected members and not to co-optees.

Since 2003 councillors in England have been eligible to join the local government pension scheme on the recommendation of the local independent remuneration panel.

We recommend in **recommendation 58** that all councillors should be able to join it automatically. This might remove a barrier to service by offering some reassurance to people of working age and we believe strongly that people should not be disadvantaged financially by serving as a councillor.

The situation regarding members' allowances and benefits is complicated: we call on the Government in **recommendation 59** to review the earnings disregard for benefits in respect of allowances, and in particular move to disregard renounced members' allowances for benefits purposes.

We see a value in including in the national framework of allowances the issue of how councillors can communicate with their electorate about their political activities (compared with communications produced by the council itself, which are likely to steer clear of mentioning political stories). As we say in **recommendation 60**, this could include making small grants to councillors for such communications.

Effectiveness

There is no foolproof test of councillors' effectiveness, and individuals perform the role in different ways; in addition, councillors are not employees. Any question of introducing performance related pay would raise difficult issues and we do not seek to do so. Several authorities have, however, introduced voluntary clawback schemes under which councillors may be liable to forfeit parts of allowances if they fail adequately to perform their role. Some comparison can be made with police authorities, which have the right to withhold allowances if members do not attend meetings, although determining a councillor's performance clearly raises more complicated issues than purely attendance at meetings.

Since we have proposed the development of a defined role for councillors, we believe that there is justification for a clawback scheme in those exceptional cases where a councillor demonstrably fails to fulfil specified duties; we would expect such cases to be rare. This proposal could introduce a potential for political dispute or abuse which it would be necessary to avoid. We are satisfied that such abuse could be prevented provided the route to any clawback, as we say in **recommendation 61**, is through the standards committee of the council.

Postscript

"When I joined the town hall 52 years ago the surnames of half the councillors were on the 1892 foundation stone outside the town hall. They were the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the present councillors. Their money came from the mills and that money had built the town hall. It was part of their lifestyle to be on the council.

The newer Labour members worked in the nationalised industries – mostly down the pit. They were able people who had left school at 13 and discharged their considerable abilities on the council. They enjoyed time-off and were compensated by the financial loss allowance. Better to be in the town hall than down the pit.

On the county council were the grandees, whose ancestors had run quarter sessions before the county councils took over in 1888. They inherited a family commitment in public service. They did not use the title 'councillor' because they already had titles – Viscount, Major-General etc.

These classes of councillor have disappeared. The mills are now flatted factories or are run from London – or abroad. The nationalised industries have been denationalised. The able manual workers now go to university and are on a career treadmill. The aristocrats have returned to their stately homes."

This elegantly descriptive opening to a submission to our forum is a pertinent reminder that the days when distinct social and occupational groups despatched representatives to the service of local government almost automatically are gone. Communities are more diverse, social groupings and identities are more fluid. Local authorities and political parties now face the tougher task of persuading individuals to offer their time. In doing this, they find themselves in competition with all other community organisations that rely on the time commitment of volunteers.

Local government is not, however, just one community organisation among many. It is the centre of local democracy, and other community organisations share an interest in local government's health. That is why we have sought to emphasise the importance of local authorities actively promoting local democracy throughout their communities, and the crucial role of the councillor in both the representative and the participatory arms of democracy.

The recommendations in this report require attention and action on the part of central and local government, the political parties, employers the media and others. If our proposals are implemented as a package, we are satisfied it will be possible to expand the range of able, qualified people who can be attracted to council service. We intend to reconvene in one year's time to assess what progress has been made.

Although some of our recommendations are inevitably concerned with the detail of local government arrangements, we reiterate that this report is about far more than that. Its context is the current, growing concern about the nature of relationships between the citizen and the state. Local democracy is the most fruitful route into grappling with those issues. It offers diverse ways in which, amid the many pressures of modern life, people can become involved in their community's governance on their own terms, and to the extent to which they choose.

If our recommendations were not implemented, what might the future hold? The unrepresentative nature of councillors is already an issue which is beginning to devalue local democracy in the eyes of the public. If nothing changes, the current difficulties facing the political parties in recruiting good candidates would be likely to increase. It must be expected – to take just one of many possible examples – that the proportion of young councillors would remain low, posing increasing succession problems for the future. With some councillors occupied by substantial executive functions, there might eventually be insufficient able and energetic members available to lead the community contact on which local democracy relies.

None of that need happen. Our recommendations offer a starting point for recruiting a new and wider range of councillors. They deserve to do so for the sake of the important democratic reasons we have discussed, but also for one that we have perhaps understated: councillors have spoken to us repeatedly about the great satisfaction that the role brings. It is not only an essential form of service to the community, but one that offers strong personal rewards.

recommendations

Promoting democracy

1. Local authorities should be charged with a statutory duty to facilitate local democratic engagement by:
 - a) proactively disseminating clear and accessible information on how local governance works: what councils and councillors do; what the responsibilities of other agencies are; how local agencies relate to one another (or not); even how to register to vote and how exactly to vote;
 - b) facilitating more active civic participation in a range of areas (such as tenant and residents' associations, school governorship etc). This may well require a more specific capacity building/community development approach;
 - c) raising interest in and providing information on how to stand as a councillor;
 - d) proactively promoting the role of councillor and the activities of elected members.

Principal authorities should also provide information and facilitate democratic engagement in respect of the parish and town council tier.

To support this recommendation central government departments must work far more effectively together than hitherto, to ensure a consistent and positive approach to local government.

2. The LGA/IDeA should develop and provide a framework of advice and best practice guidance for this new function.
 3. In order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in local representative democracy, the role of a councillor must be compatible with full-time employment and an executive councillor with full or part-time employment. The leader of a council should be able to work in addition to council duties; it is recognised that some leaders of larger authorities may wish to work full-time on council duties, but they should not be required to do so.
 4. Local authorities must recognise that elected councillors provide crucial two-way links between local councils and their communities. They carry into the council the views of the public and explain the decisions of the council to the public. As such, they must be given the tools to work effectively at the interface of local representative and participatory democratic processes.
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Councillors' role

5. Local authorities, in conjunction with guidance from the LGA, should develop and introduce clear role descriptions of what is expected of councillors. Similar role definitions should be developed in conjunction with NALC for the parish and town council tier.

Direct contact

6. Local authorities need to recognise the importance of direct contact between councillors and the public and assist councillors to be more visible and accessible in their locality by:
 - a) providing and supporting opportunities for democratic engagement where councillors can meet with their constituents face to face;
 - b) placing councillors at the heart of well-supported area and neighbourhood-based structures;
 - c) utilising councillor-led scrutiny processes to enable councillors to interact with their communities;
 - d) making much more active use of digital and social networking technologies.

The public eye

7. As part of their corporate communications strategy, local authorities and councillors should promote the role of councillors using a range of communication tools, for example by:
 - a) Using the media and communications resources of the council to work to build positive relations with the local media;
 - b) Making use of council newsletters and other media publications;
 - c) Harnessing technological solutions – such as email, web 2.0, blogs and texting – to make councillors' activities more visible.

Public service broadcasting

8. Public service broadcasters should ensure that they fulfil their remit to facilitate civic understanding, particularly in relation to local government and democracy.
 9. Ofcom should, as part of their periodic reviews of whether public service broadcasters are fulfilling their remit to facilitate civic understanding, comment in particular on coverage of local government and democracy.
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Campaigns

10. All local authorities should take seriously their key role in publicising and communicating the decisions made by the council and the work of councillors and organise and resource themselves accordingly. This should include signing up to the LGA/IDeA Reputation campaign.
11. There should be further work at the national level to actively promote to under represented groups, the opportunity to stand and serve as councillors.
12. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity should be examined, with a view to its amendment or withdrawal, in order to free up councils to publicise the role and work of their members more effectively without fear of breaking rules.

Young people and citizenship

13. The Department for Children, Schools and Families, in conjunction with Communities and Local Government and the LGA, should work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that the role of councils and councillors and the value of local democracy (including the parish and town council tier) is mainstreamed within the citizenship curriculum, and strongly reflected in national guidelines and best practice.

Youth engagement

14. Local authorities should be required to develop and implement strategies to engage meaningfully with young people, (ensuring that any such initiatives involve elected councillors), by:
 - a) involving them meaningfully in consultation processes, for example by consulting with schools wherever policy impacts upon the lives of their pupils;
 - b) utilising methods such as youth mayoral elections, political speed dating, and work experience/internships with councillors;
 - c) encouraging pupils to interact with their councillors by discussing with them areas of particular concern or interest.

Voting age

15. The Ministry of Justice should reduce the voting age to 16 years.
 16. The Ministry of Justice should review the candidacy age, four years after the introduction of voting at 16 years, to assess whether the candidacy age should be lowered to 16 years.
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Reserve candidates

17. At the time of local elections, political parties should be able to publish a list of reserve councillors, who can replace a councillor of their party who stands down during their term, avoiding the need for a by-election. A by-election will be required if: an independent stands down; if a petition demanding a by-election is signed by an equivalent number of residents of the relevant ward as equates to 25 per cent of the turnout at the last election or 10 per cent of the electorate, in that ward, whichever is the lower; or if the incumbent party chooses to hold one.

Electoral arrangements

18. A uniform cycle of all-out four-yearly local elections should be introduced across the whole of England. All authorities in a given region should be elected on the same day, but not all regions should hold elections at the same time. Local elections should not take place on the same day as national or European elections. Parish and town council elections should take place on the same day as other local elections in their region and principal authorities should always cover the cost of administering parish and town council elections in full without passing them down to the lower tier.

Multi-member wards

19. In view of the potential positive impact that multi-member wards can have in terms of encouraging the election of under represented groups and encouraging teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities between councillors, multi-member wards should be adopted throughout the local government electoral system.

Voting incentives

20. In the interests of seeking new ways to engage the electorate, local authorities should be enabled to develop and use schemes which incentivise voting, for example by offering voters a chance to enter into a lottery.

Single transferable vote

21. In the spirit of local experimentation and because there is a view that STV can increase the diversity of councillors, local authorities should be enabled to pilot STV if they wish. Any pilots should only be introduced following a majority vote and a preceding period of consultation, and should be in place for a minimum of two terms.
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Term limits

22. The Government should introduce legislation to bring into force, after a transitional period of four years, a statutory requirement to limit councillors to serve five consecutive terms; and to limit leaders and directly elected mayors to serve three consecutive terms.

Political restrictions

23. Political restrictions based on salary level should be abolished. Restrictions (see recommendation 24) should be retained for very senior posts and certain politically sensitive roles, with Councils' Standards Committees having the ability to implement restrictions to other posts where considered necessary in particular circumstances.
- a) Very senior posts are: Chief Executive, Statutory Chief Officers, Non-statutory Chief Officers, Monitoring Officers, and Deputy Chief Officers;
 - b) Politically sensitive roles are: those directly giving regular advice to the Council or any of its committees or other meetings of elected members; and/or speaking on behalf of the Council on a regular basis to journalists or other media;
 - c) The rest of the workforce are: unrestricted but with the option for restrictions to be applied to a post if deemed appropriate by the Council's Standards Committee after proper advice and consideration.
24. Restricted activities should be limited to:
- a) standing for election as an MP, MEP, AM or a councillor on a principal authority; or
 - b) holding office in a political party, including acting as an election agent or sub-agent.

Equalities

25. The Government, working with the EHRC should amend relevant guidance to make it clear that local authorities' new duty to facilitate democratic engagement (see recommendation 1) is covered by the equalities duties.
26. The Government, working with the EHRC, should amend the relevant legislation to include specific requirements for councillor equalities targets as an element of Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.
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27. The EHRC should be asked to assess local authorities' compliance with their councillor diversity targets (see recommendation 26) as set out in their Equalities Schemes, and to work within those authorities who are least reflective of their communities, the bottom 10 per cent, to assess whether they should make more efforts to change the situation, and if necessary to support initiatives to help them to do so. The EHRC should make an assessment at the time of whether lack of representativeness may also be due to inaction by local political parties or indeed the wider community.
28. The EHRC, IDeA and DIALOG should seek to revise the Local Government Equality Standard framework to give local authorities a clearer responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in terms of opportunities for participation as elected representatives.
29. In recognition of the important role of local authorities in promoting equality of opportunity for participation as elected representatives, councillor diversity should be formally commented on as part of performance assessments, though it should not directly affect CPA/CAA scores.
30. Disabled people should not encounter additional barriers to serving as a councillor, therefore:
- a) all candidates considering themselves as having a disability should be offered an assessment by a trained officer to assess their needs in advance of arrival in post and to consider any reasonable adjustments that can be made;
 - b) guidance should be provided to local authorities clarifying which of councillor's duties are covered by the requirement for reasonable adjustments;
 - c) councillors should be treated as council employees, including under the Access to Work scheme, as the lack of cover for 'unofficial' duties could provide a disincentive for disabled councillors.

Political parties

31. National party leaderships should:
- a) recognise more visibly the value of councillors and work with them proactively, so they can be seen to be an integrated part of the system of governance;
 - b) encourage local parties to recruit as candidates suitably able people who share their values and have demonstrated leadership qualities but who may not have a lengthy record of party activity.
32. We support the recommendation made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, that the EHRC and the Electoral Commission should work together to seek a voluntary agreement on the part of political parties to behave as if they
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are bound by the positive duty in the Race Relations Amendment Act. We also recommend that the agreement covers disability and gender equality duties.

33. The recommended move to member wards provides opportunities to address gender and other imbalances in representation, and we would encourage political parties to select a range of candidates including those who are women, and/or from ethnic minority backgrounds and other under represented groups.
34. The provision of any public funding for political parties at the local level should be dependent upon political parties signing up to a voluntary agreement as at recommendation 32, and should specifically be dependent upon demonstrating progress in terms of equalities targets as set out in their Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.
35. A dedicated fund should be established to provide public money to political parties, specifically for projects aimed at improving the recruitment, training and selection of candidates.
36. Political parties should, in conjunction with local authorities and in association with organisations leading this work, such as Operation Black Vote and the Fawcett Society, develop training and outreach programmes, to assist those who need the opportunity to develop the presentational and political skills to stand as candidates.
37. The LGA and IDeA should assist local political parties in determining best practice in candidate selection, by developing advisory materials and training programmes to support them.
38. As recommended by the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, party groups should extend exceptions to enforcing the party whip on the grounds of conscience to allow councillors greater leeway to represent ward issues.

