Communities and Local Government

Strengthening local democracy – focus groups

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February 2010

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Background and objectives

This research explores the views of the public to the proposals set out by the Government in the *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation, which explores whether local government has the powers it needs to meet today's challenges. This study focuses upon the following key proposals from the consultation:

- giving councils more scope to scrutinise the decisions of local service providers
- exploring whether there are barriers to using existing powers and whether there are other powers which councils should have
- ensuring councils have the powers and responsibilities they need to tackle climate change
- considering how sub-regional structures can be made more accountable and transparent
- exploring how to articulate and clarify the relationship between central and local government so that their respective functions are transparent to citizens

The overall objective of this study is to gain the views of the general public on proposals outlined in the consultation, in order that a sense of public opinion would inform the Government's response to the consultation. In particular, it seeks to gather the opinions of the wider public, including harder to reach groups who may not ordinarily have been sufficiently engaged or informed to respond to the proposals.

1.2 Methodology

The research was conducted using a qualitative research approach which comprised a series of 11 extended (two hour) focus groups across England with people from a range of ages, social categories and ethnic groups, including three groups with Asian and black participants to ensure any differences by ethnicity (if they exist) could be drawn out and captured effectively. (This is much more difficult to do in a mixed ethnicity group because transcripts from audio recordings cannot specify the ethnicity of the person speaking). It was particularly important to form the groups in this way, given the need for this research to reflect the views of those less likely to respond to the formal Government consultation directly.

Throughout the groups, participants were provided with information cards, case study examples and exercises which were used to give them the baseline knowledge they needed to respond to the proposals, and to help

draw out key aspects of each section of the consultation and understand the principles behind them. The examples do not necessarily reflect Government's views on how these issues should be addressed and do not attempt to fully reflect the complexity of the issues. They were used to enable participants to engage with the overall nature of the proposals by making them tangible (rather than to get feedback on the specific ideas presented). Moderators used these examples as a mechanism to illustrate the general themes being discussed and therefore, where possible, avoided discussing the details of the examples which were not the focus of this study.

The key findings from the discussion groups are summarised below:

1.3 General council powers

Many participants did not feel well informed about council powers and how they were used. Throughout the discussions many participants suggested that this fundamental **lack of understanding of council powers made it more difficult for them to give a definitive opinion on whether or not councils needed more authority to act** as proposed in the consultation document.

Although people could think of examples of councils using their powers to improve local areas (for example, tackling run down areas and improving local facilities), they often find it easier to suggest instances of local authorities not using their powers – these include complaints of councils failing to tackle important issues like anti-social behaviour and not responding to the problems of individual residents.

Across the groups, the **biggest perceived barrier to councils using their powers was seen to be lack of motivation,** with many participants believing that councils could do more to improve areas if they tried. However, lack of resources, the role of central government, and bureaucracy are also seen to be issues.

Participants were **happy with the principle of local authorities having greater powers to tackle problems in local areas**, but believed it should be **contingent on councils proving that they are using powers appropriately and effectively**. In particular, many people felt that councils should only be given greater powers if they use them in line with the wishes of local people, and if they communicate more effectively with their residents.

1.4 Extending the requirement to participate with scrutiny

Very **few participants were familiar with the existence of scrutiny enquiries** and most were unable to think of specific examples of such committees operating in their area. However, **once explained, most were positive about the idea** and comfortable with the concept of scrutiny as a council function.

Participants were able to suggest a range of issues in their local area that they would like investigated, ranging from anti-social behaviour and the disposal of discarded hypodermic needles, to cycle paths and footpaths and better planning of road-works. Some found it difficult to think beyond very personal or localised concerns (i.e. things that directly affected them, personally).

There was a **broad consensus across the groups that it would be useful for councils to gain the co-operation of a wider range of bodies** when conducting scrutiny enquiries, but there was **less agreement on whether authorities should have the power to oblige** all organisations operating in the local area to participate in scrutiny.

Utility companies, transport providers and local businesses were common suggestions for the types of organisation that should be required to participate with scrutiny, while several participants pointed out that different issues would require the involvement of different organisations, and thus it was important that scrutiny committees should have the flexibility to require different organisations to co-operate depending on the nature of the enquiry**. Most participants also felt that scrutiny committees would be a waste of time and resources if organisations were not required to respond to their recommendations.**

Participants were **keen that scrutiny enquiries should reflect residents' concerns** and interests even if these fall outside the remit of a council's stated priorities, though they often found it difficult to establish how this should work in practice. However, there was **a mixed appetite for public involvement** in scrutiny enquiries.

1.5 Climate change

Some participants were unfamiliar with the causes and effects of climate change and, for many, the ideas and examples raised in the consultation were new. However, **most people felt that it is appropriate for government at both national and local level to tackle the problem of climate change**, and participants generally felt that there was scope for extending councils' role in combating climate change.

In particular, **many participants felt comfortable with the idea of councils inspiring and encouraging behaviour change** and providing the community with tools to tackle climate change.

However, initial reactions to specific examples of ways in which the Government might be able to take action, such as retrofitting social housing, private homes and businesses, or using and generating renewable energy, showed much less agreement, and some variation across age groups and locations.

Beyond councils' current role of advising and providing assistance to the vulnerable and disadvantaged **there was little commitment from participants to addressing climate change in other ways**. This was often due to **concerns about personal loss of control, the perceived invasiveness of some actions and the possible individual cost**. This is interesting to compare with the *Big Energy Shift* study[1] which revealed huge potential for people to change their energy behaviour once participants are given all the contextual information they need to understand these issues.

1.6 Sub-regional arrangements

Participants were **largely unaware that they are living in an area with a city or sub-regional arrangement**. However, when introduced to the idea, they **generally accepted the rationale behind the arrangement** and agreed that dealing with issues such as transport planning and the economy at this level made sense.

Participants did **not spontaneously raise any concerns about their lack of awareness** of how the city or sub-region is governed, **but, when asked directly, most agreed that making their city or sub-region more accountable was appropriate.**

When presented with a range of possible structures, only one participant across the groups supported the status quo. However, **there was no agreement among participants over which structure would be preferable in terms of accountability**. A sub-region leader chosen from existing members of the partnership (usually leaders of member councils) was popular with some participants as the simplest and least resource intensive option. However, across the groups, most participants did not support this option on the basis that councillors would find it too difficult to decide on the leader or would be biased towards their own local authority area at the expense of the interests of the region as a whole.

Most participants felt that having a directly elected representative such as a mayor would mean everyone living in the sub-region would be able to hold the leader directly to account through elections. Also, participants who supported the option of a directly elected mayor overseeing partnership members felt that this would ensure the individual was independent of any single local area and could consider the interests of the region as a whole.

Some participants supported the third option of a directly elected mayor and new sub-regional body for the same reason, and on the grounds that it was important to have more accountability and checks and balances through the assembly. However, there were some strong feelings among a few participants that this system caused confusion for the electorate, and was unnecessarily complex and wasteful.

1 Big Energy Shift: *Report from citizens forums* (2009) Downloaded from http://www.big-briefs.com/big_energy_shift/Big_Energy_Shift_Final_Report_300609.pdf

1.7 Relationship between central and local government

Most participants said they were **unsure of the respective roles of central and local government**, and several said that this was not something they often thought about. However, some participants did spontaneously raise the issue of councils being restricted in their powers and actions by central government, and **many participants seemed to conceptualise the central-local government relationship in terms of the limitations that councils are placed under as a result of central direction**. Examples of this tended to focus on financial dependency and targets.

There was **widespread agreement that councils should have the authority to meet the needs of their residents**, and are probably best placed to do this. However, people were **also happy for central government to step in if councils were seen to be abusing their powers**. There was some tension between participants' recognition that different areas have different needs and their concern about postcode lotteries or too much differentiation between areas.

Participants **were happy with the idea of a formal agreement setting out the respective roles of central and local government**, though tended to be dubious about how much difference it would make and found it difficult to suggest the types of principle it should include. They also found it difficult to suggest how such an agreement should be policed, but, when prompted, most liked the idea of an independent body such as an ombudsman.

1.8 Conclusions

Very few of the participants involved in this research had previously considered the issue of council powers in any depth and few knew enough to comment on whether local councils currently have the ability to act in local communities' best interests.

Judging from their initial, non-deliberated, views about the role of councils and their ability to make a difference, it would seem that there is **no public clamour for extended powers**. There was a **consistent lack of understanding among the participants of what councils can and cannot do** to ensure the wellbeing of their local areas.

Typical views of local government's ability to use powers for the good of the community demonstrated a **lack of confidence in the ability of councils to act**. There is a widespread perception that councils find it difficult to get the basics in service delivery right and, therefore, it may be a stretch to imagine them using extended powers differently. This was tied to a **widespread view that councillors lack real engagement with the public**, and that their resulting lack of knowledge about what the public feel are local priorities **might make it difficult for them to use extended powers effectively**.

More positively, **councils are seen as best placed to make local decisions**, and there was **broad support for the ideas proposed in the consultation if it meant that councils would be more able to fulfil their leadership role on important local matters**. Participants felt that the idea of extending powers seems a sensible one given that councillors are elected to act on behalf of local communities, but that it is debatable whether the power will be used effectively.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

This research examines the views of the public to the proposals set out by the Government in the *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation[2], which explores whether local government has the powers it needs to meet today's challenges. The consultation includes a range of propositions which could give local people a bigger role in shaping the places where they live and the public services they use. The measures proposed would do so by increasing the ability of local authorities to work in the interest of their citizens.

This study focuses upon the following key proposals from the consultation:

- giving councils more scope to scrutinise the decisions of local service providers
- exploring whether there are barriers to using existing powers and whether there are other powers which councils should have
- ensuring councils have the powers and responsibilities they need to tackle climate change
- considering how sub-regional structures can be made more accountable and transparent; and
- exploring how to articulate and clarify the relationship between central and local government so that their respective functions are transparent to citizens

2.2 Research objectives

The overall objective of this study is to gain the views of the general public on proposals outlined in the Strengthening Local Democracy consultation, in order that a sense of public opinion would inform the Government's response to the consultation.

The consultation is widely targeted at local authorities, public and private sector bodies, third sector organisations and the public. This research aims to gain a snapshot of the views of members of the public, specifically including harder to reach groups who may not ordinarily have been sufficiently engaged or informed to respond to the proposals. These proposals could result in changes of interest to the public and it is therefore important to ensure that people have had an opportunity to respond to the proposals, in order to add a sense of public opinion to inform the Government's response to the consultation.

2 http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localdemocracyconsultation

This study does not exhaustively cover every proposal or consultation question in *Strengthening Local Democracy* but explores the key themes and issues which are of most relevance to the public.

2.3 Methodology

Sampling and recruitment

Due to the complex nature of the proposals, and the level of background information required by members of the public to be able to respond to them effectively, a qualitative research approach was deemed most appropriate for this study. This allows experienced moderators the opportunity to explain different aspects of the consultation and guide them through the proposals. An extended discussion group enables a cross-section of people to participate in an informal and interactive discussion and allows time for the complex issues and options for change to be explored in some detail. It enables researchers to shed light on why people have particular views, and to test the strength of people's opinions. It also enables us to provide participants with a range of stimulus materials, examples and activities to help them understand the proposals. By contrast, a standard survey approach would not have allowed us to ensure that respondents understood the proposals nor had the basic knowledge of local government to give opinions on the proposals in a considered manner. Additionally, a survey would not have enabled the research to drill down into the complexities of views, looking at what was driving attitudes and perceptions.

The Ipsos MORI research team considered a number of different approaches (for example, deliberative workshops involving a larger number of people and over a longer period). The final recommended approach that was adopted, however, comprised **a series of 11 extended (two hour) focus groups.** By conducting a larger number of focus groups with 8 – 10 participants rather than fewer workshops with more participants, this gave the research team the flexibility to cover a range of different locations and backgrounds and could be organised within the short fieldwork period available before the close of the consultation. By running discussions that are slightly longer than standard focus groups (which are usually around an hour and a half) we allowed more time for explanation of the proposals.

We spoke to **92 people** from a range of ages, social categories and ethnic groups across **11 discussion groups** across the country. Groups with Asian and black participants were conducted in addition to having a representative mix in the other groups. This was to ensure that any differences in views relating to ethnicity could be captured. Where verbatim comments from these groups appear in the report they are identified with the ethnicity of the participant, where the participant was in one of the representative groups it is not possible to identify the ethnicity of the participant, although the majority were white British. It was also important to form the groups in this way, given the need to access the views of people who would ordinarily be less likely to respond to the consultation and, thereby, harder to reach.

The breakdown of the groups was as follows:

Location	Social class	Age	Ethnicity
Leicestershire	Mixed	18-34	Asian
Leicestershire	ABC1	35-54	Representative
Greater Manchester	C2DE	35-54	Representative
Southwark , London	C2DE (mini-group)	18-34	Black
Southwark, London	C2DE	35-54	Representative
Pan-London	ABC1(mini-group)[3]	18-34	Black
Huntingdonshire	ABC1	55+	Representative
Huntingdonshire	C2DE	18-34	Representative
North Kent	C2DE	55+	Representative
Corby	ABC1	18-34	Representative
Corby	C2DE	35-54	Representative

Content of the discussions

To aid discussions and provide structure, Ipsos MORI developed a discussion guide and various stimulus materials (included in Appendix 2 of this report). These helped to ensure that participants across the discussion groups were introduced to the proposals in a clear and standardised way. The materials included information cards, case study examples and exercises which were used to give participants the baseline knowledge they needed to respond to the proposals, and to help draw out key aspects of each section of the consultation and understand the principles behind them. The examples were used to enable participants to engage with the overall nature of the proposals by making them tangible (rather than to get feedback on the specific ideas presented). Moderators used these examples as a mechanism to illustrate the general themes being discussed and therefore, where possible, avoided discussing the details of the examples, which were not the focus of this study.

Topics covered in the groups included:

- general awareness of, and attitudes towards, local council powers
- the role of local government in scrutiny
- the role of local government to tackle climate change
- sub-regional accountability
- the relationship between central and local government

3 The original intention was to run a mixed social class group in Southwark, London, with a group of black participants aged 18-34. However, due to lack of attendance, it subsequently became a 'mini-group' of C2DE participants, requiring a further 'mini-group' to be conducted with ABC1 participants.

Due to the complex nature of the proposals and the unfamiliarity of participants with them, it was decided that the different topics should be split across the groups in a modular form. Therefore, no single group covered all aspects of the consultation within their two hour discussion, but across the 11 groups all topics were covered at least three times. The table below indicates the way in which the different modules of the discussion guide were divided between the groups:

Location	General powers	Scrutiny	Climate Change	Sub-regional	Central-local
Leicestershire (young Asian)	✖	✖		✖	
Leicestershire	✖	✖			✖
Greater Manchester	✖	✖		✖	
London (young black) – two 'mini' groups	✖	✖	✖		
Southwark, London	✖	✖			✖
Huntingdonshire	✖	✖	✖		
Huntingdonshire	✖	✖	✖		
North Kent	✖	✖		✖	
Corby	✖	✖			✖
Corby	✖	✖	✖		

During the group discussions, in order to make the proposals more tangible and easier for participants to respond to, the moderators used a number of pre-agreed prompts and exercises which are discussed in this report. These were designed to introduce new ideas in a neutral way (i.e. without advocating particular proposals) but to ensure that participants had fully considered the wider implications of the proposals being discussed. This is common practice when discussing issues which may not be 'top of mind'. All the prompts used are identified in the discussion guide (see Appendix 2).

In addition to general prompts, the exercises included case studies designed to tease out richer discussion and to help moderators to understand what underlying considerations are driving responses to the overarching proposals. It is important to note that these case studies were designed to help people think about a range of options with respect to specific issues and are not necessarily representative of Government's views on how these issues should be addressed and do not attempt to fully reflect the complexity of the issues. This is because the aim of the research was not to get feedback on the

particular issues but rather to understand how people go about answering questions and what underlying factors are driving opinion.

2.4 Interpreting qualitative research

As discussed above, extended discussion groups are designed to enable the moderator to speak to a cross-section of people and, as a result, to help to understand the drivers and motivations behind responses to individual proposals. They also give participants time to come to a considered view which will also take into consideration the views of others in the group. Giving people the time and space to consider proposals is particularly important when the topics of discussion may be new or complex, or that people may not have thought about in a particular way previously.

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research does not aim to provide statistically reliable data on which generalisations of public opinion can be made, but instead aims to drill down into explanations of *why* people think the way they do. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and, therefore, does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the *extent* to which something is happening. Where we have used qualifiers such as 'few', 'many' and 'most', these are reflective of those who participated in the groups only.

The analysis in this report reflects the balance of views across the discussions. Verbatim comments from the discussions have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of every member of the discussion groups but have been selected to give a snapshot of the kinds of views expressed by individuals when different topics were discussed.

3. General council powers

3.1 Chapter summary

This chapter looks at participants' awareness of, and attitudes to, council powers overall. Below is a summary of findings:

- many participants do not feel well informed about council powers and how they are used
- people could think of examples of councils using their powers to improve local areas, but often found it easier to suggest instances of local authorities not using their powers
- the biggest perceived barrier to councils using their powers was seen to be lack of motivation. Lack of resources, the role of central government and bureaucracy were also issues
- participants were happy with the principle of local authorities having greater powers to tackle problems in local areas, but believe it should be contingent on councils proving they were using power appropriately and effectively
- many people felt councils should only be given greater powers if they use them in line with the wishes of local people, and communicate more effectively with their residents

3.2 Awareness of current council powers

Although participants across the groups were divided on how informed they felt about their council, participants who did consider themselves informed tended to focus largely on naming the range of services which they believe are provided by councils, or focused on the quality of council communications about service provision. Overall, there was a general sense among many participants that they felt ill informed about local authorities' activities more widely and, in particular, about council powers. In several cases, this tied in with complaints about poor communication on the part of local councillors and failure to demonstrate they are acting in the interests, and on the wishes of, local people. It is worth noting that, throughout the discussions, many participants suggested that this fundamental lack of understanding of council powers made it difficult for them to give a definitive opinion on whether or not councils needed more authority to act.

There was a tendency for participants – in the absence of firm knowledge of what councils are meant to do – to assume they are responsible for a wider range of services than they currently are. For example, a couple of participants in one group assumed that their council was responsible for clearing litter on private land, and were frustrated when they called the

council to ask them to do so and were told that it was not within the council's remit.

Councillors have a range of powers, I don't know what these powers are, where would one go to find out? You'd have to be a crack lawyer to interpret the powers. It's a question of knowing what the powers are.