Support

39. Councils should adopt modern business and meeting processes which seek to remove potential barriers to participation. This should include:
 - a) ensuring meeting times are accessible to both members and the public, with a preference for early evening meetings to enable working councillors to attend;
 - b) ensuring meetings are chaired efficiently and have agreed maximum lengths;
 - c) making use of modern technology to enable involvement in meetings without the need to attend in person;
 - d) ensuring paperwork for meetings is concise and focused and provided in a timely fashion;
 - e) making meetings as welcoming and inclusive as possible.
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40. The Government should introduce legislation in order to enable involvement in meetings including, but never limited to, voting, without the need to attend in person.
41. The IDeA/LGA/LGLC should develop a Charter regarding minimum standards of member support which local authorities should agree to provide. This should at least include:
- a) administrative support for case work, communications and diary management;
 - b) research support for ward work;
 - c) IT equipment for use at home, (PC or laptop, broadband access etc) and IT support;
 - d) arrangements and publicity for surgeries;
 - e) arrangements for child and dependent care cover (at minimum fully covering costs, and preferably organised home care);
 - f) social networking training and support.
42. Councils should support councillors to develop their skills by offering:
- a) a flexible and time-sensitive induction programme, which utilises a range of learning methods;
 - b) an option for 'refresher' and 'ongoing' training for all councillors;
 - c) personal development plans regarding development needs and opportunities;
 - d) opportunities to be partnered with mentors within and/or outside one's own council;
 - e) self and peer review schemes leading to tailored support packages for councillors;
 - f) training in approaches to community development.
- Minimum standards of development support should form part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41.
43. The IDeA's Charter of Member Development should be further developed to recognise good service to representatives, and it should be agreed that councils should only be awarded the Investors in People status if they can demonstrate a high level of service to councillors, not just to council employees.
44. As part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41, there should be an expectation on councillors that they take up appropriate training and development opportunities offered to them by their local authority.
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45. Political awareness and an appreciation of the councillor role should be regarded as a core training need for local authority officers. In recognition that few opportunities are available for officers to observe councillors carrying out council duties, specific awareness raising opportunities should be developed including councillor involvement in officers' induction events/programmes and opportunities to shadow members in their ward work.
46. The Department for Communities and Local Government, in liaison with local government groups, should issue clear guidelines regarding which member support activities should be considered political and which non-political, and therefore which activities can be funded by local authorities. It should be made clear to councils that surgery support and case work support is always legitimate.

Employers

47. Employers should ensure that they have in place an HR policy in respect of time-off work for public duties, including for work as a local councillor. These should be agreed with trades unions or employee representatives, as appropriate.
 48. Local authorities should use established and new avenues to actively liaise with local employers. They should:
 - a) engage with local employers to raise awareness of the role and its transferable skill-set; and explain employers' duties in respect of time-off;
 - b) recognise the contribution made by local employers of councillors for example by sending letters welcoming and thanking them for their support;
 - c) equip councillors for and assist them in negotiating with employers;
 - d) provide information packs to both councillors and employers;
 - e) involve employers in shadowing/induction events etc.
 49. The IDeALGA should:
 - a) develop a generic employers information pack, to be adapted for local use;
 - b) develop generic information for councillors for negotiating with employers, to be adapted for local use;
 - c) reintroduce a Good Employers' Award;
 - d) work with employer organisations to publicise the role employers have in supporting councillors.
 50. A financial compensation scheme, to be administered by local authorities should be developed which allows small businesses to claim a flat rate for absences resulting from employees' councillor duties. Appropriate rates should be included in the National Framework on Allowances (see recommendation 57), and should take account of regional variations in pay.
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Accrediting and recognising service

51. The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to promote a model of accreditation of councillor skills based on best practice. This should enable the validation of the everyday skills developed by councillors, such as negotiation and communication skills, and also allow councillors to undertake more formal course-based qualifications.
52. The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to develop schemes for recognising and celebrating individuals' service and skills as a councillor and providing an opportunity to remain civically active.
53. Opportunities should be explored for national and trade media to recognise councillors through public service awards or similar.

Parachute payments

54. A national framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should include a scheme of 'parachute payments' for elected mayors, leaders and executive portfolio-holders who lose office through the action of the electorate. The payments should be at least equivalent to statutory redundancy pay and linked to time served in office.

Exit interviews

55. In order to understand and address the needs of and opportunities provided by individuals who stop being councillors, all local authorities should undertake exit interviews, with a view to:
 - a) providing the council with systematic evidence of why councillors decide not to stand for re-election and whether anything can be done to address this; and
 - b) providing individuals with opportunities for them to continue to be civically engaged.
 56. In order to develop a clear understanding of the profile of councillors:
 - a) the census of local authority councillors should be continued;
 - b) the LGA/IDeA should reinstate their national exit survey;
 - c) a census of parish and town councillors should be introduced;
 - d) the survey of candidates standing for election should be continued.
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Allowances

57. A national framework of guiding principles for members' allowances schemes should be developed. It should specify a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of authority. Councils should have regard to the national framework in framing their own schemes but should be able to opt to appoint their own local or regional independent remuneration panel. The framework should also make recommendations in respect of parish and town councillors.
58. All councillors should be entitled to access to the local government pension scheme, and any allowances for serving on joint authorities should also be taken into account.
59. The Department for Work and Pensions should review the earnings disregard for benefits in respect of members' allowances, and in particular move to disregard renounced members' allowances for benefits purposes.
60. The National Framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should not preclude small allowances being made available to councillors to communicate with their electorate, including where content is explicit about their political allegiance and activities.

Effectiveness

61. In order to maintain confidence in local councillors, Local Authority Standards Committees should be empowered to suspend and claw back part of the basic allowance on the limited occasions where councillors are measurably failing to fulfil their role description.

All of these recommendations are intended to encourage debate for the benefit of the future of local government. However, there was considerable discussion around some of the more contentious recommendations; and not all of the recommendations were unanimously agreed by the Commission.

notes on the recommendations

These notes are intended to provide additional evidence in support of the recommendations of the Councillors Commission. In some cases, where noted, a full explanation is available in the main report.

Recommendation 1

Local authorities should be charged with a statutory duty to facilitate local democratic engagement by:

- a) **proactively disseminating clear and accessible information on how local governance works: what councils and councillors do; what the responsibilities of other agencies are; how local agencies relate to one another (or not); even how to register to vote and how exactly to vote;**
- b) **facilitating more active civic participation in a range of areas (such as tenant and residents' associations, school governorship etc). This may well require a more specific capacity building/community development approach;**
- c) **raising interest in and providing information on how to stand as a councillor;**
- d) **proactively promoting the role of councillor and the activities of elected members.**

Principal authorities should also provide information and facilitate democratic engagement in respect of the parish and Town Council tier.

To support this recommendation central government departments must work far more effectively together than hitherto, to ensure a consistent and positive approach to local government.

Lack of awareness

A recent report of the All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group identified lack of awareness of the councillor role, and the role of local government more generally, as a key barrier to attracting potential councillors (Dungey, 2007). Widespread public lack of understanding about what councillors do is a recurring theme in the literature on councillors (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Such findings are supported by qualitative research undertaken for the Commission among community activists, who exhibited a very limited understanding of the role of councillor and governance in general (Hands et al., 2007).

At the parish and town council level, the public profile of councils is even lower. Indeed a 2002 survey found that there existed communities in which residents were wholly unaware that they were served by a parish council (Woods and Gardner, 2007). The recent report by the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development describes public awareness as to what town and parish councils do as 'negligible' (2007:35) and experts from the University of Gloucestershire, in their submission to the Commission, suggest that parish and town councillors often do not even register 'on the radar' of Government, let alone in the minds of the public.

Among the wider public, confusion appears to be rife regarding the roles and responsibilities of different tiers of local government, and their relationships to one another. Submissions to the Commission made common reference to such confusion, particularly in multi-tier areas, and suggested that the public often assume that councils have responsibility for services they do not control.

Unsurprisingly, lack of public awareness in relation to what councillors do is mirrored in a similar ignorance of participation opportunities and lack of knowledge of how to stand for selection or election (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Research undertaken for the Commission found that very few respondents (other than the few interested in becoming councillors and some senior level activists) had any understanding of the process by which a potential councillor stands for election (Hands et al., 2007).

In case study research undertaken for the Commission into representative councils, awareness-raising initiatives were regarded as important for establishing strong links between council and community, promoting local democracy and improving citizens' understanding of the local council and its key functions (John et al., 2007). Participants in our VCS workshop in Somerset also argued that local authorities should provide information about the role and responsibilities of councillors via a variety of routes, including making use of alternative media/community radio, publishing information in council newspapers, and profiling role models.

Appetite for more local authority involvement in recruitment

Although one or two submissions to the Commission suggest that promoting candidacy for local elections should remain the sole purview of political parties, and a number indicate areas where the involvement of councils might create difficulties (for example in relation to extremist candidates), there exists a relative consensus that local authorities should play a greater and more proactive role in councillor recruitment, though it is clear that this should supplement rather than replace the role of political parties. The recent report of the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group echoes this view and concludes that councils should do more to encourage people locally to consider putting themselves forward for election (Dungey, 2007). In fact it argues that councils should have a formal duty to do so and recommends that there should be a new legal duty on councils (possibly on the Returning Officer), to provide information about the role of councillor in order to support recruitment. This could include open events, information packs, shadowing and mentoring, and the general promotion of the role (Dungey, 2007).

Moreover, research undertaken for the Commission found some evidence that community activists might be converted into councillors via a personal approach from a neutral individual or organisation who is aware of their work in the community, particularly if they felt they had been 'headhunted'. It was also suggested that public meetings could be held to answer questions about standing as a councillor, though it was also said that this kind of meeting might need to be 'disguised' as a community event, in order to appeal to those not currently interested in politics and local government (Hands et al., 2007:25-26).

Most local authorities however are very reluctant to involve themselves actively in promoting opportunities to become councillors. Local authority officers interviewed in our case study research expressed the view that they felt unable to make a major or significant contribution to the recruitment of new and under represented councillor as this was not an appropriate role (John et al., 2007). In other research too, council officers expressed that there was not a great deal more that could be done in terms of recruitment at the local authority level and that efforts might well meet with resistance from the political parties. An example is cited where officers wanted to meet with candidates pre-election, but the political parties warned them off due to concerns that officers might 'scare' candidates when discussing the requirements of the role. In another area, an authority attempted to set up an event to raise awareness of the role of councillor, selection and election etc., but the political parties felt that this was inappropriate.

Despite the reluctance of many local authorities to get involved, our evidence gathering has revealed that some local authorities are already showing the way forward in a variety of elements which could form part of this function. For example, Moray Council (in Scotland) put up 'Wanted' posters 'on every block' which highlighted the role and provided contact details. St. Edmundsbury Borough Council conducted a 'Voice' campaign which sought to encourage people from across the community to stand, and reports that there were fewer uncontested wards and more candidates than in the previous local election. Haringey held 'pre-election events' which took the form of open evenings which were well-attended and covered practical issues such as the electoral process, information about roles, expected time commitment and support available to members. Rotherham Council, which has its own internal target for increasing the number of candidates at elections, also describes how sessions were held in advance of elections entitled 'A councillor? Who? Me?' and which included a frontline and executive councillor going through their diary and explaining what all their commitments involved. Thanet District Council's Chief Executive made use of the local media to explain what is required of a councillor in the run-up to elections. East Devon District Council ran a series of road shows in local towns and villages in order to raise awareness of the election and to encourage potential candidates. As well as enticing people to consider becoming councillors, some councils provide detailed pre-election support to assist potential candidates and councillors prepare for taking on the role. Leicester City Council, Bristol City Council and Lancashire County Council produce quite detailed candidate packs and make them available via their websites.

Reaching out to under represented groups

There is evidence of differential levels of political and civic skills and confidence among under represented groups which may affect their willingness to come forward in the absence of encouragement and support. For example, an Electoral Commission (2004) study identifies that women have a weaker sense of political efficacy than men and less confidence that they can influence the political process through their own actions. This finding is reinforced by a number of other studies which have identified a lack of confidence or reluctance to put themselves forward as barriers to participation in local government (see Haberis and Prendergrast (2007) for details). Likewise Ellis (2003) refers to a lack of confidence amongst disabled people who are subject to repeated negative stereotyping, and a lack of confidence among some young people is identified as a reason for their lack of involvement in more active forms of participation (Molloy et al., 2002).

A number of authorities have already taken a key role in reaching out to under represented groups to encourage participation. Indeed John et al. (2007) suggest that in the five case study areas studied, councils (and local employers) had a crucial role in harnessing the existing 'cultural dynamic' which facilitated effective representation. Perhaps the most well-known targeting scheme is that run by Operation Black Vote and Bristol City Council which seeks to raise awareness and confidence among people from ethnic minority backgrounds and to encourage their involvement as elected members. This scheme is currently being extended to target women and people with disabilities.

Routes into the councillor role

Research undertaken for the Commission concluded that 'it is widely held that information and advertising around the role of councillor should be targeted at the whole community, but especially at those already active in the voluntary sector, at young people and others in under represented groups' (Hands et al., 2007:24). Involvement in political life often starts with a single local (often controversial) issue, and involvement in local community-based organisation and we know that some groups of citizens (notably younger people, those from some BME communities and women) prefer to engage in alternative political spheres.

There may also be ways in which existing networks and organisations could play a role in creating pathways from youth participation to election as councillor. According to Brand (2006), more could be done within existing youth forums (such as the British Youth Council and local area youth committees) and the Youth Parliament to highlight the potential benefits of the role and to create pathways from participation in these groups to seeking election as a councillor.

About half of all councils have some non-councillor co-optees involved in their overview and scrutiny work. Evidence presented to the Commission by the Centre for Public Scrutiny emphasised that such an approach can provide a valuable route for people to gain experience and understanding of local government. A submission from Bristol City Council cites examples of individuals making progress from engagement via equalities forums and co-opteeships to becoming councillors and school governors.

A contributor to the Commission's on-line forum suggested that better use could be made of the wealth of publicly appointed positions where local parties and authorities can nominate board members (school governors, health authorities, voluntary sector and charities, law-centres etc.) and which can be a vital stepping stone to elected office. Indeed in this regard, the LGiU, in its submission to the Commission, recommended that publicly-funded appointments websites (such as www.direct.gov.uk and www.publicappts-vacs.gov.uk) be required to carry information about being elected as a local government councillor and that the promotion of the councillor role be taken up by organisations concerned with promoting volunteering, alongside promotion of other governance roles such as school governor, members of health trusts, and those such as magistrates.

Recommendation 2

The LGA/IDeA should develop and provide a framework of advice and best practice guidance for this new function.

See note on recommendation 1 above.

Recommendation 3

In order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in local representative democracy, the role of a councillor must be compatible with full-time employment and an executive councillor with full or part-time employment. The leader of a council should be able to work in addition to council duties; it is recognised that some leaders of larger authorities may wish to work full-time on council duties, but they should not be required to do so.

The amount of time needed to perform the role of local councillor is consistently cited as a major barrier to becoming and remaining active in local politics (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007; Hands et al., 2007; John et al., 2007). The table below (taken from John et al., 2007) shows the average number of hours spent by councillors on council duties. While these figures have to be interpreted with some caution (they are sourced from various surveys that have utilised different methods and definitions), they are indicative of a general upward trend. Whether attending council meetings, dealing with constituents' enquiries or attending community councils and school boards, councillors contribute a large amount of time to their duties which inevitably in turn impacts upon employment and family life. Women in particular have found council duties a constraint upon obligations to their family (e.g. Wilson et al., 1993).