Male, Aged, 55+, ABC1, Huntingdon

3.3 Current council powers

3.3.1 How councils use existing powers

Participants, often, initially found it easier to suggest examples of councils not using their powers than examples where they are used. Examples of local authorities' failure to tackle important issues included, for example, complaints about anti-social behaviour, often among young people, and examples of them failing to solve individual residents' problems or being seen to 'pass the buck' to other organisations.

Well, where I live […], I've asked them to cut the trees down. They need trimming. All I get is, phone the highways department. Why should I phone the highways department? I phoned the council; that should be their job to do something.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE , North Kent

However, several participants were also able to recognise areas or issues where their local authority had made a positive impact. For example, participants in Corby spoke of the local authority's efforts in tackling run-down areas and building swimming pools, those in Dartford were positive about their council's efforts in improving local parks, and people in Leicester used their local authority's policy of offering free swimming to children and pensioners as an example of using their powers in a positive way. Again, though, because participants were unfamiliar with the specific powers that councils have, many found it difficult to give specific examples of authorities using their wider powers to effect change in the way that the local authorities in the example had done. Indeed, some of the examples related more generally to local authorities' responsibilities towards local areas than to their powers per se.

Some participants also gave examples of instances where they felt their local authority had misused or over-reached its powers. These often centred on local authorities being seen to be overly rigorous in collecting money from residents; for example, making repeated demands for council tax or imposing parking fines.

They know how to demand money when money is owed to them, but they don't do anything with the money.

Male, Aged 18-34, Black, ABC1, London

3.3.2 Perceived barriers to using current council powers

Before each group was informed of the extent of current council powers, a commonly held belief across the discussions was that councils do have the powers that they need to make a difference to residents' quality of life in local areas, but that, in many cases, they are not perceived to have the will or motivation to use those powers.

They just don't try. It's not that they haven't got the power, they don't want to do what they've got the power to do.

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE , London

Yes, they do have it [power], but they don't use it though. They use it at their discretion, you know what I mean, when they're ready to come out and do things, when they feel like it.

Male, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Stockport

However, when pressed, participants did also suggest other barriers councils might experience in using their powers. Lack of resources was a commonly cited reason for local authorities' failure to act, and some participants suggested that this was a rationale given by councils themselves.

The restrictions perceived to be placed on local councils by central government were also spontaneously raised by participants in several groups as an obstacle getting in the way of local authorities' capacity to act. This is an issue which is covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

Less commonly, participants also saw lower tier authorities' need to refer to upper tier authorities or (in one group) the influence of 'quangos' as a restriction on councils' ability to act, while others made more general references to problems in their area remaining unsolved because they lie outside the remit of the local authority.

The length of time it takes to make decisions and the amount of red tape and bureaucracy were also highlighted by a few participants as barriers to making a difference.

Because it takes so long to do anything because they've obviously got to stay within the law. And there's so much paperwork involved […], so they're losing the power there because everything takes months and months to sort out.

Female, Aged 35-54, ABC1, Leicester

Again, though, a lack of awareness about council powers made it difficult for some participants to highlight specific barriers that might prevent councils from acting.

3.4 Extending council powers

3.4.1 Attitudes to the principle of extending council powers

When asked directly, many participants said initially that they felt councils do currently have enough powers, although, on further consideration, they could identify issues on which they wanted their council to act and were unsure if their council had the power to do so. Once the notion that councils might not have all the powers they need was introduced, most participants were happy for them to have the powers they need to deliver on local issues, and agreed with the principle that local councils are best placed to make decisions for local areas.

If they're using the powers they've got in an appropriate way and everybody can actually see what they're doing and it's in a positive way, yeah, because they're the ones that control your area and they're the ones that can look after your area.

Female, Aged 18-34, Black, ABC1, London

Yes, definitely [councils should have power to act on local priorities] because they're normally local people who are in the council so they know, to a degree, they know the problems that they're facing, they know the community.

Female, Aged 18-34, C2DE, Huntingdon

However, some participants worried that extending council powers would be of limited effect if resources were not increased at the same time. There was also cynicism in some groups about whether councils would use those powers effectively given participants' impression that they do not use the authority that they currently have to the best of their ability. This was voiced most forcefully and eloquently in the group discussion among young black professionals.

3.4.2 Areas where participants would like councils to have greater powers

Several participants (across different discussion groups) felt anti-social behaviour, and law and order more generally, were issues where they would like their local authorities to have greater power to tackle the concerns of local residents.

I think they should have a lot more power to disperse that sort of thing [anti-social behaviour and young people hanging around drinking] because to me that's a major cause for concern, in any town really, not just in Corby.

Male, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

Other examples of the types of issues where participants suggested they would like councils to be able to exercise more power included:

- public transport (for example, subsidising bus fares)
- managing parking effectively
- effective and safe disposal of used hypodermic needles
- ensuring road safety
- making sure people delivering services do their job properly (e.g. in Jobcentre plus and the management of council flats)
- controlling/regulating the types of tenant moving into areas/ properties
- reducing homelessness
- protecting vulnerable children
- helping local people into employment
- doing more to prevent local shops and businesses closing down

3.4.3 Caveats/limitations on extending council powers

Although participants, in principle, were happy for local councils to have more power if they need it to get things done locally, for most participants this came with the proviso that councils should be required to prove to residents that they were using that power appropriately and effectively.

I would want to see some stats or some information on what they've done with what they currently have.

Female, Aged 18-34, Black, C2DE, London

Some participants were also concerned about the idea of giving councils too much power – while they were keen for them to have the authority to tackle local problems, there was also a clear sense that there should be some restraints or guidelines. In the groups where the central-local government relationship was explored more explicitly (see Chapter 7) these caveats tied in with the sense that participants were looking for a balance between councils having the powers they need to improve the area and there being some degree of oversight of those powers.

I think there should be a limit, obviously; you can't have any one organisation with unlimited power. You've got to have some sort of control, I understand that.

Male, Aged 55+, ABC1, Huntingdon

One specific area where many participants were keen for those limitations to be established was in ensuring that councils use their powers in a way that corresponded with the needs and wishes of local residents. At the very least, most participants would like councils to simply communicate better with

residents, and, as we have seen, this tied in with a more general feeling that people often feel insufficiently informed about what powers their councils have and how they are using them for the benefit of the area.

In addition, some participants wanted to put in place more specific requirements ensuring that councils consult with local residents about how to take action before they are granted extra powers.

But when they give that power to the councils, to make sure that the proviso is that the people in the area are involved in it as well, that they have some kind of input in it, so that they know that the more power that the council is getting is going in the right places.

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Stockport

However, participants recognised the need for proportionality in the degree of consultation and the fact that requiring local authorities to consult residents on every decision would be a waste of time and resources, as well as an unnecessary restriction on councils' ability to act effectively.

The council don't have the time and resource to go through each and every single individual, it's a democracy rule.

Male, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

4. Extending the requirement to participate with scrutiny

4.1 Chapter summary

This chapter looks at participants' views on extending the requirement to participate with scrutiny. Below is a summary of findings:

- very few participants were familiar with the existence of councils' scrutiny function but most were positive about the idea
- participants were able to suggest a range of issues in their local area that they would like investigated, several of which focused on very localised concerns. Some found it difficult to think beyond very personal complaints or cases which they wanted resolved
- there was broad consensus across the groups that it would be useful for councils to gain the co-operation of a wider range of bodies when conducting scrutiny enquiries though there was less agreement on whether authorities should have the power to oblige all organisations operating in the local area to participate with scrutiny. Utility companies and local businesses were common suggestions for the types of organisation that should be required to participate with scrutiny
- most participants felt that organisations should be required to respond to scrutiny committees' recommendations
- participants were keen that scrutiny enquiries should reflect residents' concerns and interests even if these fall outside the remit of a council's stated priorities, though they often found it difficult to establish how this should work in practice
- there was mixed appetite for public involvement in scrutiny enquiries

4.2 General awareness of scrutiny function and usefulness

4.2.1 Awareness of existence of scrutiny

Very few participants were familiar with the existence of councils' scrutiny function and most were unable to think of specific examples of such committees operating in their area. However, when provided with examples of such committees operating in practice (for example, a successful enquiry into a housing development in Cambridgeshire), participants were largely positive about the idea.

It's a good thing, because the Government and the utility people and transport and everyone's getting together, discussing the problem as a whole, so they're not just doing it individually and then not letting anybody know what's going on.

Female, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

Participants largely seemed comfortable with the concept of scrutiny as a council function, and some suggested that, although not explicitly familiar with them, they were not surprised by the existence of such committees.

4.2.2 Suggested topics for scrutiny enquiries

When asked to suggest topics for scrutiny enquiries, participants tended to focus on localised concerns, or issues of direct relevance to themselves (suggesting, for example, particular issues in their street or housing estate which they would like to see resolved). The issues were broadly similar to those identified in Chapter 3 as areas in which people would like to see local councils having greater powers. Perhaps because of their lack of familiarity with local councils' scrutiny function, some participants found it difficult to understand the idea that scrutiny committees are tasked to investigate issues of broader local concern rather than a personal concern or individual case they wanted followed up (and a few participants seemed to have difficulty distinguishing between scrutiny committees and other enquiries they had come into contact with, for example into council housing grievances).

However, some spontaneous suggestions for topics that participants felt they would like investigated in their area included (in no particular order):

- **crime and anti-social behaviour** (including gun crime)
- **issues around roads** (including road quality, parking and speed control measures, road works and co-ordination of disruption, provision of cycle paths)
- **maintenance and allocation of council housing** (including fire safety, ensuring properties are not left vacant)
- **upkeep of parks, open spaces and other public spaces** (including disused land)
- **upholding perceived responsibilities of local employers and businesses** (e.g. employing local people for local jobs, pubs and clubs taking responsibility for patrons leaving their premises, not selling alcohol to minors)
- **drug and alcohol abuse**
- **quality of public service delivery** (including ensuring staff have skills and competencies required to do their jobs effectively)
- **cleanliness, waste and recycling** (including disposal of hypodermic needles)

- **flooding**
- **lack of activities for children and teenagers**

4.3 Extending the requirement to participate with scrutiny

4.3.1 Principle of requirement to participate with scrutiny

There was broad consensus across the groups that it would be useful for councils to gain the co-operation of a wider range of bodies when conducting scrutiny enquiries. Indeed, some participants were happy for scrutiny committees to have the power to oblige any organisation operating locally, or having an impact locally, to participate in their enquiry.

If they need to speak to somebody about a problem I think they should be able to do it. I don't think… that people should be able to pick and choose whether or not they're going to assist.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

However, a small number of participants were unhappy with the principle of local authorities requiring private companies to co-operate with scrutiny.

Despite the broad consensus about giving scrutiny committees the power to oblige any organisation operating locally to participate, some were concerned that this might result in councils calling in too many bodies (a few participants were anxious about local authorities misusing their power in this regard), or that it might leave the situation so vague that unwilling participants might be able to avoid their obligation to co-operate. Many participants favoured simply extending the requirement to participate with scrutiny to a broader range of organisations.

I think […] there should be a list but if a company has information or needs to cooperate with the council so that they can improve things, which is obviously why they're having this scrutiny, they should be obliged, really by law, to speak to the council about it. Because the council are trying to improve things for everybody's wellbeing.

Female, Aged 18-34, ABC1, Corby

On the other hand, a few participants were wary of extending the requirement to participate in scrutiny too widely, on the basis that it might result in the reluctant and thus perhaps unproductive involvement of such bodies. In their view, the voluntary involvement of organisations who were invited to participate would be a better solution.

If you force someone to do something they're not going to do it wholeheartedly […] if you said you can if you want to and if they were passionate enough they would go and they'd do a good job of it.

Male, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

Conversely, some people worried that if there was no statutory requirement to assist with scrutiny, there would be a risk that organisations would not do so if it were not in their interest.

4.3.2 Types of organisations which should be involved

Because of participants' lack of familiarity with the scrutiny process, some initially found it difficult to envisage what kinds of organisations they would like to participate in enquiries. Participants were presented with examples of scrutiny enquiries in Cambridgeshire and Worthing, and in the light of those most were keen for transport providers and utility companies, for example, to be obliged to co-operate if necessary.

I think definitely utility companies, I'm shocked that they're not supposed to because […] if anything goes wrong with piping in an area, electricity, gas, these are the people you see every single day in any given area. So for them not to be part of this list for me is just outrageous.

Male, Aged 18-34, ABC1, Corby

Other organisations which participants said that they would like to see participate in such enquiries included river authorities, telephone companies, local businesses (or an umbrella organisation representing local businesses), leisure centres, youth offending teams, and neighbourhood watch groups. In addition, some participants were keen that any organisations operating within a local authority's catchment should be required to participate in such enquiries.

More broadly, many people pointed out that different issues would require the involvement of different organisations, and agreed that it is important that scrutiny committees should have the flexibility to require different organisations to co-operate depending on the nature of the enquiry.

4.3.3 Responding to recommendations

There was broad consensus among participants that scrutiny committees can only be useful if their recommendations are responded to. Most people were happy with the idea that all bodies involved in an enquiry should be required to respond to its recommendations and that this should extend to both public and private sector organisations. Many individuals were concerned that if there is no requirement to respond to recommendations then such committees are a waste of resources.

If it does go under scrutiny then there should be an outcome, something positive should be done on the matter. They can't just go and do the whole process and then not do anything about it.

Female, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

A few participants suggested extending scrutiny powers further than the consultation proposals – so that organisations should be required to accept the recommendations. However others felt that this was going too far and that businesses, for example, might well have legitimate reasons (often financial) for not doing so. Most felt it reasonable that the organisations involved should be required to respond and give explanations of what they will do as a result of the enquiry's recommendations and why.

I think the main objection from any body that was given a recommendation would be whether it's cost effective to them or not. But I think they would have to show good cause that, no we're not going to do it your way because, and it would have to be a good reason.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

4.4 Scope of scrutiny enquiries

4.4.1 Types of topic which should be covered

Most participants were unfamiliar with the concept of local priorities in the form of local area agreements (LAAs) and sustainable community strategies and found it difficult to understand what would fall within their remit. This lack of knowledge made it hard for them to decide whether the topics of scrutiny enquiries should be limited in that way or not.

I don't know what the full list [of LAA targets] is, so I don't know whether it covers everything in general or whether certain things are exempt that I assume might be important to be looked at.

Male, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

However, there was a broad consensus that the subjects for such enquiries should be directed by the needs and interests of local participants, whether or not such interests fell outside the scope of stated priorities.

A few participants in one group were concerned about councillors enquiring into topics in which they had no experience and which, therefore, they might not be best placed to understand.

More broadly, several people across the groups emphasised the importance of scrutiny enquiries investigating matters of *ongoing local* importance. There was also a concern that enquiries should not waste time and resources by looking into trivial matters or by conducting too many enquiries.

4.4.2 Importance of resident input

Most participants were keen that residents should have some input into the topics selected for scrutiny. However, there was recognition within most groups that some balance was required and that committees could not investigate every personal complaint or minority concern.

People will take advantage of the fact that anything can be scrutinised, and they will bring frivolous matters to the table, but […] on the same token, matters that will not be seen as major issues by a member of the [committee] for example could be a very troublesome thing for the local community, the fact that they could bring it to the table themselves would be beneficial.

Male, Aged 18-34, Black, C2DE, London

However, participants found it difficult to suggest in practice what criteria scrutiny committees should use to determine whether or not an issue was driven by local need. There was a sense that a certain number of people should have to think an issue was important for it to be selected for scrutiny, and the idea that enquiries should require a petition for a topic to be considered was raised in several groups. However, participants found it difficult to pin down how many (or what proportion of) residents an issue should have to concern or affect for it to be investigated. Some people also felt that councillors should be more proactive in seeking out the opinions and concerns of residents in their ward.

So it's down to the councillor to say everyone's complaining to me about this and this, and then through that they would form a committee.

Male, Aged 35-54, ABC1, Leicester

A small number also suggested that better use and examination of existing customer intelligence could be used as a basis for deciding suitable scrutiny enquiries; for example, by looking at what the most popular complaints are in a given period of time.

4.5 Public involvement

4.5.1 Appetite for public engagement with scrutiny

The degree to which participants wanted to get engaged with scrutiny themselves was mixed. Some participants said that they would be keen to be involved, but it was difficult to test how far this would extend in practice. Others, though, admitted that they would be unlikely to involve themselves personally in such enquiries. Lack of time, apathy and fear of repercussions were all cited as barriers which might prevent residents from getting involved.

Just because, honestly, it's just too much hassle. It just gets pushed aside, so it's all fair and well going making a complaint or even just going and giving evidence whatever. But you don't know what happens to it, they could just go, yeah yeah that's fine. Write it all down and it could either get filed away, put away and you never know anything about it.

Female, Aged 18-34, ABC1, Corby

Participants also reinforced their belief that most residents would only be interested in issues of direct relevance to themselves and their immediate neighbourhood.

However, even participants who said that they were unlikely to participate in such enquiries themselves were keen for other people to have the opportunity to do so should they want to (although there was some concern that people who did act as 'expert citizens' may not be representative or have a mandate to speak on behalf of other people living locally).

As with council powers more generally, many participants used the discussion of scrutiny to reinforce their point that councils should be communicating better with their residents overall. Several said that they would like to be made aware that such enquiries are happening and the types of topic that they are covering so that they at least have the option of getting involved should they want to.

If I'm asked the question and I choose to ignore it, not to fill in a form, not to write back, that's my choice, but [it would be good if] at least someone actually gave me the option of giving a voice.

Male, Aged 35-54, ABC1, Leicester

4.5.2 Methods of public engagement in scrutiny

Participants emphasised that it had to be made as easy as possible for participants to engage with scrutiny if they were to be encouraged to do so. There were several suggestions that councillors on scrutiny committees need to make more of an effort to engage with the public if they want their input.

I think sometimes you need to go out to people. You shouldn't expect people to come to you because not everyone's got cars or not everyone speaks English, whatever.

Female, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

Several participants also suggested that they would be more likely to get involved if they could do so anonymously, rather than having to participate in person. Several groups suggested that email would be a useful medium to gain residents' input into scrutiny enquiries.

5. Climate change

5.1 Chapter summary

This chapter begins by exploring participants' attitudes towards and levels of awareness about climate change and what councils are currently doing to tackle the problem locally. It then goes on to describe the extent to which participants support or oppose the idea of extending council powers to tackle climate change, and the reasons behind the views expressed.

Climate change featured in five of the discussions: one in Corby and two in Huntingdonshire and London (the two 'mini-groups').