Average number of hours spent on council duties, 1964-2006

Year	Hours per month	Source
1964	52	Maud (1967) cited in Widdicombe (1986)
1976	79	Robinson (1977) cited in Widdicombe (1986)
1985	74	Widdicombe (1986)
1993	74	Young and Rao (1994)
2003	82.66	Rao (2005)
2004	93.2*	IDeA/LGA/LGAR (2005)
2006	94.9*	IDeA/LGA/LGAR (2007)

*Based on weekly data and re-aggregated to provide an estimate on a calendar month basis.

Recommendation 4

Local Authorities must recognise that elected councillors provide crucial two-way links between local councils and their communities. They carry into the council the views of the public and explain the decisions of the council to the public. As such, they must be given the tools to work effectively at the interface of local representative and participatory democratic processes.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 5

Local authorities, in conjunction with guidance from the LGA, should develop and introduce clear role descriptions of what is expected of councillors. Similar role definitions should be developed in conjunction with NALC for the parish and town council tier.

The position of councillor is complex and challenging and we have received much evidence that the role of councillors is unclear to the public and often councillors themselves. Submissions to the Commission have highlighted that the public may not appreciate the distinction between councillors and officers in terms of pay or responsibilities; and this appeared to be corroborated by qualitative work undertaken for the Commission (Hands et al., 2007). There is some anecdotal and qualitative evidence that both the general public and parish councillors themselves also lack clarity about the role of parish councillors in relation to other tiers of government and alternative governance bodies (Commission for Rural Communities, 2007) and that use of the word 'parish' may add to the confusion, suggesting as it does, continuing links to the Church.

When we asked respondents to our call for evidence how they viewed the role of the local councillor, they overwhelmingly made reference to representing the community. Beyond this, respondents referred to a wide range of more specific councillor roles and most advocate a menu-style approach, which allows individuals to interpret it according to their own available time and skills, and political and personal priorities. Respondents made reference to the different formalised positions (leader, mayor, executive etc.) and to the different functions exercised by councillors (leadership, representation, strategy, holding to account, regulatory, scrutiny, policy-formation, problem-solving (case-work), partnership-working, consultation etc.), which commonly cross-cut these formalised positions.

In an effort to clarify the function, some councils have created role descriptions for councillors. London boroughs created a joint role description as part of the work of the London-wide independent remuneration panel. The IDeA political skills framework has been used to support this work. It defines councillor skills under six headings: local leadership; partnership working; communication skills; political understanding; scrutiny and challenge; and regulating and monitoring.

Recommendation 6

Local authorities need to recognise the importance of direct contact between councillors and the public and assist councillors to be more visible and accessible in their locality by:

- a) providing and supporting opportunities for democratic engagement where councillors can meet with their constituents face to face;**
- b) placing councillors at the heart of well-supported area and neighbourhood-based structures;**
- c) utilising councillor-led scrutiny processes to enable councillors to interact with their communities;**
- d) making much more active use of digital and social networking technologies.**

Recent research undertaken for the Commission found that those who have been helped by a councillor generally describe them as 'hard working', with 'good intentions' and 'trying to make a difference locally'. Where contact has been personal, councillors are seen to be particularly effective at casework and excel at the community champion role (Hands et al., 2007:4).

A number of particularly fruitful routes to increasing direct contact are presented in the submissions to the Commission. For example, one respondent from Lancashire County Council describes the effective use of regular walkabouts with county and district councillors to identify problems, meet people, and provide information. Details of problems and resolutions are posted onto councillors' websites for information. A further submission from the same council highlights the use of a 'mobile unit' which travels round the county (staffed by officers and councillors) and provides members of the public with an opportunity to meet councillors face to face and raise concerns with them. It has made 93 visits since October 2003 to venues such as local festivals, shopping centres, town centres and supermarkets, and has dealt with more than 20,000 enquiries.

Devolving budgets and area and neighbourhood committee arrangements can also help increase contact between elected representatives and the people they represent, by providing a mechanism for more local issues to be raised. The evidence is that area and neighbourhood arrangements provide an important role for ward members to promote the interests of their neighbourhood. A recent survey shows that 52 per cent of councils have some kind of area-based structures and, where they exist, 58 per cent have decision-making powers (Gains et al., 2007). Budgets are often delegated to area committees. Members are strongly in favour of this local engagement. A councillor from South Somerset District Council emphasised that "local people come along to area committees as they are not so large or formal meetings which can be intimidating for people. We try to welcome the public."

Scrutiny mechanisms may also be seen to provide an important opportunity to engage with local people and communities, as was highlighted in the submission of the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Staffordshire County Council, for example, describes, how scrutiny has been used to engage with local people, including special meetings to capture the views of people affected by policy proposals, visits by members to a range of venues in the course of their scrutiny work, co-opting school children and young people onto scrutiny working groups, inviting responses from members of the public in regard to key lines of scrutiny enquiry, and engaging with service users.

Recommendation 7

As part of their corporate communications strategy, local authorities and councillors should promote the role of councillors using a range of communication tools, for example by:

- a) using the media and communications resources of the council to work to build positive relations with the local media;**
 - b) making use of council newsletters and other media publications;**
 - c) harnessing technological solutions – such as email, web 2.0, blogs and texting – to make councillors' activities more visible.**
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A number of respondents to the Commission called for councils to develop media and communications strategies to promote the role of councillors and build positive relations with the local press. John et al. (2007) recommend that in order to counter the negative portrayals of local politics and councillors, councils should examine how local democracy and, specifically, the position and role of local councillors can be publicised in the local media. Attendees at the Commission's media roundtable event felt that local government could improve its approach to communications by: the appointment of communications professionals with high status and resourced to do the job well; more strategic, proactive and sophisticated work with the media; and ensuring media briefings focus on issues and services that matter and not Council structures. They concluded that the media will not change: local government must take their stories to the media proactively as part of their wider communications strategies.

John et al. (2007) also highlight the use of council published newspapers to highlight positive news stories about councillors. They found that transmitting council news and information to minority communities was considered crucial by council leaders and officers for publicising the council and its role. For instance, this can be achieved by ensuring that general council news and information is communicated via channels most likely to reach minority populations, e.g. minority ethnic newspapers and minority ethnic television channels.

The ways in which councils communicate directly with residents are undoubtedly important. Evidence submitted to the Commission by Ipsos MORI shows that of all the material councils produce, A-Z directories of services are the most valued by residents – they are found useful by 55 per cent of those surveyed, followed by the council website at 40 per cent. Councils which produce interesting, useful magazines or newspapers tend to be highly regarded – those that fail to get this right, tend to achieve lower ratings from both the public and the Audit Commission (Ipsos MORI, 2006).

In terms of widespread public communication it seems that councils could do much more to utilise technology to enhance access to local councillors (particularly for the younger generation) and the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group concludes, that 'Councils need to develop the use of new media and, in particular, communication with local people through new media' (Dungey, 2007: 6). For example, Lancashire County Council web-casts most of its public meetings and reports attracting an average of 1,500 viewers each month.

It was suggested to the Commission that councillors themselves should do more to embrace the potential of IT to interact with their communities, for example using blogs and web 2.0 sites and perhaps extending schemes such as the mySociety HearfromYourMP.com service to provide a 'Hear from Your Councillor' service.

Recommendation 8

Public service broadcasters should ensure that they fulfil their remit to facilitate civic understanding, particularly in relation to local government and democracy.

Many respondents to the Commission's call for evidence, including at our regional stakeholder events, cited the culpability of the media in maintaining and cultivating negative impressions of councillors and also the potential for the national media, and TV in particular, to alter impressions.

The report by the APPLGG also argues that the media generally, and public service broadcasters in particular, have a responsibility to support effective democracy at a local level (Dungey, 2007:40).

The BBC is required under section 264 of the Communications Act 2003 to 'provide, to the extent that it is appropriate for facilitating civic understanding and well-informed debate on news and current affairs, a comprehensive and authoritative coverage of news and current affairs'. Ofcom is also required under the same legislation to periodically review how public service broadcasters are fulfilling this remit.

A number of respondents have also suggested to us that the placement of positive councillor role models in TV shows and soap operas would be a good way to raise public awareness.

Recommendation 9

Ofcom should, as part of their periodic reviews of whether public service broadcasters are fulfilling their remit to facilitate civic understanding, comment in particular on coverage of local government and democracy.

See note on recommendation 8 above.

Recommendation 10

All local authorities should take seriously their key role in publicising and communicating the decisions made by the council and the work of councillors and organise and resource themselves accordingly. This should include signing up to the LGA/IDeA Reputation campaign.

There is a growing body of evidence to support the notion that high quality information provision can boost resident satisfaction. The 2006-07 Best Value User Satisfaction Survey shows that nationally only 47 per cent of residents feel their council keeps residents very or fairly well informed about the services and benefits it provides, which represents a decline of 9 per centage points from 2003-04. Interestingly, however, people who feel more informed, tend to be more satisfied with their council overall (CLG, 2007).

Recommendation 11

There should be further work at the national level to actively promote to under represented groups the opportunity to stand and serve as councillors.

The evidence gathered by the Commission has confirmed that while some barriers to participation are widespread and experienced by large swathes of the population, others disproportionately disenfranchise specific groups. For example, women often face additional time-related barriers because of caring responsibilities, employed people find it difficult to balance being a councillor with work, people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities may be disproportionately affected by barriers related to deprivation and social exclusion, and people with disabilities may face additional access and mobility-related barriers (see Haberis and Prendergrast (2007) for a more detailed exploration of this issue).

Recommendation 12

The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity should be examined with a view to its amendment or withdrawal, in order to free up councils to publicise the role and work of their members more effectively without fear of breaking rules.

A number of respondents to the Commission's call for evidence support the argument that there is a reluctance by local authorities to get involved in promoting the work of councillors because of concern that promoting the achievements of their councillors will be deemed to be involvement in political activity. *The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity* originated out of governmental suspicion of the scale and allegedly 'political' nature of at least some of the publicity spending of certain councils. The Code sought to highlight "factors which should be borne in mind in decisions on publicity which deals with matters or issues which are, politically or otherwise, controversial ...". It was lightly amended in 2001 to take account of the new executive-based political management and other changes introduced in the Local Government Act 2000.

The LGiU, in its submission to the Commission, argues that the Code causes 'serious problems for councils in promoting awareness of the role of councillors' and that consequently there needs to be a 'major revision of the legal framework to enable better communication'. As the LGiU has also noted (in its written submission to the Commission, and also Kitchin, 2006), both the tone and content of the Code seem not to have recognised the way in which the roles of local authorities and particularly of leading members and officers have changed in recent years – precisely as a result, ironically, of the Government's own legislation.

Recommendation 13

The Department for Children, Schools and Families, in conjunction with Communities and Local Government and the LGA, should work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that the role of councils and councillors and the value of local democracy (including the parish and town council tier) is mainstreamed within the citizenship curriculum, and strongly reflected in national guidelines and best practice.

There is a large amount of literature confirming the view that young people are alienated from both local and national politics (Molloy et al., 2002; Jowell and Park, 1998). As well as being under represented in the council chamber, a comparison with older age cohorts reveals that young people are also less likely to exercise their right to vote in local and national elections or to identify with a political party (Pirie and Worcester, 2000). The political disconnection of young people is of significant concern, particularly as they form the next generation(s) of voters and political participants (Geddes and Rust, 1999). Moreover, there is a popular perception amongst some commentators that an increase in the number of young councillors will translate into higher voter turnout and potentially a wider-range of views being represented in the council chamber (Brand, 2006).

A lack of understanding about local government is particularly acute among young people, who, research for the Commission revealed, often knew virtually nothing about councillors, to the extent that 'in one group there was obvious confusion between the roles of 'councillor' and 'counsellor' (Hands et al., 2007). A study conducted by the National Centre for Social Research of young people aged 16-25 uncovered very low levels of awareness and understanding about the role and responsibilities of local government and a general confusion about the difference between national and local politics – particularly in terms of who it is that represents young people at the local tier (Molloy et al., 2002). This lack of understanding and awareness was shown to impede young people in developing an interest in local government.

Following the recent Ajegbo Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review of citizenship education the curriculum for secondary school pupils in key stages 3 and 4 focuses on three key concepts: democracy and justice, rights and responsibilities and identity and diversity; and seeks to develop three essential skills and processes: critical thinking and enquiry, advocacy and representation and taking informed and responsible action. It aims to equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed for effective and democratic participation and to help pupils to become informed, critical, active citizens who have the confidence and conviction to work collaboratively, take action and try to make a difference in their communities and the wider world (Ajegbo, 2007).

Councils and individual councillors have taken some interesting approaches in relation to citizenship classes to interest young people in local government. The Association of Citizenship Teaching has promoted the idea of involving councillors in the classroom with “I am a Councillor” classes where students can ask questions, chat to councillors and then vote for the one they agree with. In Wales it has been made a statutory requirement that all schools establish school councils.

Recommendation 14

Local authorities should be required to develop and implement strategies to engage meaningfully with young people, (ensuring that any such initiatives involve elected councillors), by:

- a) involving them meaningfully in consultation processes, for example by consulting with schools wherever policy impacts upon the lives of their pupils;**
- b) utilising methods such as youth mayoral elections, political speed dating, and work experience/internships with councillors;**
- c) encouraging pupils to interact with their councillors by discussing with them areas of particular concern or interest.**

A study by the National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) found that for some young people the experience of participating in local government can be significant in creating and increasing their understanding of and interest in it (Molloy et al., 2002). Similarly, case study research conducted for the Commission in five local authority areas chosen because their councils were characterised by large numbers of councillors from traditionally under represented groups, identified the use of awareness-raising activity, particularly in local schools, to create a long-term interest in political activity (John et al., 2007).

Many submissions to the Commission referred to councils that are already involved in initiatives with schools. For example Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council describes how the civic mayor visits schools and arranges elections so that a pupil can become ‘mayor for the day’. This includes the provision of civic regalia – a robe, cravat, hat and chain in miniature size – and the initiative has provoked substantial public and media interest. Lewisham Council highlights the positive impact that the election of a young mayor has had on youth engagement within the authority area.

A disquieting research finding from the aforementioned NCSR study was a widely held scepticism by young people of the value of participation in local politics. Underlying this phenomenon were a combination of factors including: a lack of faith in existing methods of participation; perceptions that local government is not interested in the views of young people; and assumptions that the ‘system’ works and, consequently, there is no need to get involved. Of particular importance perhaps is the fact that young people perceive local government to be disinterested in their views. Even when young people acknowledge that there are opportunities to

participate they sometimes abstain, assuming that their views will either be given little status or simply ignored (White et al., 2000; Lowndes et al., 1998; Carnavon and Smith, 2001, all cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

Recommendation 15

The Ministry of Justice should reduce the voting age to 16 years.