Below is a summary of the findings of this chapter:

- some participants were unfamiliar with the causes and effects of climate change and, for many, the ideas and examples raised in the consultation were new
- participants generally felt it is appropriate for government at both national and local level to tackle the problem of climate change
- many participants felt comfortable with the idea of councils inspiring and encouraging behaviour change and providing the community with tools to tackle climate change
- participants generally felt that there was scope for extending councils' powers in combating climate change and meeting national targets
- however, there was much disagreement about the extent to which councils can take action, particularly when it came to discussing specific example case studies around retrofitting old buildings and the use and generation of renewable energy
- beyond councils' current role of advising and providing assistance to the vulnerable and disadvantaged, there was not very much commitment to addressing climate change in other ways. This was due to concerns about personal loss of control, invasiveness of some actions and possible individual cost – more forceful options for change saw little support

Alongside the results from the current study, the responses to another piece of Ipsos MORI research, the *Big Energy Shift*[4] (commissioned by the Department for Energy and Climate Change) should be considered. Responses there were overwhelmingly *positive* about improving the energy efficiency of homes and about low carbon and renewable energy technologies in principle.

4 http://www.bigenergyshift.org.uk/

The difference in methodology between these reports provides the likely explanation of the differing results, and is indicative of the positive role of climate change and energy scarcity education (indicated in the *Big Energy Shift*) and of where the public currently stands on the issues around action on climate change (indicated in the current report). A fuller comparison between the methodologies used in these two pieces of research and the resulting responses can be found in Appendix 1.

5.2 Climate change and use of current council powers

This section establishes participants' baseline knowledge and awareness of climate change and the role of local government in tackling this problem.

5.2.1 Awareness of and attitudes towards climate change

It is important to note that not everyone was familiar with the causes and effects of climate change. This was particularly the case in one of the London groups, by comparison with the relatively high levels of knowledge in rural Huntingdon where participants seemed to have a good grasp of the basics. The ideas and examples discussed in this chapter of the report were new to many participants and a great deal of explanation was required before we were in a position to discuss the issues set out in the consultation. Across the five groups, there were only a few participants who could either be described as 'impassioned' by the issue or climate change 'deniers'.

Perhaps more positively, however, no participants felt it inappropriate for government at national and local level to tackle the problem. However, there was some feeling that in light of the international scale of the problem, various governments have probably responded too late to make a timely difference.

5.2.2 Attitudes to council responsibility for tackling climate change

Participants across the groups were generally comfortable with the idea that their local council should have a role in tackling climate change. Indeed, this is a tangible example of a topic on which many could agree they feel it is appropriate for councils to act as community leader. Many participants accepted that it is important for someone to inspire the requisite behaviour change in the community that would make a difference to greenhouse gas production. They felt that the public generally needs to be shown and encouraged how to adapt their behaviour and be provided with the necessary tools and means in order to do this easily.

However, participants also pointed out that as climate change does not respect local authority boundaries, councils cannot be solely responsible for tackling the problem and that national governments are, ultimately, better placed to lead on the drive to improve it.

5.2.3 Awareness of current council activities

Recycling was most commonly mentioned (spontaneously) as a council activity intended to save resources and energy and therefore tackle climate change. There was some variation between groups on awareness of other things that their local council does, with the C2DE London group (the mini-group in Southwark) being least aware of other examples. However, in Huntingdon and Corby and among the professional Londoners, suggestions came more easily. These included:

- distributing free energy efficient light bulbs
- offering discount insulation
- building new council homes to high energy efficient specifications
- improving the energy efficiency of existing council-owned homes
- providing information
- installing wind turbines on buildings
- switching to bio-fuels used by public transport

There was a general perception that council tenants and people on benefits receive more assistance from the council in making their homes more energy efficient.

No you have to be on benefits to get any kind of help with the insulation and whatever.

Female, Aged 55+, ABC1, Huntingdon

Sometimes some old people can get freebie things, like when their boiler needs changing, they will get their boiler changed free.

Male, Aged 18-34, Black, C2DE, London

5.3 Extending council powers

This section considers opinions towards extending councils' powers and tries to establish the 'sticking points' or what participants found to be acceptable and why. To help tease out detail, enrich consideration of the issues and ensure discussion was not focused on abstract ideas, two case studies were used in this section. It is important to note that these case studies are not derived from the consultation document or indeed any government proposals on how councils might address this issue. They act simply as a way to help participants envisage how principles might be applied in practice and to help gauge levels of participant acceptance of different schemes.

5.3.1 Attitudes to extending council role in tackling climate change

Participants across the groups generally felt that there was scope for extending councils' role in combating climate change and meeting national targets. However, there were a few participants who felt they could not say

if powers should be extended since they did not feel they knew enough about councils' current powers in this respect. There was both much agreement and dissension about the details of how councils' powers should be extended.

An area of activity where there was most agreement among participants was increasing councils' ability to educate local communities to be more energy efficient and less wasteful in their use of natural resources generally. Many felt that councils should be seen as educators and inspire behaviour change through advice and information provision.

I hate being told how to live my life and it's much better to persuade somebody in a helpful way to explain why and give inducements than to say you will do it this way.

Male, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

However, in most other areas of activity discussed there was a great deal of disagreement. This occurred for a number of reasons depending on the council activity under consideration. For example, the issue of cost and perceived loss of control over decisions about one's energy consumption came into sharp relief in discussions about retrofitting properties of different tenures (discussed in more detail below).

5.3.2 Reactions to exercise 1 – Retrofitting homes

Participants were asked to envisage a typical street with a mix of homes: some council homes, some housing association and some private homes (rented or owner-occupied). They were told that many of these homes were old and not energy efficient and that the same applied to the shops in the street and the local school. They were then asked to think about the four options shown in the slide below, and which they felt their local council should do in order to make the street more energy efficient.

Exercise 1: Street Retrofit

A) Do what they currently do now e.g. offer help to those seeking it out/vulnerable	B) Require everyone in council and HA housing to have refurbishment to a high standard of energy efficiency
C) Require private home owners (including landlords) to have refurbishment to a high standard of energy efficiency	D) Enforce whole street refurbishment including schools, shops etc

Overwhelmingly, participants across all groups fully endorsed option A – a continuation of what the council currently does in respect of helping residents who are vulnerable or who are on benefits. There was a general sense that helping the less well-off, regardless of the cause, was in society's interest although this was not expanded on in any real detail. At the same time, there was much discussion about whether it was fair that only vulnerable residents should benefit from this support. Participants – both those who owned homes and those who did not – felt that there was a general assumption made by government that home-owners can afford everything, yet the participants felt this was far from reality.

Why give it [help] to people who live in council housing or home association housing but not people who have got their own houses?

Male, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

Many participants felt that home-owners, who often struggle to maintain and pay for their homes, should receive similar help to vulnerable people, and this would enable them to do their bit for tackling climate change.

Whilst most participants felt it was generally acceptable that councils should be able to carry out option B – requiring council and housing association properties to have refurbishment to a high standard of energy efficiency, there were a small number of dissenters who felt that social landlords should not have the right to tell people what to do in their own homes.

In principle, participants agreed that all sections of the community should play their part – not just the vulnerable and poor – in tackling climate change. However, option C was not seen as acceptable action for a council to take. Participants felt that there must be other ways to reduce domestic carbon emissions which might be less intrusive and less expensive to homeowners.

If you don't have money then it's not an option to go and refurbish. Most people are struggling.

Female, Aged 18-34, Black, C2DE, London

For similar reasons, a number of participants did not feel option D was practical as some smaller business owners would not be able to afford the added expense. However, there was broad agreement with the council trying to make public buildings energy efficient and there was limited support for larger businesses to be required to make extra effort to cut down on their energy use.

If you're going to force it [changes] on her [small-business owner] because she's got a business, you're going to send her under. Whereas if it's a case of Top Shop, a big name brand who can afford to do that, have hundreds of branches, that's fair enough.

Female, Aged 18-34, Black, ABC1, London

There were some notable differences of opinion in the younger group in Huntingdon from the other groups. They tended to feel that the council should be doing a lot more to tackle climate change and whilst acknowledging that it would be very difficult to force private owners and businesses to make changes, that they should definitely apply more effort into actively encouraging and incentivising behaviour change.

So I think everyone should be prepared that they have to do something about it and the council's prepared to let some money, a lot of money go on it and then everyone has to have it, including schools and shops and everything like that.

Female, Aged 18-34, C2DE, Huntingdon

5.3.3 Reactions to exercise 2 – Renewables

Participants were also asked for their views on the extent to which councils should be encouraging the use and generation of renewable energy and were shown four contrasting options for action.

Exercise 2: Renewables

A) Requirements for **new homes** to get their energy from renewables (e.g. generating their own electricity through solar panels or having to source heating from renewable sources such as woodchips)

B) Introducing district heating schemes for existing homes (communal heating rather than homes having their own boilers)

C) A council setting up its own wind turbine scheme to generate renewable electricity to power local buildings or to sell back to the grid

D) Councils agreeing to big wind farm schemes

The four options presented in this exercise proved as contentious with participants as the retrofit options. Only option A was supported across the board, although with caveats – a number requested that the requirement should be for new homes to obtain *a percentage* of their energy from renewable sources, but not all. The reasons given for this qualification varied, ranging from the imagined cost of the energy supply and generation, to a lack of confidence in renewables providing sufficient energy to new homes. There was also concern from home-owners across the groups of the impact that such a measure might have on house prices – would new homes built to exacting energy efficiency standards (that included energy from renewable sources) devalue less energy efficient homes?

Well my question with that is, if they did that, will it push the price of the new homes up...And then make it unaffordable for the first time buyers who want to get on to the market? Because that's where the problem is at the moment and obviously with that pressure, the market doesn't move.

Female, Aged 18-34, C2DE, Huntingdon

The concept of introducing district heating schemes (Option B) was not supported by anyone in any of the groups. The key reason was that it removed residents' personal control of their heating and meant they could not have access to their own boiler. This was a consistently articulated concern, regardless of how 'green' participants may have previously presented themselves to be.

Furthermore, the London group of black professionals, expressed some doubt about whether councils are sufficiently skilled to run efficient communal heating systems. Based on some of their own or their family and friends' negative experiences of council housing repairs and delivery of services in general, the view was that councils may not be ready to be responsible for providing heating for large numbers of households.

I don't think that should be a council initiative. I don't think some councils are competent enough to handle such things. A council to handle a district's heating? I can't see that as a good thing.

Male, Aged 18-34, Black, ABC1, London

Option C received more mixed reactions. Some participants felt that councils should not be in the business of providing energy as they are non-profit-making organisations, others felt this would be fine in principle but worried about the skills and ability of councils to do this well.

Others suggested that national government should have a role in coordinating renewable energy and energy provision, not councils, as it may lead to energy postcode lotteries.

Option D was interesting in how it divided opinion along generation lines. In particular, the younger people (18–34yrs) in Huntingdon fully supported the idea of councils being allowed to grant wind farm permissions whilst the older group (55+yrs) claimed they would be ineffective, unsightly, a 'blot on the landscape', and were in full opposition to the idea.

5.3.4 How else councils should address climate change

Most participants, and particularly home-owners, felt that councils' climate change powers should be limited in terms of their impact on private homes due to the likely expense incurred in making adjustments. Participants were behaving conservatively when doing the two exercises as they did not want to appear to be supporting options that might be costly to individuals. At the same time there were seemingly paradoxical discussions about the need for councils to help everyone, including home-owners – not just vulnerable people.

Yet, when given the opportunity to suggest alternative options, few could come up with actual examples that would be cost-free and tended to not consider the cost implications of the council taking any steps to tackle climate change. Many suggested that councils should offer support, advice and grants/subsidies, all of which still have an indirect cost to residents through taxation. The idea of councils being responsible for encouraging behaviour change met with mixed reactions. Some felt that the council should take on this role as it provided residents with useful reminders and information about how to be more 'green'.

They should be advertising it, in a fun way, even if it's billboards in the town centre.

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

However, other participants considered advertising and campaigns a waste of money as they deemed them ineffective. One man mentioned the Mayor of London's drive to get people cycling, which he felt had not produced results.

There was some support for councils incentivising behaviour change among residents in some, small way to help bring the issue of climate change to the forefront of everybody's minds in their daily lives.

Or like save £10 on your council tax if you do so and so, do you know what I mean? Little, silly little incentives, but they're making a big difference to people who have to run their own home but don't get any help...who are outside that help bracket, if you know what I mean. The vulnerability bracket, who are outside of that. There could be a bit more help, incentive wise, I think.

Female, Aged18-34, C2DE, Huntingdon

However, providing incentives for change were considered by some participants to be outside a council's role. Other specific ideas included creating more cycle paths and improving public transport – suggested by many participants – and providing school buses to reduce school-run traffic and car use.

There was general disapproval of the council acting as an enforcer of good behaviour, with a few individuals supporting this idea. One young woman in London suggested a soft approach in which councils could set household targets for energy consumption and install more effective or smart metering systems so that each household can be monitored for exceeding their recommended energy limit.

As with renewables, there was also some support for climate change being dealt with at a national level – to prevent the development of a postcode lottery – and, again, there was concern over the implications for house prices. In light of some understanding about climate change being a borderless phenomenon, some participants concluded that climate change should be managed at an international level.

To prompted suggestions about tightening planning regulations and working with community organisations, there was general support for these ideas in principle, but little discussion about what this would mean in practice.

6. Sub-regional arrangements

6.1 Chapter summary

This chapter looks at views on the accountability of city or sub-regional governance arrangements drawn from the discussions in Dartford, Leicester and Stockport. Below is a summary of findings:

- participants were generally unaware they are living in an area with a city or a sub-regional arrangement
- participants generally accepted the rationale for city and sub-regions and felt that dealing with issues like transport planning and the economy at this level made sense
- participants did not spontaneously raise any concerns about their lack of awareness about how the city or sub-region is governed
- after some exploration of the issue, most participants agreed that making their city or sub-region more accountable was appropriate
- there was no agreement over what sort of governance structure would be preferable at a sub-regional level although most participants felt that having a directly elected representative such as a mayor would make it easy to identify who is responsible for the decisions made at this level of government, thus improving accountability

6.2 Awareness of sub-regional arrangements

6.2.1 Awareness of existence of sub-regional arrangements

Participants living in an area with city or sub-regional arrangements were unaware that this was the case. One participant living in Leicester claimed to be aware of the arrangements but this knowledge appeared to be superficial and was not elaborated on, whilst another participant in Stockport later talked about another tier of government (although not in these words) above local councils and its responsibility for Manchester airport but did not articulate whether or not this was the city region.

It followed that no one was aware of who their city or sub-regional representatives were or how to contact them. Some participants suggested that if they had been aware of the sub-region then they might have approached their local council or carried out an internet search to find out more.

In general, participants easily and readily accepted the rationale for city and sub-regions and felt that dealing with issues such as transport planning and the economy at this level made sense. It is possible that at the beginning of discussions about sub-regions, participants were not willing to be overly

critical of the idea of sub-regions given they had little baseline knowledge of them. However, as participants began to consider the idea further and became more confident talking about it, they appeared genuinely convinced of the need for sub-regional arrangements for matters such as transport planning and economic regeneration.

Acceptance or support for sub-regional arrangements was also implied in their opinions of other proposals tested out in the discussions. In the Stockport group, for instance, there had been some talk about how the buses across the Greater Manchester region should be better coordinated, as they are currently perceived to offer a patchy service.

6.2.2 Views on accessibility and accountability

Participants did not spontaneously express any concerns about their lack of awareness about their city or sub-region. It seemed that they needed time to process and reflect on this new information.

When probed on this issue, a number of participants tended to apply their somewhat negative views on the perceived inability of local government to keep residents informed on the sub-regions. Participants felt that they should know more about the decisions and actions the city or sub-region is taking on their behalf, particularly actions that directly affected their local area or themselves personally, and especially in view of the types of issues for which the sub-region is responsible.

Nevertheless, initially, most participants appeared happy for the sub-regions to simply keep them informed of the work they are doing and no-one questioned whether the structure of current arrangements are accountable enough or whether they should be more directly involved with the sub-regions.

Very few participants were concerned about the ability of their local councillors to be able to do an effective job of representing residents at both a local authority and sub-regional level. Prior to discussing possible changes to arrangements, it appeared that most participants were happy with the status quo:

We voted them [local councillors] in, so they are, they're accountable

Female, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

If people in charge are doing things, you want to have an input, but you can't be putting restrictions on all the time, can you? They're not going to get all the jobs done if they've got to, they're forever going back, going back and going back. At some point you've got to have some confidence in that they're going to be doing it for the best of you, aren't you?

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Stockport

When asked directly to consider whether there were any disadvantages with the status quo, very few participants gave spontaneous examples. On considering the advantages and disadvantages, however, participants quickly moved to a position where they saw many problems with the current system as they understood it (discussed in more detail in the next section). A principal concern was for councillors having vested interests in a local authority area but having to consider the region's best interests at the same time.

Are you not going to get some people for one region, pushing it a way that they want it to go?

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Stockport

6.3 Creating accountable sub-regional structures

Following the initial discussion on awareness of city and sub-regions and the accountability of current arrangements, participants were then asked to take part in an exercise which would help them to consider which, if any, alternative sub-regional governance structures they think would be preferable in terms of accountability. They were given four options to choose from (shown as embedded images, displayed below):

1) City region leader

2) An elected Mayor

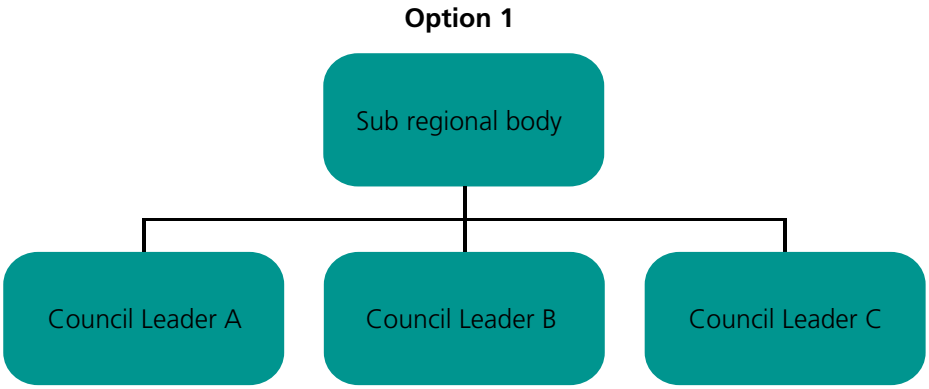
3) An elected Mayor and assembly

4) Something else (including status quo)

Moderators spent some time explaining the different structures and framed them in the context of other case study examples such as the Greater London Authority for the Mayor and Assembly. Participants were then asked to indicate which option they preferred and explain why. They were then given the chance to change their preference after hearing what others felt.