The most common minimum voting age in Europe for at least the past two decades has been 18, but Austria recently became the first EU member state to move to 16 for all elections, several Länder having previously reduced the voting age for municipal elections. Several German Länder and, more recently, Swiss cantons are following the same route. At the other end of the scale, the minimum age for voting in Italian Senate elections is 25. The Isle of Man and the Channel Island of Jersey have also recently lowered their voting ages from 18 to 16, and there is a strong and growing body of opinion supportive of the case for doing so in all UK elections.

Among the specific points in the Votes at 16 Campaign group's case for a lower voting age are:

- With citizenship education now a compulsory part of the national curriculum in England at key stages 3 and 4, lowering the voting age would allow a "seamless transition" from learning about voting, elections and democracy to putting such knowledge into practice;
- The advent of the internet in particular, along with all the other features of the modern information age, has led to young people being able to access information and develop political views at ever-younger ages;
- Depriving 16 and 17-year olds of the vote gives the impression to them and to society at large that their views are, at the least, less valid than those of older citizens or that they are not real citizens at all;
- Lowering the voting age would help to stem young people's disengagement with formal democratic politics and political institutions;
- There are serious inconsistencies in 16-year olds being able to work full-time, get married, leave home, claim benefits, join the armed services, and pay income tax, yet not being able to express views on such matters through the ballot box.

Recommendation 16

The Ministry of Justice should review the candidacy age, four years after the introduction of voting at 16 years, to assess whether the candidacy age should be lowered to 16 years.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 17

At the time of local elections, political parties should be able to publish a list of reserve councillors, who can replace a councillor of their party who stands down during their term, avoiding the need for a by-election. A by-election will be required if: an independent stands down; if a petition demanding a by-election is signed by an equivalent number of residents of the relevant ward as equates to 25 per cent of the turnout at the last election or 10 per cent of the electorate, in that ward, whichever is the lower; or if the incumbent party chooses to hold one.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 18

A uniform cycle of all-out four yearly local elections should be introduced across the whole of England. All authorities in a given region should be elected on the same day, but not all regions should hold elections at the same time. Local elections should not take place on the same day as national or European elections. Parish and town council elections should take place on the same day as other local elections in their region and principal authorities should always cover the cost of administering parish and town council elections in full without passing them down to the lower tier.

All councillors are now elected for four-year terms but English local authorities use two significantly differing electoral models. Sometimes this is by statute and sometimes by choice. The models are:

Model 1: London boroughs and English counties are legally required to have 'all-out' elections, with the whole council elected at the same time every four years. Most unitary authorities and shire districts choose to operate this system as well. Authorities generally use multi-member wards and divisions offering a multiple-choice, candidate-centred ballot structure, with the seats being won by the candidates with the most votes no matter what proportion that is of the total votes cast.

Model 2: For no reason other than historical accident, metropolitan boroughs are required to hold elections in three out of every four years and elect their councillors in rotation. A minority of unitary authorities and districts also choose to operate this system. It usually, although not invariably, involves one member per ward per election. So such councils have, in any one year's election, mainly single-member wards and a single-choice, candidate-centred ballot structure. Again the seat goes to the candidate with the highest vote.

Advocates of all-out elections contend that they appeal more to voters, who perceive that there is a chance to change an authority's political control in a way that is frequently statistically impossible with partial elections. Whole council elections, it is asserted and as some of the evidence suggests, are likely to produce relatively higher turnouts (see, e.g., Rallings and Thrasher, 2003). All-out elections can provide a winning party or administration with a clear policy mandate for four years, and thereby offer greater stability and policy consistency.

The alternative case for partial elections centres on the regular accountability that they offer. Supporters of this system contend that councillors and parties need to engage with the electorate, promoting their policies and defending their record on an annual basis. Partial elections can reduce the potential for abrupt, disruptive, and sometimes politically exaggerated change in the make-up of councils and in their policies and can reflect more sensitively the changing views of their electorates over time. There are also potentially increased costs, but there is the compensation of being able to use elections as a means of maintaining the local organisation and its membership.

In their commissioned MORI survey as part of a 2003 consultation exercise, the Electoral Commission (2004) found that only 16 per cent of respondents – and just 5 per cent in metropolitan areas – were able correctly to identify the electoral cycle in their area. The Electoral Commission in its 2004 report and the Widdicombe Committee (1986) recommended that there be a simplified and uniform system across the country.

The many submissions to the Commission make clear that perceptions of local government are already unduly influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of national level politics and politicians, and many respondents stressed the need to separate local from national level politics.

In respect of the parish and town council tier, the evidence suggests that the financial cost of running elections acts to discourage smaller councils from seeking to hold them, particularly in the case of by-elections. Although higher tier authorities are able to cover the cost of local elections, and many do so especially when local elections fall at the same time as principal authority elections, they are also entitled to request reimbursement of costs from the local councils. In councils with small budgets, the cost of elections can represent a significant proportion of the funds raised by the precept such that 'many councils shrink from the cost of elections and are secretly relieved when no ballot is required' (Jones et al., 2005: 36). A number of publications consequently suggest that reform is needed to ensure that principal authorities or central government take responsibility for the cost of local elections to parish and town councils (Woods et al., 2006; Woods and Gardner, 2007; Jones et al., 2005; Young Foundation, 2006).

Recommendation 19

In view of the potential positive impact that multi-member wards can have in terms of encouraging the election of under represented groups and encouraging teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities between councillors, multi-member wards should be adopted throughout the local government electoral system.

The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) explains in its written submission to the Commission, that it is assumed that:

“[p]arty selectors behave rationally to maximize votes. When choosing only one candidate, it is a rational strategy to pick those who have been elected before (incumbents) or people who look most like those who have been elected before. In both the House of Commons and UK local councils, incumbents tend to be male, white, older and from professional, retired, or self-employed backgrounds. When one candidate is chosen per district, choosing untypical candidates such as young, female, ethnic minority or with a non-traditional career background, can be seen as a high risk strategy: there is the risk of losing votes.”

Recommendation 20

In the interests of seeking new ways to engage the electorate, local authorities should be enabled to develop and use schemes which incentivise voting, for example by offering voters a chance to enter into a lottery.

The Electoral Reform Society reports that incentive voting has never been tried on any significant scale⁴. The IPPR identified only two modern examples of the use of incentives. These were free doughnuts or trips to a chiropractor to Californian voters on production of voting stubs and, again in California, US\$5 coupons for free chicken dinners in return for voting⁵. The possibility of a modest council tax discount for those turning up at the polling booth was raised by Geoff Hoon in 2005.

In November 2000, Labour MP Jimmy Hood proposed to establish a ‘Rewarding Democracy Commission’ to look into the matter. In rejecting compulsory voting, Mr Hood said he wanted “the United Kingdom Parliament [to] consider using the carrot, not the stick.” He continued: “The stick of compulsion is too authoritarian, too dictatorial and alien to our parliamentary democracy. My Bill proposes rewarding participating citizenship by making modest remunerations to people who vote in our parliamentary elections... Any citizens who choose not to exercise their right penalise themselves, not others.”

⁴ Source data: www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=4

⁵ Source data: www.ippr.org

In November 2001, during discussion of Gareth Thomas's Compulsory Voting Bill, Tony Wright voiced his opinion that "we should reward civic virtue, not punish civic vice." Desires for incentive voting to be properly discussed by Parliament have arisen a number of times since.

Recommendation 21

In the spirit of local experimentation and because there is a view that STV can increase the diversity of councillors, local authorities should be enabled to pilot STV if they wish. Any pilots should only be introduced following a majority vote and a preceding period of consultation, and should be in place for a minimum of two terms.

An international literature review undertaken for the Commission concluded that "candidate-centred systems with single-member districts, including First Past the Post (FPTP), are viewed as the least favourable to the election of under represented groups. Proportional representation systems are generally seen to provide the greatest opportunities for these groups" (Rao et al., 2007: 3).

With regard to STV in particular, the exhortations of one New Zealand Minister for Local Government powerfully made the case for electoral reform: "STV has the potential to make our local authorities more representative of the communities you serve. It increases the likelihood that those communities within our society that feel isolated and marginalised from mainstream political life will have the opportunity for direct participation. That can only enrich the nature of political life in this country and strengthen the foundations of our democratic institutions" (Cheyne and Comrie, 2005: 201, cited in Rao et al., 2007).

However, research does not reveal a strong public impetus for electoral reform, and STV, as a proportional system, is more likely to result in coalition government than FPTP.

Recommendation 22

The Government should introduce legislation to bring into force, after a transitional period of four years, a statutory requirement to limit councillors to serve five consecutive terms; and to limit leaders and directly elected mayors to serve three consecutive terms.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 23

Political restrictions based on salary level should be abolished. Restrictions (see recommendation 24) should be retained for very senior posts and certain politically sensitive roles, with Councils' Standards Committees having the ability to implement restrictions to other posts where considered necessary in particular circumstances.

- a) very senior posts are: Chief Executive, Statutory Chief Officers, Non-statutory Chief Officers, Monitoring Officers, and Deputy Chief Officers;**
- b) politically sensitive roles are: those directly giving regular advice to the Council or any of its committees or other meetings of elected members; and/or speaking on behalf of the Council on a regular basis to journalists or other media;**
- c) The rest of the workforce are: unrestricted but with the option for restrictions to be applied to a post if deemed appropriate by the Council's Standards Committee after proper advice and consideration.**

The restrictions in England are far-reaching by international standards both in terms of the numbers of staff 'caught' by the restrictions and in the range of prohibited activities. The breadth of the types of activity which are restricted, which mirror the activities that senior civil servants are prevented from undertaking, amounts effectively to a blanket ban on all public political activity. Those subject to the restrictions are prevented, not only from standing for election to any principal tier authority, but also canvassing for a party, or expressing publicly any views in support of a particular party.

BMG's qualitative research with councillors for the Commission found some one-time local authority employees who had had to change their jobs before being able to stand for election, and others who had decided to limit their career ambitions to keep them out of Politically Restricted Posts (Hands et al., 2007). Further, a forum respondent suggested, the fact that political restriction can affect relatively junior officers means that becoming a councillor "looks like a career block" to young people working in local government.

The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 addressed the regime of PRPs north of the border and in effect abolished all remuneration-determined posts, leaving it up to individual authorities to decide whether any post previously 'caught' in the remuneration threshold should still be considered restricted.

Submissions and evidence presented to the Commission have suggested a range of alternatives in respect of reducing the number of posts ‘captured’ by the regime. At the more modest end of the range would be the Local Government Association’s principal preferred reform: raising the salary threshold to the highest point of the National Joint Council NJC scale at spinal point 49 (£39,123 in 2006-07). Then, in the middle of the range, would come Scotland’s complete abolition of salary-defined PRPs. At the radical end of the range, perhaps the most clearly articulated case is that presented by SOLACE, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, which regards the existing framework as “ ...crude and inconsistent ... disproportionate and unreasonable” and argues for the introduction of a more flexible and sensitive framework which retains restrictions only for the most senior officers and for the rest of the workforce, treats political neutrality and professional conduct as management issues, to be ensured through the contract of employment.

Recommendation 24

Restricted activities should be limited to:

- a) standing for election as an MP, MEP, AM or a councillor on a principal authority; or**
- b) holding office in a political party, including acting as an election agent or sub agent.**

See note on recommendation 23.

Recommendation 25

The Government, working with the EHRC, should amend relevant guidance to make it clear, that local authorities’ new duty to facilitate democratic engagement (see recommendation 1) is covered by the equalities duties.

Recommendation 25 ensures that it is clear to local authorities that equalities duties (race, gender and disability duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; the Disability Discrimination Act 2005; and the Equality Act 2006).

The application of equalities duties to the new function will mean that they will be required to produce Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.

Recommendation 26 ensures that local authorities include in these Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes targets relating to the representativeness of their councillors, which will enable the EHRC to monitor their progress in this area, as proposed in recommendation 27.

Recommendation 26

The Government, working with the EHRC should amend the relevant legislation to include specific requirements for councillor equalities targets as an element of Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.

See note on recommendation 25.

Recommendation 27

The EHRC should be asked to assess local authorities' compliance with their councillor diversity targets (see recommendation 26), as set out in their Equalities Schemes, and to work within those authorities who are least reflective of their communities, the bottom 10 per cent, to assess whether they should make more efforts to change the situation, and if necessary to support initiatives to help them to do so. The EHRC should make an assessment at the time of whether lack of representativeness may also be due to inaction by local political parties or indeed the wider community.

See note on recommendation 25.

Recommendation 28

The EHRC, IDeA and DIALOG should seek to revise the Local Government Equality Standard framework to give local authorities a clearer responsibility to promote equality of opportunity in terms of opportunities for participation as elected representatives.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 29

In recognition of the important role of local authorities in promoting equality of opportunity for participation as elected representatives, councillor diversity should be formally commented on as part of performance assessments, though it should not directly affect CPA/CAA scores.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 30

Disabled people should not encounter additional barriers to serving as a councillor, therefore:

- a) All candidates considering themselves as having a disability should be offered an assessment by a trained officer to assess their needs in advance of arrival in post and to consider any reasonable adjustments that can be made;**
- b) Guidance should be provided to local authorities clarifying which of councillor's duties are covered by the requirement for reasonable adjustments;**
- c) Councillors should be treated as council employees, including under the Access to Work scheme, as the lack of cover for 'unofficial' duties could provide a disincentive for disabled councillors.**

Research by Ellis (2003) has found that disabled people face many notable barriers to participation in terms of volunteering and it seems likely that many of these will be similar when it comes to being an elected representative. These include the physical inaccessibility of premises and venues, a lack or inadequacy of transport provision, an inaccessibility of information and resources, and training that does not take account of their needs.

In terms of access, elected members are now covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA). It is therefore illegal for a locally elected authority to discriminate against their members in relation to carrying out official duties. Local authorities are required to make reasonable adjustments in relation to disabled members and provide them with support so that they will not be discriminated against by default practices. Reasonable adjustments include sign language interpretation at official meetings, induction loop systems, accessible meeting rooms, and providing meeting notes in alternative formats. Barnes (2002) suggests that time allocation for speaking may also need to be changed to enable disabled people to participate fully. It is unclear at present to what extent councils have made adjustments in order to fulfil their responsibilities to disabled members, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lack of consistency in approach, and that there is a lack of clarity about which of a councillor's duties are covered by the requirement for reasonable adjustments.

The Disability Rights Commission, in their submission to the Commission, argued that although councillors are entitled to reasonable adjustments if they meet the DDA definitions, very few local authorities publicise this entitlement or have specific officers responsible for ensuring that these adjustments are in place. They further argue that councillors should be considered in a comparable way to council employees and adjustments should therefore take account of factors such as communication support, ICT equipment, accessibility of buildings, support staff, provision of specific aids and the timings of meetings. They also raise concerns about the interpretation of 'official duties' applied by local authorities and point out

that some councils will not support councillors who are undertaking duties on bodies to which a councillor has been nominated by the local authority, or provide appropriate support for transport between home and council offices – all of which would be covered if councillors were treated as council employees.

The Commission was presented with a case where a deaf councillor has been battling to get a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter to cover his 'unofficial' (meetings with community groups etc) alongside his 'official' council work (ie formal council meetings) and had been forced to pay out of his own pocket: 'It is clearly unfair for me to pay out of my own pocket for BSL interpreters to meet local groups/residents who do not have any grants/funding to pay for BSL interpreters whose charges are very expensive. To date, I have paid about £400 since I was elected... [The council's] argument was purely about financial issues and identifying whether these meetings are political!'

The submission from the Disability Rights Commission suggests that a lack of information regarding exactly what is expected and what support is available would be an even greater barrier to people with disabilities who need to have a clear picture in order to assess whether they could actually manage the role and what barriers/adjustments would need to be made.

Recommendation 31

National party leaderships should:

- a) **recognise more visibly the value of councillors and work with them proactively, so they can be seen to be an integrated part of the system of governance;**
- b) **encourage local parties to recruit as candidates suitably able people who share their values and have demonstrated leadership qualities but who may not have a lengthy record of party activity.**

Political parties remain the main conduit for recruitment of candidates for local government and over 90 percent of existing councillors represent one of the three main political parties. As research has shown, at the time of becoming a councillor most candidates have long-standing relations with a local party (Hands et al., 2007) and the parties tend to recruit from within their own memberships and networks.

Although, most councillors participating in the qualitative research conducted for the Commission felt that their party's selection process was already open and transparent and that they are doing their utmost to attract new blood, the public see political parties as secretive and closed with 62 percent of respondents to an Ipsos MORI poll claiming that they are neither open nor transparent (McTaggart et al., 2006). Participants at the Commission's Voluntary and Community Sector workshop in Somerset suggested parties should provide seminars for prospective councillors on the role (ideally the three parties together) and should be honest and open about the process to prospective candidates.

A recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Wheeler, 2006) provides a detailed analysis of how the main parties currently recruit their council candidates and reveals that all three operate remarkably similar processes of ‘closed selection’ which favour both existing party members and incumbents (the Labour party less so in this second regard).

Case study research undertaken for the Commission in five authorities, whose councils are made up of unusually high numbers of councillors from traditionally under represented groups, shows that innovative practice in the selection of candidates can achieve results. The study found that in all five areas studied, “local parties have been instrumental in recruiting under represented groups and, consequently, improving levels of representativeness” (John et al., 2007: 27). In these cases ‘active’ local political parties played a crucial role in reaching out to such groups, whether in the form of targeting candidates, publicising council opportunities, or developing organisations and mechanisms that seek to recruit under represented groups into the political process, such as youth organisations and utilisation of social networking websites. The research highlighted the role of local political parties or social networks in ‘pushing and pulling’ citizens toward active involvement (John et al., 2007: 7).

Recommendation 32

We support the recommendation made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, that the EHRC and the Electoral Commission should work together to seek a voluntary agreement on the part of political parties to behave as if they are bound by the positive duty in the Race Relations Amendment Act. We also recommend that the agreement covers disability and gender equality duties.

Investigations have suggested that extending public duties to political parties is not a workable solution and that new dedicated equalities duties for political parties would need to be introduced to have a similar effect. We therefore considered an alternative suggested by the LGiU, that at the very least, political parties should be asked to agree to observe comparable standards within their memoranda and articles of association. The CIC also recommended a ‘voluntary agreement on the part of political parties to behave as if they are bound by the positive duty in the Race Relations Amendment Act’.

Recommendation 33

The recommended move to multi member wards provides opportunities to address gender and other imbalances in representation, and we would encourage political parties to select a range of candidates including those who are women, and/or from ethnic minority backgrounds and other under represented groups.

Research reveals public hostility in this country towards quotas, as evidenced in BMG's qualitative study (Hands et al., 2007). Quotas are regarded by many as undemocratic and discriminatory; it is argued that voters should decide who represents them, and quotas imply that men are elected not because we judge them better qualified, but because of their gender. Many women too reject the argument that quotas are about compensating for past and continuing discrimination and don't want anyone to be able to say they were elected just because they are women.

Nonetheless quotas in one form or another are widely used internationally (Rao et al., 2007). The past decade or so has seen a massive growth worldwide in the deployment particularly of quotas for women, the extent of which tends not to be appreciated in this country. Its scale is such that it has been described as a 'quota fever' or epidemic, and it has embraced some of perhaps the more surprising areas and countries – Africa, Latin America, South Asia, the Balkan countries, as well as Western Europe. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance database lists 69 countries and a total of 168 parties that claim to use voluntary quotas.

Following the passing of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 there is nothing to stop any political party, should they wish, voluntarily taking advantage of our many 3-member wards and divisions and requiring, for instance, that no three-candidate slate be all of one gender.

Recommendation 34

The provision of any public funding for political parties at the local level should be dependent upon political parties signing up to a voluntary agreement as at recommendation 32, and should specifically be dependent upon demonstrating progress in terms of equalities targets as set out in their Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.

If political parties were to behave as if bound by equalities duties, as in recommendation 32, they would be required to produce Race, Gender and Disability Equalities Schemes.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 35

A dedicated fund should be established to provide public money to political parties, specifically for projects aimed at improving the recruitment, training and selection of candidates.

Political party membership has declined dramatically. As argued in a recent report from the Young Foundation:

‘Political Parties still have a monopoly of government power. But by almost every other measure they look like institutions in decline. A generation ago 3.5 million Britons were members of a political party. Today the figure is nearer 500,000. A generation ago nearly half of all electors identified ‘very strongly’ with a political party, today the figure is less than one in six’ (McTaggart et al., 2006:3).

The decline in membership has serious implications in regard to the resources available to political parties to develop their recruitment and selection processes. Local political parties are under strain in fulfilling their roles in respect of recruitment and selection as they lack finance and are facing increasing problems in sustaining an active membership. Given the limited resources of local parties generally, very little money is available for spending on the recruitment and selection process of council candidates in ways which might widen the current pool.

The Hayden Phillips review into party funding reported in May 2007 and favoured state funding. Publication of the review has been followed by further discussions between the political parties but talks have recently faltered.

Nonetheless, an earlier review of candidate selection, sponsored by the Electoral Reform Society and chaired by Peter Riddell, made a number of recommendations on how parties’ recruitment and selection processes might be improved. Anticipating that lack of resources for local change might be a constraining factor, the report recommended that:

‘A fund should be established on the model of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to provide public money to political parties for projects aimed at improving the recruitment, training and selection of candidates. This should be a relatively small amount of ring-fenced money for the specific purpose of attracting a higher quality and more diverse range of candidates in all parties’ (Riddell, 2003:41).

In the light of the recent collapse of talks around state funding led by Hayden Phillips the Commission is minded to follow Peter Riddell’s suggestion that a fund be established to aid parties in being innovative in their recruitment and selection methods by financial support for specific projects.

Recommendation 36

Political parties should, in conjunction with local authorities and in association with organisations leading this work, such as Operation Black Vote and the Fawcett Society, develop training and outreach programmes, to assist those who need the opportunity to develop the presentational and political skills to stand as candidates.

See note on recommendation 31 above.

Recommendation 37

The LGA and IDeA should assist local political parties in determining best practice in candidate selection, by developing advisory materials and training programmes to support them.

See note on recommendation 31 above.

Recommendation 38

As recommended by the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, party groups should extend exceptions to enforcing the party whip on the grounds of conscience to allow councillors greater leeway to represent ward issues.

A lack of interest in politics and politicians and public antipathy towards political parties and party politicians were repeatedly cited in submissions to the Commission as a major barrier to involvement. The Director General of SOLACE for example, in his submission to the Commission argued that the 'general distaste for adversarial politics' amongst the public is at the heart of the lack of candidates. Other research has also revealed how, at a fundamental level, the dearth of councillors appears to be related to the public's mistrust of politics and politicians at both a national and local level (Hands et al., 2007). Surveys consistently find that politicians are among the least trusted of professions (Electoral Commission, 2007: 43) though local councillors may fair slightly better than their national counterparts (Ipsos MORI, 2006: 13).

Nonetheless the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Local Government Group on the role of local councillors concluded that a public lack of trust in politicians 'creates a climate of denigration and cynicism within which councillors have to operate' and argues that this represents a barrier to participation (Dungey, 2007:5). Respondents to the Commission's call for evidence also suggested that councillors are held in lower esteem than in the past; and that this is related to the decline in trust in national level politicians and parties. Professor George Jones (London School of Economics) argues that there now exists a widespread 'cultural disdain' for politicians, where once they were held in some regard. Molloy et al. (2002) identified that young people's attitudes to local government were affected by a widespread disillusionment with politics, often driven by images from national politics.

Most significantly perhaps, our research identifies a lack of interest in and disillusionment with politics as a major stumbling block for activists at all levels. Councillors are regarded 'first and foremost as politicians (self-seeking, manipulative, evasive) rather than altruistic, caring community workers' and further 'most activists have no desire to enter politics or to become in any way 'like them' (Hands et al., 2007:22). For many people then party politics seems to act as a deterrent to involvement. Research has shown that community activists are 'thoroughly turned

off by the political parties and politics in general and that most of those who 'have a passing interest in standing for election would only want to stand as an independent' (Hands et al., 2007: 14). Most community activists say that they strongly dislike the idea of 'political game-playing'; neither would they be prepared or able to 'toe the party line' (Hands et al., 2007:5).

Participants at a voluntary and community sector workshop event which the Commission held in Somerset echoed this sentiment; arguing that there is too much unnecessary party politics in local government which constrains effectiveness at a local level and acts as a turn-off to participation. Participants suggested that parties could help to alter negative perceptions about local government by changing their behaviour to reduce 'game playing' and yah-boo politics; adopting more co-operative/consensual politics; and advocating principles of honesty, openness, integrity, accountability. It was further suggested parties should withdraw altogether from local government and that independent candidates be supported. Indeed in the final vote at the session the most popular suggestion as a route to encouraging voluntary and community sector activists to become councillors was to 'remove political parties from local government'.

A number of views have been expressed about the tensions which frontline councillors face in their role where they need to balance representing their ward with party discipline and that these tensions are all the greater in wards where there are councillors from more than one political party. There is clearly a need to recognise this within the context of the debate as over half of all councillors feel that political parties dominate decision-making to the detriment of open and transparent debate in their neighbourhoods (Rao, 2005).

Recommendation 39

Councils should adopt modern business and meeting processes which seek to remove potential barriers to participation. This should include:

- a) ensuring meeting times are accessible to both members and the public, with a preference for early evening meetings to enable working councillors to attend;**
 - b) ensuring meetings are chaired efficiently and have agreed maximum lengths;**
 - c) making use of modern technology to enable involvement in meetings without the need to attend in person;**
 - d) ensuring paperwork for meetings is concise and focused and provided in a timely fashion;**
 - e) making meetings as welcoming and inclusive as possible.**
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Recommendation 40

The Government should introduce legislation in order to enable involvement in meetings including, but never limited to, voting, without the need to attend in person.

Timing and conduct of meetings

Meeting time flexibility has been identified as a potentially important way of facilitating the increased participation of under represented groups (John et al., 2007). Research has revealed that for employed councillors, daytime meetings are one of the absolutely core problems they face as a councillor. Those in county councils stress that given all of the daytime meetings, it is very hard for working people to become councillors at this level. Councillors who care for young children, on the other hand, find late afternoon and early evening meetings are particularly awkward, while those representing rural areas and who consequently have to travel long distances to and from meetings are generally opposed to evening meetings (Hands et al., 2007).

“Overall, and not surprisingly, younger people and those with work or caring commitments tend to favour flexible or evening meetings; while older councillors tend to be happier with daytime meetings, believing that the onus is on individuals to ‘make it work’. Most accept that there is no easy answer and ‘you’ll never please all of the people all of the time.’” (Hands et al., 2007: 45).

Councils therefore need to be flexible about meeting times, bearing in mind current and potential councillors, as well as members of the public.

The British Chamber of Commerce, in its submission to the Commission, suggests that ‘steps towards making council business more family and business friendly are needed, for example, when meetings are held. Likewise, employers interviewed in the course of research for the Commission, suggested that increased flexibility in council meeting times would be helpful, but also that the predictability of meeting times is actually more often important than when the meeting takes place (Hands et al., 2007: 11). There is also a need to recognise that, for people with responsibilities outside the council, and particularly for those who may have a long distance to travel home, often late at night, a maximum finishing time for meetings is as important as a fixed starting time. At the Commission’s employers roundtable it was also agreed that there was a general perception that meetings are too long and are much less efficient than those in the business community.

Technological solutions

Inventive use of modern technology, meanwhile, should eliminate some of the need for councillors to physically attend meetings at all. This could be particularly beneficial in rural areas, or for councillors in full-time employment or with childcare responsibilities. However, it appears that currently there is no legislation allowing councils to make use of teleconferencing facilities for meetings in which votes are required (Hands et al., 2007).

Paperwork

A particularly common complaint in our research has been about the sheer quantity of paperwork that councillors need to get through that leaves many feeling 'bogged down' and 'overwhelmed'. This is one of the shocks when they first take office; and why speed-reading is one of the most important skills they feel they need to pick up (Hands et al., 2007: 36). Comments have also been made that meetings and papers for meetings could be both prepared for and run in a much more efficient manner, making life easier and making more time available for councillors. At the Commission's regional Stakeholder Event in Newcastle, reducing paper workload by producing summaries of reports etc was considered the third most effective way to support councillors in their role.

Cultural change

At the Commission's Black and Minority Ethnic Women Workshop, the 'macho bullying culture' was identified as a barrier, and it was alleged that this had resulted in a number of young BME women serving one term and quitting as a direct result of their experiences. It has similarly been noted that local authority culture may be alienating for some people from ethnic minority backgrounds (Solomos and Back, 1995) and there is also evidence of discrimination and racism directed at sitting councillors.

A number of submissions to the Commission refer to the need for councillors to develop a 'thick skin'. One comments that the kind of behaviour that is regarded as the 'rough and tumble' of politics would not be allowed in any other workplace, and may well act to discourage particularly women and young candidates.

We have also heard that citizens are put off local politics by formal procedures and bureaucracy (John et al., 2007:15). Council business is seen to be boring and complicated, with much stress and many frustrations, and especially among younger audiences, as intimidating, oppressive, bureaucratic and old-fashioned (Hands et al., 2007:15). Rotherham Borough Councils submission to the Commission argues that as fewer people are now members of formal groups – churches, political parties, trades unions – than in the past, they are less familiar with formal meeting processes and that attending council meetings can as a consequence result in bafflement. Submissions to the Commission have suggested that new and potential councillors experience difficulties in understanding council meeting processes, which are not sufficiently explained to them from the outset. This can make the induction process doubly difficult and the council meeting atmosphere a daunting prospect.

Recommendation 41

The IDeA/LGA/LGLC should develop a charter regarding minimum standards of member support which local authorities should agree to provide. This should at least include:

- a) administrative support for case work, communications and diary management;
- b) research support for ward work;
- c) IT equipment for use at home, (PC or laptop, broadband access etc and IT support);
- d) arrangements and publicity for surgeries;
- e) arrangements for child and dependent care cover (at minimum fully covering costs, and preferably organised home care);
- f) social networking training and support.