There was very little consensus across the groups as to which option was the most preferred; although, as a whole, more participants tended to support a system where the electorate had an opportunity to vote directly for a visible leader. Participants' responses to the options are considered below in more detail.

6.3.1 Reactions to option 1 – City region leader



Where there was support for the city region leader option, this usually stemmed from a concern to not introduce too many tiers of elected government as this could cause confusion for the electorate. This appeared to be the simplest of the options and possibly least resource intensive and, for participants living in Dartford and Leicester in particular, presented a better use of valuable resources.

It's all about resources [...]. Apparently the country's in debt so why waste money on new things, right? Why waste money when you can do the same thing with half the cost? Why?

Male, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

In addition to the view that more elections were an unnecessary waste of resources, participants – again in Leicester and Dartford – were not convinced that another tier of elected representatives was necessary or that there was sufficient additional work for them to do.

Do we really need two lots of people doing the same job?

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

In Stockport, the main reason that two participants preferred this option was more positive. They felt it would be effective as it would include existing councillors who represent each local area, with direction from a leader drawn from and voted in by the representative group of sub-regional councillors.

I just think it's better because you've got somebody from each [area], from every sort of place and then one [leader] there regionally. You're still getting that input… we're electing them from this level anyway, so those that are there [at regional level]...have been elected. So for them to vote amongst themselves, I'm fine with that, yeah.

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Stockport

However, across the groups, most participants did not support this option: they felt that councillors would find it too difficult to decide on the leader or would be biased towards their own local authority area at the expense of the interests of the region as a whole.

6.3.2 Reactions to option 2 – Directly elected mayor

Option 2

Citizens across the sub-region elect a mayor who oversees the partnership members

Across the groups, participants who supported the directly elected mayor option tended to agree on the reasons why. They liked the idea that the mayor would be independent from any single local area and therefore would not be biased and would be able to more easily consider the interests of the region. They felt that everyone would find it easy to identify who is responsible for the decisions made at this level of government, improving accountability.

Once you've elected this man, he's in charge of the whole sub-region… Doesn't matter whether Dartford gets something more than Medway gets or Gravesham gets, because he's only concerned about the whole area.

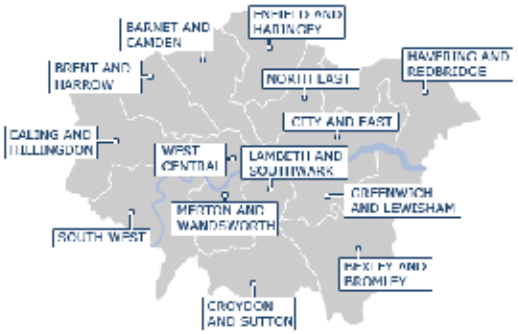
Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

So it's one person that's held accountable rather than one person saying it was him and the other person saying it was him, just going round and round in circles.

Male, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

6.3.3 Reactions to option 3 – Directly elected mayor and sub-regional assembly

Option 3



Citizens across the sub-region elect
– **a new sub-regional body, and**
– **a new mayor** to lead it

Many of the same arguments to justify support for the directly elected mayor option were used in favour of this more involved option that includes the election of an assembly. However, those who favoured this option also felt it was important to have more accountability and checks and balances through the assembly.

The younger group in Leicester felt that this system appealed as it would attract new people into decision-making – new people who they expected to be more motivated and more passionate about regional issues than existing local authority councillors.

However, there was some strong feeling among a few participants in the groups that this system caused confusion for the electorate, was unnecessarily complex and wasteful.

You will create another authority in the area, and it will be totally separate from the county council, totally separate from the borough councils, and you're now looking at yet another elected authority, as opposed to the authorities working together under a leader. And we don't need another authority.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

6.3.4 Alternative suggestions

In two of the three groups (following piloting) we added an explicit fourth option – do something else and/or maintain the status quo. Only one participant thought this was the best option and this was because they wanted to maintain the status quo. Supporting this option seemed to tie in with participants' concern about the cost of making changes and their

previous lack of concern before the group discussion about the accountability of sub-regional arrangements.

Where it says something else, I haven't got something else to put in its place but I don't see why it's got to change anyway because we've got Kent County Council, then you've got the individual boroughs and we're having enough trouble now getting everything sorted out without complicating it with all these.

Female, 55+, C2DE, Dartford

It is worth noting here that concerns over how a new system would be financed surfaced at the end of discussions in the Stockport group, which caused concern upon reflection for many participants, and raised questions on whether this issue is a priority to address at the current time.

7. Relationship between central and local government

7.1 Chapter summary

This chapter looks at participants' views on the relationship between central and local government, reflecting discussions in Leicester, London and Corby. Below is a summary of findings:

- most participants said they were unsure of the respective roles of central and local government, and several admitted that this was not something they often thought about
- many participants seemed to conceptualise the central-local government relationship in terms of the limitations that councils are perceived to be placed under as a result of central direction. Examples of this tended to focus on financial dependency and targets
- there was widespread agreement that councils should have the authority to meet the needs of their residents, and are probably best placed to do this. However, people were also happy for central government to step in if councils were seen to be abusing their powers. There was some tension between participants' recognition that different areas have different needs and their concern about postcode lotteries or too much differentiation between councils
- people were happy with the idea of a formal agreement but were dubious about how much difference it would make and found it difficult to suggest the types of principle it should include
- participants found it difficult to suggest how such an agreement should be policed, though most liked the idea of an independent body, such as an ombudsman

7.2 Awareness of central-local government relationship

7.2.1 General awareness of central and local government relationship

People's level of knowledge about central-local government relations was mixed. Whilst a very few individuals appeared fairly knowledgeable about the way the two layers worked together, most participants were, on the whole, unsure of the respective roles of central and local government, and several admitted that this was not something they often thought about.

I think there's a general lack of understanding by all of us, of who does what.

Male, Aged 35-54, ABC1, Leicester

When asked to discuss their knowledge of central and local government in more detail, those participants who did feel able to respond largely focused on the limitations that councils are perceived to be placed under as a result of central direction. In some groups, the relationship between central and local government was also brought up, unprompted, in the context of a wider discussion about council powers, with several people seeing the restrictions that central government places on local authorities as an example of councils having too little power.

I just imagine the council's hands are tied like a lot of other people. What they'd like to do and what the Government allow them to do.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

7.2.2 Perceived instances of central involvement in local affairs

When asked to give examples of central government involvement in local affairs, most participants spontaneously tended to focus on finances (e.g. council tax capping or councils having to rely on or look to central governments for their budgets or resources). Some believed this involvement results in local government not necessarily having the funds it needs to respond to resident priorities. The other perceived instances were related to centrally set targets (for example, the issue of recycling targets and regulations around waste collection came up in both Leicester and Dartford). These were perceived to be set centrally but impacting on local service delivery (e.g. because recycling targets were perceived to be the cause of the reduced number of refuse collections in Leicester).

Outside of these issues, there was limited awareness of instances in which central direction had limited a local authority's ability to act. However, when prompted, a few individual participants did suggest examples of this kind of central direction – for example, mention of schools being taken into 'special measures', a suggestion in Dartford that the Human Rights Act was preventing the council from taking action around gypsy/travelling communities, and reference to the decision to grant permission for the extension of Heathrow against the wishes of the local authority. However, many other participants were unable to suggest examples of central government involvement in local affairs.

7.3 Attitudes to central-local government relationship

7.3.1 Striking a balance – attitudes to central direction and local control

In general, participants were largely happy for local authorities to act as they see fit (but within the law) to meet local needs, and several voiced the idea

that councils' knowledge of the needs of a local area puts them in a better position than central government to do this. Therefore, councils should have the authority to take action to meet those needs autonomously.

To be honest they know this town, they are councillors from round here, they know Corby, they know what Corby needs, what would help Corby, so I don't see why they should have to keep running to Parliament to say we're going to open ten new shops and put a new shopping centre in.

Female, Aged 35-54, C2DE, Corby

This also tied in with recognition that different parts of the country will have different needs and that a 'one size fits all' approach would, therefore, not be the most effective.

However, there was also recognition among most participants that this authority could not be completely unfettered, and that central government should be able to direct local councils if they appeared to abuse their powers. Indeed, participants recognised that the concepts of protecting local councils from undue central direction and giving central government the power to step in if necessary are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

If it's more local you're going to get more done, so it's good for them to have more power but it needs to be scrutinised and they need to be accountable to someone about this power.

Male, Aged 18-34, Asian, Mixed, Leicester

7.3.2 Caveats and concerns

Beyond the recognition that some central involvement many be necessary in cases where local councils appeared to abuse their powers, some participants agreed with the idea that central government might be better placed to take a national view of an issue, and that this might sometimes necessitate overriding local wishes – the case study example of the Kings Cross planning application was highlighted by some participants as a legitimate case of government interest. There was, though, widespread agreement that central government should only get involved in issues that really were of national importance, and should not be directing every minor local decision.

However, participants voiced particular concerns about the idea of national priorities conflicting with local wishes. There was also a concern that residents' confidence in their local authority might be undermined if central government is seen to overrule them on an issue of importance to local people.

It should also be recognised that there were inconsistencies in the attitudes of some participants. For example, some participants who liked the idea of local control also spoke of their concerns of the dangers of a 'postcode lottery'.