The level of support offered to councillors is a vital one. Support can potentially be a huge barrier to people looking at the councillor role and considering whether to take it on, and can also make or break a new councillor's decision about whether to stand again after their first term, or indeed whether to resign mid-term. As Hands et al. point out:

“Several of the ‘effective’ councillors are particularly concerned about what they see as the low levels of support currently available to councillors. For those who want to see more working councillors (rather than full time paid, professional ones), the issue of additional support is a touch stone issue in the way that remuneration is for some ‘professionalisers’” (2007:45).

Evidence supporting this recommendation emerged from the Commission's regional stakeholder event in Newcastle in June 2007: a request for basic forms of support came top of a 'wish list' of requirements to help councillors perform their role. The Commission has also heard calls for improved practical support from the online forum, submissions to our call for evidence, and roundtable discussions. Research with existing councillors reinforces this message:

“Support with the more mundane tasks (e.g. writing letters, answering petitioners, helping with casework) would, it is claimed, soon have an impact on the core issue of the amount of hours that councillors feel they have to work [and would] ... greatly improve councillor retention rates” (Hands et al., 2007:45).

The Commission has also heard examples of councils which do not provide computer facilities, or where the costs of hiring surgery space are not met. We have heard calls for more officer support with case work and research (including assistance with tracking casework through the system, and with queries not relating to council services). A particular need for ward work to be better supported by officers was uncovered. It is suggested that officers could do more in terms of providing briefings, administrative support with preparing ward newsletters, and assisting councillors to draw up annual ward reports.

We have also seen examples of good practice in these regards. Lambeth Council, for example, uses an electronic system to log casework, manage correspondence and assist ward work:

“When a constituent rings up a Councillor to complain that their bin has not been emptied, a car is dumped outside their house or to ask what they are going to do to improve the level of recycling, the Councillor simply emails the query to e-Casework identifying the department responsible for the matter and it is automatically entered into the council’s enquiry system.”

Another area where the evidence suggests that practical support is crucial in addressing barriers to participation is in relation to those councillors who have additional caring responsibilities (most often women and younger councillors in employment). As one councillor from South Gloucestershire District Council commented to us:

“As a mother of two young children... the most difficult part of standing for... and working as a councillor has been juggling childcare arrangements. Nursery-based childcare works best for those in regular 9-5 jobs. Child minders can offer more flexibility but they will still require parents to book regular slots to hold open the place for the child and it is unfeasible to book every possible time of the week a meeting might happen. Clearly a nanny would offer more flexibility but this is not affordable on a councillor’s allowance. Evenings are particularly difficult to arrange cover...”

John et al., (2007) found that two of the most frequently cited strategies for addressing councillors’ needs in relation to broadening access included: changing meeting times to accommodate the conflicting responsibilities encountered by individual councillors, and providing additional child care provision.

Recommendation 42

Councils should support councillors to develop their skills by offering:

- a) a flexible and time-sensitive induction programme, which utilises a range of learning methods;**
- b) an option for 'refresher' and 'ongoing' training for all councillors;**
- c) personal development plans regarding development needs and opportunities;**
- d) opportunities to be partnered with mentors within and/or outside one's own council;**
- e) self and peer review schemes leading to tailored support packages for councillors;**
- f) training in approaches to community development.**

Minimum standards of development support should form part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41.

Recommendation 43

The IDeA's Charter for Member Development should be further developed to recognise good service to representatives, and it should be agreed that councils should only be awarded the Investors in People status if they can demonstrate a high level of service to councillors, not just to council employees.

Research for the Commission has found that members still experience a sense of shock when they first realise the expectations upon them in terms of workload, time commitments and new procedures (Hands et al., 2007). Evidence gathered at Liverpool City Council and submitted to the Commission suggests that new councillors face a very steep learning curve that can seem overwhelming at times.

It has also been pointed out that induction training sessions are often held en masse on weekdays just after elections, at a time when many candidates have already used holiday to contest the election. Therefore efforts need to be made to create effective, time-efficient and flexible induction programmes to support councillors through their first twelve months of office. Hands et al. also found that amongst potential councillors 'those who are concerned they do not have the right skills and knowledge to be a councillor would need assurance that induction training will be fully comprehensive, before they agree to stand' (2007:27).

Use of a variety of mediums could also be a positive step – John et al. (2007) cite an example of one local authority that provides an audio CD package to councillors so that they can listen at home or while driving. Each CD focuses on a different skill area (eg radio skills) and allows development to be flexible. Research with existing councillors also highlighted calls for more practical, hands-on, rather than course-based, training, and particularly more opportunities for informal networking and mentoring (Hands et al., 2007) which was also echoed in many submissions to the Commission.

The best councils in regard to development support have put in place comprehensive member development strategies. Lancashire County Council for example, set up a cross-party Member Development Steering Group to lead and formulate a member development strategy, which reveals its commitment to providing continual development for all 84 County Councillors. In November 2003 Lancashire adopted the IDeA Charter of Member Development and later the North West Charter on Member Development. In consultation with members, a strategy focusing on training and keeping members up-to-date was formulated. A dedicated member development support team was appointed and an annual programme of training and development activities was produced, informed by consultation and individual development plans.

Recommendation 44

As part of the support Charter proposed in recommendation 41, there should be an expectation on councillors that they take up appropriate training and development opportunities offered to them by their local authority.

If local authorities are to be expected to provide comprehensive resource structures, then councillors must also fulfil their side of the bargain. Although many submissions to the Commission reveal a positive attitude towards the need for, and take up of, development activities other research undertaken for the Commission has identified resistance from councillors to attend training that is arranged for them, particularly at induction (Hands et al., 2007). Officers commented that some newly elected councillors perceive they have an almost 'divine' right to make decisions and hence do not see the relevance of training while other councillors simply find it difficult to find time for training when they are already feeling the strain associated with performing basic council duties. More established councillors do not always recognise the value of on-going training.

Recommendation 45

Political awareness and an appreciation of the councillor role should be regarded as a core training need for local authority officers. In recognition that few opportunities are available for officers to observe councillors carrying out council duties, specific awareness raising opportunities should be developed including councillor involvement in officers' induction events/programmes and opportunities to shadow members in their ward work.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 46

The Department for Communities and Local Government, in liaison with local government groups, should issue clear guidelines regarding which member support activities should be considered political, and which non-political, and therefore which activities can be funded by local authorities. It should be made clear to councils that surgery support and case work support is always legitimate.

It has been brought to the Commission's attention on a number of occasions that one of the reasons for the variation in support across the country is differences in interpretation and caution applied to rules regarding the support for councillors' work. Councils often have concerns about being seen to support work for the political side of the role. The exceptional and comprehensive support programmes offered by some authorities are proof enough that the rules do not prevent adequate and appropriate support being given for the full range of councillors' functions, where local authorities are forward-thinking and proactive.

Recommendation 47

Employers should ensure that they have in place an HR policy in respect of time-off work for public duties, including for work as a local councillor. These should be agreed with trades unions or employee representatives, as appropriate.

The evidence we have gathered has made clear that as well as support provided by the local authority, support or opposition from an employer can make a vast difference to a councillor's potential effectiveness, and to the likelihood of new candidates coming forward. The attitude of an employer towards their staff's political activity is crucial and can "either facilitate or constrain involvement in local politics." (John et al., 2007:11).

There is a distinct lack of clarity however, about what constitutes the ‘reasonable’ time off to perform their duties to which councillors are entitled under the Employment Rights Act 1996. The Commission has come across examples where councillors have not been granted the time-off or given the flexibility that they would like from their employers. Difficulties appear to be most pronounced for employees in smaller businesses where granting time-off will have a greater proportional impact on the employer. There may also be differential impacts on under represented groups. For example, women are more likely than men to be employed in part-time, fixed-term work, and are more likely to have taken other career breaks and find it harder to take additional time off. Cases of refusal to grant time off for civic duties have been taken to employment tribunals, for example in the successful employment appeal tribunal brought by Mrs C Riley-Williams in regard to taking time-off as a magistrate from her work at Argos Ltd, in April/May 2003 (Employment Appeal No. EAT/811/02/RN).

Although there were those who called for the Commission to clarify what ‘reasonable’ time-off means, the degree of flexibility and variation in the roles of councillors within councils and within and between tiers, makes this an impossible task if the Commission does not wish to prescribe what a councillor should do and for how much time each month or year. ‘Reasonableness’ will also be dependent on the size of an employer, and the type of work in which a councillor is engaged. Moreover, as Hands et al., point out, there is only limited support for further legislation (2007; viii).

Judge J McMullen QC said during the above-mentioned tribunal that ‘the absence of any policy by the Respondent in this case to deal with applications for time-off made under the statute has caused this litigation to be conducted. We would urge employers, in agreement with trade union or employee representatives as appropriate, to put in place policies for the handling of applications for time-off... for public duties’.

Recommendation 48

Local authorities should use established and new avenues to actively liaise with local employers. They should:

- a) Engage with local employers to raise awareness of the role and its transferable skill-set; and explain employers’ duties in respect of time-off;**
 - b) Recognise the contribution made by local employers of councillors for example by sending letters welcoming and thanking them for their support;**
 - c) Equip councillors for and assist them in negotiating with employers;**
 - d) Provide information packs to both councillors and employers;**
 - e) Involve employers in shadowing/induction events etc.**
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Recommendation 49

The IDeA/LGA should:

- a) develop a generic employers information pack, to be adapted for local use;**
- b) develop generic information for councillors for negotiating with employers, to be adapted for local use;**
- c) reintroduce a Good Employers' Award;**
- d) work with employer organisations to publicise the role employers have in supporting councillors.**

Research suggests that the public's current negative perceptions of local government may well be affecting the private sector's attitude towards providing more overt support to those employees who wish to become councillors (Hands et al., 2007). Research undertaken with employers themselves identified a need for the Government to educate and convince employers about the value and benefits of employing a councillor, in order to increase their willingness to allow time away from the workplace for council business. Like the rest of the general public, it appears that many employers have very little idea about what councillors do, the skills they build up, and the transferability of those skills, and a carefully targeted information campaign would be valuable (Hands et al., 2007).

John et al. (2007) also argue that the benefits of employing a councillor should be better communicated to employers. They argue that because of a lack of awareness about what being a councillor entails, many companies are failing to recognise the benefits of supporting councillors as part of Corporate Social Responsibility activities, and fail to appreciate the valuable transferable skills that a councillor can take back into the workplace. These are powerful potential benefits which need to be championed in order to offset some of the concerns of employers.

The Commission's conversations and research with employer organisations have illustrated the concerns that employers have about councillor employees. They are concerned that councillors may not be available for important work-related activities because of their civic duties, and that council work will detract from the amount of energy and motivation that an employee has available and/or is willing to devote to the employer. Further they are concerned about the possibility of conflicts of interest between employer and council (such as when public sector organisations bid for contracts). There is also concern expressed that as an employer they will be seen by other employees or clients to be aligned to a particular political party, and that employees may learn 'bad habits' as a politician that could be detrimental in terms of working practices (for example inefficient meetings etc). Information packs produced for employers will need to openly address these concerns.

Recommendation 50

A financial compensation scheme, to be administered by local authorities should be developed which allows small businesses to claim a flat rate for absences resulting from employees' councillor duties. Appropriate rates should be included in the National Framework on Allowances (see recommendation 57), and should take account of regional variations in pay.

Delegates at the Commission's regional events indicated that they saw support from employers for staff who are councillors as very important to attracting people to the role. Offering compensation to employers, particularly small businesses, was rated as one of the most useful ways of encouraging employers to be supportive, with around a quarter of delegates rating this as valuable.

At the Commission's employers roundtable it was agreed that schemes aimed at providing compensation to employers, would only be valuable if it was ensured that it was not administratively burdensome, if it was advertised well and lessons were learned from similar schemes.

Recommendation 51

The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to promote a model of accreditation of councillor skills based on best practice. This should enable the validation of the everyday skills developed by councillors, such as negotiation and communication skills, and also allow councillors to undertake more formal course-based qualifications.

The latest National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England (IDeA/LGA/LGAR, 2007) asked respondents directly if they would like the chance to gain a more formal qualification as a councillor and 41.7 per cent answered that they would. Research undertaken for the Commission with existing councillors showed that most respondents were broadly in favour of the idea though in a 'fairly passive sort of way' (Hands et al., 2007: 48). The research found that it is younger employed councillors who are most enthusiastic about accreditation – seeing it as a way of distilling their councillor work and skills in a way that would massively enhance their CV when looking for future employment. Resistance to the idea stems in the main from anxiety about the time commitment it might require, that it might give the impression to potential candidates that you need to be 'clever' or 'expert' and therefore put people off standing, and that it could be seen as a move towards the performance management of councillors.

The research also identified enthusiasm for accreditation amongst employers, who:

“admit that they are currently unclear about exactly what councillors do and what skills are acquired; or if they already employ councillors and are aware of these skills, they say that many other employers are still ‘in the dark’ and therefore accreditation could be very valuable.” (Hands et al., 2007: 70).

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, in its submission to the Commission highlighted the transferability of skills associated with scrutiny, including analytical skills in reviewing and assessing evidence, engaging with a diverse range of people, and developing mediation and negotiation skills in order to get recommendations accepted. Schemes or qualifications aimed at councillors have already been developed by South Bank University, and Kirklees MBC working with Huddersfield University, and Sunderland University and Birkbeck College.

Recommendation 52

The IDeA/LGA should work with local authorities to develop schemes for recognising and celebrating individuals' service and skills as a councillor and providing an opportunity to remain civically active.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 53

Opportunities should be explored for national and trade media to recognise councillors through public service awards or similar.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 54

A national framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should include a scheme of 'parachute payments' for elected mayors, leaders and executive portfolio-holders who lose office through the actions of the electorate. The payments should be at least equivalent to statutory redundancy pay and linked to time served in office.

See note on recommendation 57 below.

Recommendation 55

In order to understand and address the needs of and opportunities provided by individuals who stop being councillors, all local authorities should undertake exit interviews, with a view to:

- a) providing the council with systematic evidence of why councillors decide not to stand for re-election and whether anything can be done to address this; and**
 - b) providing individuals with opportunities for them to continue to be civically engaged.**
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John et al. (2007) identify a lack of understanding amongst council officers as to why traditionally under represented councillors leave the role and recommend that exit interviews should be used to facilitate a firmer grasp as to why they stand down and how they may be retained. This suggestion is also made by respondents to the Commission's call for evidence.

Recommendation 56

In order to develop a clear understanding of the profile of councillors:

- a) the census of local authority councillors should be continued;**
- b) the LGA/IDeA should reinstate their national exit survey;**
- c) a census of parish and town councillors should be introduced;**
- d) the survey of candidates standing for election should be continued.**

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

Recommendation 57

A national framework of guiding principles for members' allowances schemes should be developed. It should specify a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of authority. Councils should have regard to the national framework in framing their own schemes but should be able to opt to appoint their own local or regional independent remuneration panel. The framework should also make recommendations in respect of parish and town councillors.

The present legislative framework for members' allowances is contained in the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 ('the Regulations'). These provide a consolidated regime for members' allowances. Councils have to establish and have regard to the recommendations of local remuneration panels in setting their allowances scheme. There are no national limits set.

Research for the Commission (Hands et al., 2007) reveals a popular perception that many councillors are corrupt, and specifically that they take advantage of the allowances and expenses they receive. This perception is formed almost exclusively by stories printed in the local press. When prompted by our researchers with figures on typical remuneration for councillors grassroots activists, in particular, were surprised that the level is so modest. Activists accept that councillors with extra responsibilities deserve to earn higher remuneration. Most feel that average levels of remuneration for council leaders (£16,356) and cabinet/executive members (£9,243) are not unreasonable. However, it was noted that allowances for backbenchers are not high enough to enable someone currently working full-time to give up their job in order to become a councillor.

The English model of members' remuneration differs from that in the other UK countries. Responsibility for remuneration of councillors in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is devolved from Westminster. In these countries there is more central prescription, less discretion and more consistency in the setting of allowances. In these countries there are, however, a relatively small number of authorities with identical powers.

The English model has the advantage that it provides maximum local choice within the legislative framework, itself not restrictive. The local authority has the responsibility for setting its own allowances but can rely on the recommendations of its panel. Those recommendations are required to be publicised, a requirement more extensive than in the remainder of the UK. It enables the local economic context to be taken into account.

There are also disadvantages to the English model. It results in substantial disparities of remuneration for councillors in similar authorities undertaking similar responsibilities. The degree of public accountability of panels can be variable: in some councils the local authority leads the panel to its conclusions. And, despite the recommendations of an independent panel, some councillors can be uncomfortable in setting their own allowances, particularly where this is contentious either politically or through the interest of the local media.

The creation of a London-wide panel in the capital has overcome some of these disadvantages. It provides a uniform structure for the framing of members' allowances schemes. London boroughs' allowances schemes are, over time, converging in many areas.

What the National Framework should cover within its remit

The National Framework of Councillors' allowances would be established by an independent body. The framework would be expected to take into account key differences in size and types of authorities. This framework would inform the decisions made at local and where relevant, regional level, by remuneration panels.

It should specify a national minimum basic allowance for each type and size of authority. Councils should be required to have regard to the recommendations of the national panel in framing their own schemes and would have the option of appointing their own local independent remuneration panel should they need further guidance. The National Framework would be expected to make recommendations for members' allowances schemes for the joint authorities in the same way as it makes recommendations for local authorities.

In framing its advice on special responsibility allowances, the national panel should recognise that it is difficult for those carrying major responsibilities to undertake a 'normal' full-time job in addition to council responsibilities, but that councillors should not be expected to work full-time on council duties.

The National Framework should be based on a generic role description for councillors, as agreed with the LGA, recognizing the additional responsibilities held by Executive members, Leaders and others holding significant roles, as well as the core ward related roles of all councillors.

The National Framework should include a scheme of “parachute payments” for elected mayors, leaders and executive portfolio-holders who lose office through the action of the electorate. The payments should be equivalent to at least statutory redundancy pay and linked to time served in office.

The Commission considered some general issues that the National Framework should cover. It was agreed that the current system of basic and special responsibility allowances should continue, but that Members’ allowances schemes should have explicit regard to the workload involved in different roles.

In authorities with political administrations, there should be a requirement to pay a special responsibility allowance to not fewer than two opposition members (the group leader and one other) in order to resource a healthy opposition so as to ensure critical scrutiny.

In cases of prolonged sickness and maternity or paternity leave, councils should be enabled to make two special responsibility payments in respect of the same office.

It was also felt that the National Framework should include the following points:

Parish Councils

- i) A national framework should also be established for parish councils, including a minimum parish basic allowance for active parish councils.
- ii) The national parish framework should make recommendations for special responsibility allowances for parish councillors.
- iii) Parish Councils should be enabled to pay the dependants’ carers’ allowance.
- iv) Each county association of local councils should establish an independent remuneration panel to provide specific advice on local application of the national framework.

Co-optees in principal authorities

- i) The national framework should include clarification on which co-optees should be entitled to co-optees’ allowances.
 - ii) The national framework should specify for each type of authority a minimum co-optees’ allowance for chairs of standards committees.
-

Carers allowances

- i) Councillors should be offered access to the national childcare salary sacrifice scheme.
- ii) Guidance should ensure that the dependants' carers' allowance should not be restricted to childcare.
- iii) The dependants' carers' allowance should be extended to permit councillors requiring care to claim an allowance for their carers when on approved duties.
- iv) Standards committees should have the ability to extend the dependants' carers' allowance in appropriate cases in order to avoid significant financial disadvantage.
- v) Joint authorities should be empowered to pay dependants' carers' allowances to their members.
- vi) Firmer guidance should be provided on the minimum package of support that each councillor should expect to receive.

Travel and subsistence

- i) Where a council pays for travelling and subsistence within council boundaries as a lump sum or as a identifiable sum factored into the basic allowance, the payment should be free from tax and national insurance liability up to a nationally set minimum.
 - ii) In framing a national scheme, the approach of the Republic of Ireland should be considered. This approach to travelling and subsistence allowances has built-in penalties for non-attendance at meetings.
 - iii) Councillors should be able to claim mileage rates up to officer casual user rate with no tax liability.
 - iv) Although local flexibility should be maintained in order to have regard to local circumstances, the national framework should give guidance on the overall rates payable for travelling and subsistence.
 - v) In authorities with tightly-drawn boundaries and where it is reasonable to do so, travelling and subsistence allowances should be subsumed in the basic allowance. Alternatively the approach in the Republic of Ireland – as described above – should be adopted and promoted.
 - vi) Where appropriate, allowances schemes should make special provision for travel by disabled people. Schemes should permit standards committees to make exceptional provision for travel in special circumstances.
-

Recommendation 58

All councillors should be entitled to access to the local government pension scheme, and any allowances for serving on joint authorities should also be taken into account.

Since 2003 councillors in England have been eligible to join the local government pension scheme on the recommendation of the local independent remuneration panel. No councillor can have access to the scheme unless it is recommended by the independent panel. If a panel does recommend access, it can stipulate whether it applies to the basic allowance, the special responsibility allowances (or some of them), or both. A council is not bound to grant access.

A survey of authorities carried out by the Local Government Pension Committee in 2004 showed that less than half (42.4 per cent) of authorities offered their councillors access to the scheme and that there was a substantial difference between types of authority that were offering access to the scheme. Of respondents to the survey, 24 of 28 metropolitan authorities' panels offered access to the scheme. Of the 127 respondent district councils, less than half of the panels (57) offered full or partial access. 23 out of 24 metropolitan authorities had adopted their panels' recommendation. Only 35 of the 57 district councils had taken up the offer of access to the scheme. In 2004 4,311 councillors had been offered membership of the scheme and 912 had opted to join it, less than 5 per cent of the almost 20,000 English councillors (Brooke and Hall, 2007).

Many panels and councils who deny access to the scheme are influenced by two factors: cost and public opinion. The scheme is a defined benefit scheme (as opposed to a defined contribution scheme). The pension and related benefits are set by a formula linked to salary and length of service. Panels and councils are often reluctant to grant access to a defined benefit scheme when there is a general trend in the private sector to close such schemes to new employees.

The main advantage of the scheme for councillors is that it offers a predictable benefit guaranteed by the council. It needs no set up costs and only marginal administrative costs, as the scheme is already in place for local government employees. The main perceived disadvantage – cost to the council – is relatively minor as a part of the overall cost of the scheme.

At present the councillor contribution is pegged at six per cent of pensionable allowances. The employers' contribution is usually in the range of 12-15 per cent, though can be substantially higher. The scheme is generally organised on a county-wide basis. Each employer will make a different contribution to the scheme dependent upon the demography of its pensioners and the success of the scheme's investment policy.

Granting access to the scheme is intended to remove one more barrier to service as a councillor. Councillors of working age may lose pension rights in respect of their employment, either by working part-time or by loss of promotion prospects. Access to the scheme can make good this loss. It is argued that service as a councillor ought not to impose any further financial disadvantage. If a substantial part of a councillor's working time is devoted to council duties at the expense of their job or promotion prospects, then it seems reasonable that they should be able to treat their allowances as pensionable.

Evidence to the Commission suggests strong support for allowing councillors access to the scheme, as is the position in Scotland.

Recommendation 59

The Department for Work and Pensions should review the earnings disregard for benefits in respect of members' allowances, and in particular move to disregard renounced members' allowances for benefits purposes.

The situation regarding members' allowances and benefits is complicated. It depends upon the benefits a member (and family member) receives and the level of household income, including any allowances received (see LGiU Councillors' Tax and Benefits – 2006 Update, April 2006). Benefits differ in each case and it is very difficult to draw generalisations.

As a rule the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) does not disregard any councillor remuneration. Even if members renounce their allowances, they are treated as income by the DWP, unlike the regimes for taxation and national insurance.

Recommendation 60

The National Framework for members' allowances (see recommendation 57) should not preclude small allowances being made available to councillors to communicate with their electorate, including where content is explicit about their political allegiance and activities.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report – see also recommendation 10.

Recommendation 61

In order to maintain confidence in local councillors, Local Authority Standards Committees should be empowered to suspend and claw back part of the basic allowance on the limited occasions where councillors are measurably failing to fulfil their role description.

An explanation of this recommendation is provided in the main report.

how we worked and who we involved

This annex sets out the background and explains the process leading up to the publication of our recommendations. It includes acknowledgements of the organisations and individuals who contributed and helped to make the recommendations as thorough and wide-ranging as possible within the terms of reference.

Background

The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (CM 6939-1) created a stronger role for local councillors. It acknowledged that councillors should be supported in their contributions and service to the community and it announced the intention to have an independent review of incentives and barriers to becoming a councillor.

Aim and objectives

The Commission on Local Councillors was announced on 8 February 2007 with a remit to develop recommendations to encourage a more diverse and broader range of people to become councillors so that communities are better represented.

The Commission was chaired by Dame Jane Roberts (former Labour leader of Camden Council). The Commissioners were:

- Yaseer Ahmed, formerly at Commission for Racial Equality
- Cllr Cathy Bakewell, former Liberal Democrat Leader of Somerset County Council
- Jessica Crowe, Executive Director, Centre for Public Scrutiny
- Cllr Margaret Eaton, Vice-Chairman and Leader of Conservative Group at the Local Government Association
- Ben Page, Managing Director, Public Affairs, Ipsos-MORI
- Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive, the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce.

The Commission has examined some of the key issues that discourage people from standing, and serving, as a councillor. These include remuneration, securing time-off from work, the time required to do the job of a councillor, routes into the role, motivation as well as legitimate barriers.

The desired outcome for the Commission was a set of recommendations that would enable well qualified, able and more representative people to become councillors. These may be bold, but must be practical and implementable, based on a sound evidence base.

Evidence gathering

Commission meetings

We met six times over a period of eight months to hear evidence from a number of experts from think tanks, academia and local government and to consider emerging recommendations.

Review of existing data, evidence and literature

The Commission's examination of the existing literature was undertaken in a number of stages and using a range of sources. First, a rapid in-house review of the existing UK literature in relation to barriers and incentives to serving as councillors, was undertaken during the spring of 2007. This was in order to inform the Commission's initial deliberations and to identify gaps in the evidence base in advance of developing the programme of social research. In the main, this review concentrated on the English evidence base, although some international evidence was also examined where appropriate and, in particular, where there was little evidence available in the English context.

Secondly, a detailed re-examination of the data provided by the 2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England (IDeA/LGA/LGAR, 2007) was undertaken during the summer of 2007, with a particular focus on under represented groups.

Thirdly, the initial literature review was supplemented by a series of more focused reviews, undertaken during the summer of 2007, in regard to certain under represented groups (female councillors, young councillors, councillors with disabilities and councillors from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities), as well as parish and town councillors.

The key findings from these three exercises are presented in a research paper published alongside the Commission's recommendations – Haberis, A. and Prendergrast, J. (2007) *Research Report 1. Incentives and barriers to becoming and remaining a councillor: A review of the UK literature*, London: CLG.

Programme of specially commissioned social research

The review of existing literature identified a number of gaps in our knowledge and understanding and so three further research projects were specially commissioned to inform the deliberations:

- i. An in-depth qualitative study of the motivations and perceptions of key stakeholders ('potential' councillors, councillors from under represented groups, ex-councillors, council officers and employers), was undertaken by BMG Research. The key findings from this study are presented in a research paper published alongside the Commission's report – Hands, D., Taylor, S., Featherstone, R. and Boavird, T. (2007) *Research Report 2. Understanding the barriers and incentives to becoming or remaining a councillor in England*, London: CLG.
- ii. An international literature review was undertaken to identify transferable lessons from other countries in regard to the representativeness of local politicians. The key findings from this study are presented in a research paper published alongside the Commission's report – Rao, N., Grayson, L. and Young, K. (2007) *Research Report 3. Improving the representativeness of councillors: An international literature review*, London: CLG.
- iii. In-depth case study research was undertaken in five local authority areas chosen for their unusually high levels of representation by councillors from traditionally under represented groups. This research team was led by Manchester University and their findings are presented in a research paper published alongside the Commission's recommendations – John, P., Gains, F., Goodwin, M., Richardson, L., Rao, N., and Evans, E. (2007) *Research Report 4. Improving the representativeness of councillors: Learning from five high performing local authorities in England*, London: CLG.

There is not space in this publication to include all the evidence we gathered, so we have published further evidence which informed our thinking on our website www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/councillorscommission. This includes a paper on remuneration and the research that has informed our deliberations.

Who we talked to

We used a variety of ways to engage with the many organisations that have an interest in our work. We are very grateful to all the people we have spoken to or heard from who have taken the time to send in their contributions or to attend our events.

Submissions and comments

We invited views and formal submissions to inform the Commission's work and we received responses from the following organisations:

Age Concern

Mirza Ahmad, Bar Association for Local Government and the Public Service

Paul Aillet

Sagheer Akhtar, East Lancs Community Action projects

Cllr Shan Alexander, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Michael Amesbury

Cllr Stephen Amos

Cllr Samuel Arnold

Naheed Arshad-Maher

Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors

Association of North East Councils

Steve Atkinson, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Pat Audoire

Helen Bailey, Islington London Borough Council

John Bailey, Wellingborough Borough Council

Cllr Robert Barnard, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Marilyn Barnett

Cllr Rodney Bates, Surrey Heath Borough Council

Graham Baxter, North East Derbyshire Council

Margaret Begg

Patricia Bell, Cumbria Police

David Bellotti

Cllr Dick Benson

Cllr Sheila Blagg, Worcestershire County Council

Blink/1990 Trust

Steve Bolter

Alice Bolton

Steve Bradley, East Hampshire Borough Council

Cllr John Briggs, North Lincolnshire District Council

Bristol City Council

British Chambers of Commerce

Cllr Jonathan Brook, South Lakeland District Council

Phillip Brook

Cllr Brooks-Stephenson

Alison Broom, Maidstone Borough Council

Nick Burdett

Cllr Ray Burston

Linda Butcher, Crowborough Borough Council

Centre for Women and Democracy

Cllrs Deborah and Nigel Clark, East Hertfordshire Council

Cllr Lesley Clarke, Women in Local Government Society

Janet Clements, Wycombe District Council

Cllr Jim Clifton

Russ Cochrane, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

Ray Collins, Gravesham Borough Council

Eileen Conn

John Cook

Mike Cosgrove

County Councils Network

Jenny Courts, Kemble and Ewen Parish Council

Cllr Cox, Member Allowances Panel, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Lesley Davies, Durham City Council

James Derounian, University of Gloucester

Simon Deville

Disability Rights Commission

Colin Duller

Brian Edmonds

Electoral Commission

Jill M. Elson

Frank Evans

Cllr Kathy Ferdinand

Matthew Follett, Leicester City Council

Cllr David Foot

Celia Fraser, Southampton City Council's Independent Remuneration Panel

Bob Gillis, South Somerset District Council

Caroline Godfrey

Mark Goodair, Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Elizabeth Goodwin, Uttlesford District Council

Janet Grauberg, CIPFA

Cllr Chris Greaves

Cllr Paul Greenall, West Lancashire District Council

Mollie Groom

Richard Hamilton

Cllr Marc Hanson

Cllr Hazel Harding, Lancashire County Council

Adrian Hardy, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Mayor John Harrison, North Tyneside Council

Cllr Mick Henry, Association of North East Councils

Cllr Hill, Lincolnshire County Council

Cllr Alan Hills, Daventry Borough Council

Philip Hirst

Roger Hiscox

Cllr Hoare, Nottinghamshire County Council

Cllr Mike Hodgkinson

Lucy Hodgson, Warndon Parish South

Rob Hooper, Devon County Council

Cllr Bill Houlst, North Yorkshire County Council

Martin Hunt

IDeA

Independent Panel for Councillor Allowances, on behalf of Northamptonshire County Councillors

Colin Iveson, Craven District Council

Antoinette Jackson, Cambridge City Council

Cllr Mohammed Javed

Shona Johnstone, Cambridgeshire City Council

Emeritus Professor George Jones, LSE

Sheena Jones

Kelly Jordan, Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Richard Kendall

Jane Kennedy, Staffordshire County Council

Tony Kilner

Cllr Patrick Kitterick

Howard Knight, London Councils

Dr John Lander, Remuneration Panel, Carrick District Council

Andrew Langley

Robert Lanzer, Crawley Borough Council

Cllr Lewell, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

Local Government Information Unit

Lib Dem Group, Islington Borough Council

Liverpool City Council

Ann Liverton

Hywel Lloyd, OPM

Cllr Clyde Loakes, Waltham Forest London Borough Council

Local Government Association

London Councils

London Equalities Commission

Loughton Residents Association

Sir Michael Lyons

Cllr Mary Malin, Member Development Working Group, Kettering Borough Council

Claire Mangham, SIGOMA

Cathy Manning, St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Charlie Mansell

Cllr Ian Marks, Warrington Borough Council

Ian A. McCord, South Northamptonshire District Council

Cllr McGhee, Northamptonshire District Council

Kevin McKenzie, Plymouth City Council

Moira McLennan, Knowsley Borough Council

Liz McQue, North West Development Group
Cllr Meehan, Haringey London Borough Council
Bill Melotti
Cllr Andy Mercer, East Northamptonshire District Council
Cllr Gill Mercer, East Northamptonshire District Council
Christine Morgan, South Holland District Council
Cllr James Morrish, Torrington Borough Council
Cllr Steve Munby, Liverpool City Council
Municipal Association of Victoria
National Association of Local Councils
National Association of Black and Ethnic Minority Councillors
National Council of Voluntary Organisations
New Local Government Network
Cllr Richard Nicholson, Thanet District Council
Cllr O'Connor, Slough Borough Council
Office of Disability Issues
Cllr Roy Oldham, Tameside Borough Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Ben Ord
Cllr Mrs Marianne Overton, North Kesteven District Council
Michael Owen
Cllr Pabbi
Cllr Diane Packham
Cllr Zoe Patrick, Oxfordshire County Council
Louise Pellett
Cllr Sid Phelps
Cllr R.J. Phillips
Jackie Porter
Andrew Povey
Hugh Rawlings, Welsh Assembly
Cllr Steve Reed, Lambeth London Borough Council
Jonathan Rew, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Jonathan Reynolds

Steve Richards, South Lakeland District Council
Laura Robertson-Collins, Liverpool City Council
Stephen Robinson
Frances Roden
Cllr Rose
Cllr Robert Rowden, Worcester City Council
Cllr Gill Rowe, West Lancashire County Council
Graham Russell
Cllr Neil Sabharwal, Lambeth London Borough Council
Cllr Sawdon
Scope
Jane Scott, Wiltshire County Council
Nike Shadiya, London Borough of Lewisham
Cllr Terry Shannon, Rotherham Borough Council
Cllr K. Sharp, Peterborough City Council
Tasnim Shawkat, Bedfordshire County Council
Alan Sheepy
Cllr John Shipley, Newcastle City Council
Tania Shute, Exeter City Council
Elisabeth Skinner, University of Gloucester
Cllr David S. Smith, West Midlands LGA and West Midlands Regional Assembly
Cllr Nigel Smith, Basildon District Council
Cllr Smithson
Catherine Snowden, Blackpool Borough Council
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers
South West Local Government Association
Malcolm Stabler
Standards Board for England
Amanda Stephenson, Chester-le-Street District Council
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Sulafa, Stoke on Trent City Council
Sussex and Surrey Association of Local Councils
Cllr C. Swift

Prof. Marilyn Taylor

Cllr Roy Taylor

Mrs Mary Taylor, Wirral Council

Jane Thomas

Cllr Ken Thorber, Hampshire County Council

James Tootle

Ken Tyson

UK Youth Parliament

Unison

Diane Vernon, East Devon District Council

Margaret Waggott, Stockton on Tees Borough Council

C. Waling, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council

Jonathan Ward-Langman

Wealden District Council – Range of Group Leaders

Michael Webb

Peter Webb

James Wedgbury

Michael Welsh, Lancashire County Council

Steve Wemyss, Portsmouth City Council

West Midlands Regional Assembly

Carl Whistlecraft, Kirklees Council

Julia White, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Janet Whitehouse

John Williams, Tower Hamlets London Borough Council

Chris Wobschall, CIPFA

Cllr Susan Woodward, Staffordshire County Council

Cllr Claire Young, South Gloucestershire District Council

Jan Youngs, Bristol City Council

Youth Parliament

On-line forum

We invited views through the Councillors' Commission on-line forum from April to September 2007. We posed a range of questions:

- What motivates people to become councillors?
- What do councillors need to enable them to perform their role effectively?
- Is it possible to be a councillor and have a life?
- Should councillors be better paid, and why?
- Should there be better support and recognition for councillors leaving the role?

Regional events hosted by the Commission

We held regional events at Warwick University and in Newcastle and, in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff. These were participatory events facilitated by the Office of Public Management (OPM) involving councillors, ex-councillors and officers from local government as well as participants from central government, academia, public services, the voluntary and community sector, think tanks, political parties and the private sector.

The Commission would like to thank everyone who took part.

Roundtables

We met stakeholders in key sectors and organisations, on a one-to-one or roundtable basis. The roundtable events and their attendees were as follows:

Academics

Ed Cox	Local Government Information Unit
Lucy de Groot	Improvement and Development Agency
Professor Jean Hartley	University of Warwick
Professor Steve Leach	De Montfort University
Richard Muir	Institute of Public Policy Research
Professor Marilyn Taylor	University of the West of England
Dr. Stuart Wilks-Heeg	University of Liverpool
Richard Wilson	Involve

The media

Heather Jameson	Municipal Journal
Chris Smith	Municipal Journal
David Walker	Guardian Public
Edward Welsh	Local Government Association

Employers organisations and Higher Education

Judi Billing	Improvement and Development Agency
Dr Nick Bowes	Engineering Employers Federation
Roger Culcheth	Federation of Small Businesses
Alexander Ehmann	Institute of Directors
Dr Sarah Hale	Birkbeck College
Maura Kerrin	Work Psychology Partnerships
Carl Whistlecraft	Kirklees Council

Communities and Local Government's Young Advisors

Michaela Alexander	Young Advisor, Hull
Liz Allen	Young Advisor, Portsmouth
Jane Brooker-Wood	Young Advisors Charity
Nicky Cave	Project Lead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry
Lisa Harvey	Young Advisor, Middlesbrough
Jenna Higginson	Young Advisor, Tranmere and Rock Ferry
Letitia Joseph	Young Advisor, East of England
Emmanuel Landerguel	Young Advisor, Southwark
Jacqueline Macaulay	Young Advisor, Southwark
Maria Monaghan	Project Lead, Portsmouth
Linden Walcott-Burton	Young Advisor, Dudley
Krista Walters	Young Advisor, Nottingham

Communities and Local Government's Race Equality Advisory Group

Jeremy Crook (Chair)	Director of Black Training and Enterprise Group
Patrick Loftman	Consultant on race equality issues
Hansa Patel-Kanwal OBE	Organisational Development and Sexual Health Specialist
Professor Richard Tomlins	Consultant and Visiting Professor of Race And Diversity, Coventry University

Women

Muna Choudhury	Ashram Housing Association
Sue Holden	Sefton Equalities Partnership
Pinky Lilani	Asian Women of Achievement Awards and Interfaith Network
Angela Mason	Improvement and Development Agency
Zohra Moosa	Fawcett Society
Tania Pouwhare	Women's Resource Centre
Nan Sloane	Centre for Women and Democracy
Sam Smethers	Equal Opportunities Commission
Sue Smith	Oxfam – Leading the 'Regender' project looking at women in regeneration
Joy Warmington	Birmingham Race Action Partnership

Black and Asian Minority Ethnic Women

Camille Ade-John	The Community Contact Family Centre
Shan Alexander	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Naheed Arshad-Mather	BME VCS Regional panel for Yorkshire and the Humber
Dorrett Boswell	Hillcroft College for Women
Chinwe Chukwuogo-Roy	Chinwe Studio
Monica Clarke	Health & Nutrition
Marina Duckmanton	Leicestershire and Northampton Job Centre Plus
Meral Ece	Islington Council
Karen Harrison	African Women Support Network-North East (England)
Kamaljit Kaur	Institute of Community Cohesion
Nargis Khan	London Borough of Hackney
Marcia Lewinson	Women Acting In Today's Society
Fawzia Parveen	The Open Circle
Saba Rai	Sandwell Primary Care Trust
Maroof Shah	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Parvinder Sohal	Lancashire Wide Network for Minority Ethnic Women
Viveen Taylor	National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups

Parish Councils

John Coleman	Commission for Rural Communities
Gaynor De Barr	National Association of Local Councils
Neil Evans	National Association of Local Councils
Katie Fielding	Wiltshire County Association of Local Councils
David Francis	Northumberland County Association of Local Councils
Mark Gilson	Helsby Parish Council
Linda Larter	Weston-Super-Mare Town Council
Dave Mahon	National Association of Local Councils
Vanessa McConnon	Sturry Parish Council
Danny Moody	Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils
Tanya Turner	Campbell Park Parish Council
Julia Witting	Stanstead Abbots Parish Council
Amjad Zaman	Keighley Town Council

National Community Forum

Waqar Ahmed	Green Light Muslim Youth Forum
Naseem Akthar	Balsall Heath Forum
Graham Brownlee	National Community Forum
Riaz Rafat	East Staffordshire Primary Care Trust
Razia Sharif	Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network
Barbara Willis-Brown	Friends' Institute and Sparkbrook Caribbean and African Women's Development Initiative

London Civic Forum

Isaac Attram	Youth Rally Mission
Lorraine Dongo	London Civic Forum
Vincent Fajilagmago	Phillipine Generation Ltd
Adje Kouakou	FARASSA – Ivorian community organisation
Abbey Palmer	Social Action for Health
Bushra Tahir	AWAAZ – South East Asian Community organisation
Andrew Wakefield	Chair of London Civic Forum

The following events were also organised on the Commission's behalf:

Derby City Council	Evidence gathering workshop with current and former councillors, officers and community activists from the East Midlands Region
Somerset County Council	Evidence gathering workshop with members of the Voluntary and Community Sector from the South West Region.

Events we attended

We spoke at or attended a number of external seminars and events throughout the year including:

All Party Parliamentary Group on Local Government

Association of North East Councils

Association of North East Councils Annual Meeting, Stockton on Tees

British Academy Local Government Workshop *What's Wrong with English Democracy?*

Conservative Conference Fringe: Re-inventing Civic Democracy

County and Unitary Council's Officer Overview and Scrutiny Network

Electoral Reform Society 'Winning Back Voters Trust...'

Engaging Women in Public Life Centre for Women and Democracy

How to engage young people seminar (Young Advisors)

Improvement and Development Agency Local Leadership Conference – 'Frontline Councillors – Community Champions'

Local Government Association Annual Conference

Local Government Chronicle Conference, 'Developing the Role of the Local Councillor'

London Councils Annual Conference

National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Annual Conference

NAN Consortium Meeting

National Association of Councillors, Scarborough

Operation Black Vote Meeting, Bristol

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Annual Conference

South East Employers Conference, 'Enhancing Local Democracy' at LSE

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Conference

Welsh Local Government Association Conference 'Shaping up to Shape the Change', Llandudno

Further acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the Commission's thinking and who helped us to make this report as thorough as possible within our terms of reference. It would be impossible to mention everyone by name but a special thanks goes to people and organisations who organised specific events for the Commission, or enabled us to engage with groups and communities across the country:

Derby City Council
Improvement and Development Agency
Municipal Journal
National Association of Local Councillors
Somerset County Council

We are very grateful to a number of experts in their respective fields who assisted in synthesising the evidence to assist the Commission in developing their recommendations:

Sir Rodney Brooke	INLOGOV, University of Birmingham
Ed Cox	Local Government Information Unit
Madeleine Dipper	Work Psychology Partnership
Jo Dungey	Local Government Information Unit
Chris Game	INLOGOV, University of Birmingham
Tracy Gardiner	Local Government Information Unit
Dr Declan Hall	INLOGOV, University of Birmingham
Dr Maura Kerrin	Work Psychology Partnership
Dr Jane Martin	University of Warwick
Laura Robertson-Collins	Political Skills Forum
Professor Jo Silvester	Work Psychology Partnership/City University
Paul Wheeler	Political Skills Forum

We are also grateful to Alan Pike for his assistance in drafting the final report.

Finally, we have been supported by a small secretariat based in Communities and Local Government's Community Empowerment Division. We would like to thank them for all their hard work on our behalf.

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