I think the difficulty […] is you could live in a town where they pump all of their money into [hospitals] so […] you could have a heart attack and have the best treatment ever, and then you could live in another town where the hospital's slightly run down, but have a fantastic police force[...]. So somebody's got to run that.

Male, Aged 35-54, ABC1, Leicester

Similarly, there were a few participants who, although in principle liked the idea of local councils making local decisions, were also uncomfortable with the idea of there being significant variations between public services in different areas. This also came through in some of the discussions about climate change (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), with some participants fearing that areas with more restrictive environmental policies imposed by their council might have difficulty in attracting new residents or businesses.

I think all the councils should have all the same legislation, and it's the same for every council. Because each council at the moment, it's their own little island, and they seem to be putting in what they want to put in. So if you go to another council at, say, Basildon, it's completely different, the housing's different there, the way of applying for a house is different.

Male, Aged 55+, C2DE, Dartford

7.4 Formal agreement

7.4.1 Attitudes to a formal agreement

In general, most participants were happy with the idea of a formal agreement setting out the respective roles of central and local government and the principles of their relationship. There were a few concerns (for example, that such an agreement would either prove too restrictive or would be meaningless, as central government would be able to override it should it want to); but, on the whole, participants were able to see how a formal agreement might be useful both for citizens and for the bodies themselves. However, there was little sense that such an agreement was something which participants felt was fundamentally important in terms of local authorities being better able to deliver outcomes locally.

Most participants had difficulty spontaneously suggesting the types of principle which should be included in the agreement. However, when prompted, they had few concerns about the inclusion of ideas such as local independence, councils acting openly and fairly, and councils keeping people informed. There was, though, a sense in one group that the principles alone would provide inadequate steer and that more detail would be required to describe how the principles would be monitored and followed through in practice.

7.4.2 Policing the agreement – organisations and structure

Although participants understood the need to police the agreement, many found it difficult to suggest how that would work in practice. Indeed, most participants were unable to spontaneously suggest an effective way of policing such an agreement.

When asked about the idea of using the courts to enforce the agreements, some people liked the idea (and there was one suggestion that the principles themselves should be enshrined in legislation) but others were concerned that this would take up excessive time and resources, and should certainly only be used as a 'last resort'. When prompted, most broadly supported the idea of an independent body such as an ombudsman or 'watchdog'.

An independent, somebody that was independent from local government and the central government so that you could get a fair opinion to what's happened.

Male, Aged 18-34, ABC1, Corby

7.4.3 Policing the agreement – sanctions and penalties

Participants found it difficult to suggest the type of sanctions which such a body could impose. In the case of councils' not adhering to the agreement, possible penalties included the imposition of fines, placing councils in 'special measures' or imposing a period of monitoring.

However, some of these suggestions were found to be problematic. For instance, fines would only serve to punish residents and tax payers, who would otherwise have benefited from monies being spent on local matters. As one person put it: *"It's like fining yourself."*

Furthermore, people found it particularly hard to think of suitable penalties for central government aside from using the existing structures of the political system – for example, relying on different political parties to police each other or on voting them out at the ballot box.

8. Conclusions

Very few of the ninety or so participants involved in this research had previously considered the issue of council powers in any depth and few knew enough to comment on whether local councils have the ability to act in local communities' best interests.

Judging from the initial, non-deliberated, views of the participants about the role of councils and their ability to make a difference, it would seem that there is no public clamour for extended powers. Indeed, there was a consistent lack of understanding among the participants of what councils can and cannot do to ensure the well-being of their local areas. Similarly, very few people had previously worried about whether local councils are subject to too much central government direction.

Typical views of local government's ability to use powers for the good of the community revealed a lack of confidence in councillors to act decisively and effectively, based largely on direct experience or observation of poor public service delivery. There was a widespread perception that councils find it difficult to get the basics in service delivery right and, therefore, it may be a stretch to imagine them using extended powers differently.

Related to this was a widespread view that councillors lack real engagement with the public and, therefore, it would be hard to imagine that extended powers could be used effectively for community benefit if elected members do not know what the public feel are local priorities.

The issue of funding was also raised in this context. Some participants offered the opinion that with extended powers there must also follow monies so that councils can actually put their powers into practice. For example, the debates around whether councils should be able to retrofit whole streets or private housing in order to tackle climate change through energy efficiency, was an issue of affordability for some.

On a more positive note, councils are seen as best placed to make local decisions (when compared to central government) given that locally elected councillors are more likely than the 'Londoners' based in Whitehall to know what concerns local people. Plus, they live and work in the patch, and have a vested interest in making the area better.

Furthermore, there was broad support for the ideas proposed in the consultation if it meant that councils are more able to fulfil their leadership role on important local matters, and if it helped them to get the basics right. As such, extending the range of organisations that should assist with scrutiny was seen as non-contentious as it would only serve to help councils fulfil this leadership role. However, agreeing who should be duty-bound to

participate in scrutiny and whether a named list should exist caused some disagreement.

People liked the idea of councils needing to demonstrate they have the support of local people for a particular course of action or for the use of specific powers, although there was some disagreement on how this can be practically achieved without becoming bureaucratic and resource-intensive. They also agreed that it is sensible for central government to be able to direct local government if it consistently and seriously under-performs, or appears to abuse its powers. The idea of a formal agreement setting out the respective roles of central and local government and the principles of their relationship was seen to be a useful reference for all concerned, including members of the public.

The following comment from a young black participant in London (talking about the example of a council running a district heating scheme) sums up well the general response to the proposals in *Strengthening Local Democracy* – i.e. that the idea of extending powers is fine in principle given that councillors are elected to act on behalf of local communities, but whether the power will be used effectively is debatable.

To be honest, I think if the council gives us more reason to trust them, if they show that they are able to handle such power then I wouldn't have a problem… because we will know we've got a council that can handle this, and so we will know that everything will be OK.

Appendix 1

Comparison of the responses on climate change in the Ipsos MORI research on the CLG *Strengthening Local Democracy* Consultation and the *Big Energy Shift*[5]

At first glance, the findings of this focus group report on the *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation appear at odds with the *Big Energy Shift* (BES), deliberative research conducted by Ipsos MORI recently on behalf of DECC, for which a key finding was:

This research reveals ***huge potential for people to change their energy behaviour****. The majority of people across the Forums were* ***overwhelmingly positive*** *about improving the energy efficiency of their homes and about the low carbon and renewable energy technologies in principle. They would like to see change and are impressed and shocked by the scale of the problem.*

However, the two pieces of research are not necessarily contradictory. In the BES events, participants attended two or three day-long events and also participated in a variety of tasks designed to educate and inform about energy use. During this time they were exposed to all the evidence for the need to address issues of energy security and the actions that could be taken, as well as the potential benefits to them as individuals. This gives a 'deliberated' view – informing DECC of how people would feel about the issues if they had all the information they needed.

In contrast, the discussion groups held for *Strengthening Local Democracy* (SLD) discussed climate change as an example of how local government might develop its role, not as a topic to be fully explored in its own right. Therefore, participants spent only thirty minutes on these issues and the findings serve mainly to give a sense of where the public currently stands in general terms. Without significantly more information they are not as open to change as participants in the BES workshops were, and would not be expected to be. One of the key findings from the BES work was that government needs to take four steps, and the first of these is to explain *why* a shift is needed. Although some people in the SLD groups could buy in to this need, few had the sense of urgency seen after debate in the BES.

It should also be noted that, in relation to the issue of urgency, the BES events focused on behaviour change based on the possibility of lower energy security and high energy costs in the future. The options suggested to participants were offered as 'low carbon' solutions, but were essentially seen as being beneficial to the individual in the long run because of the possible scarcity of carbon fuels. In contrast, the groups for SLD focused on climate

5 http://www.big-briefs.com/big_energy_shift/Big_Energy_Shift_Final_Report_300609.pdf

change. While climate change is a crucial issue, it may not appear as tangible and as likely to affect people's lives in a way that higher energy costs might.

Step two identified in BES workshops was to set concrete goals – this was not discussed in the SLD groups. Step three was to provide information and advice. This step received most support in the SLD groups and most participants felt this sounded like an appropriate role for government to take. The final step, according to BES participants, was ensuring systems are in place to help with the financial burdens: intentionally, the discussions in the groups for SLD were shaped to reduce conversations about how changes might be funded, and one key concern was that they would be forced to change their own homes without financial support.

The lack of control issue raised in the SLD groups was also apparent in the BES work – a key barrier to take-up was identified as *"Worries about **disruption** to the aesthetics of the house and everyday life, both in installation and living with the new technology."* Later the report goes on to say *"A theme across all the research is that householders strongly want control over what happens in their own homes. They are reluctant to have their home life altered or interfered with."* The BES participants were exposed to a number of the options available (both the technology itself, presented in situ, and potential financing options) and were able to learn more about them, and spend more time considering the pros and cons of each, consequently giving them a better understanding of the options available; some of which received more support than others. In the SLD groups they had a much shorter time to consider particular options and did not have a full account of options for the technology itself or how it might be funded – again prompting the response of the public prior to absorbing all the relevant information (i.e. the majority of the public at present).

On the role of local government, the SLD groups suggest that local government is not wholly to be trusted to deliver responses to climate change. Again, the BES sets this in a helpful broader context: *"When participants do imagine a national shared idea, they understand the role of local government in delivery, much more clearly. Then, local government is seen as more trustworthy and able to deliver. In the absence of a national context, householders tend to think of local government as, potentially, serving its own ends and running inefficiently and unfairly (giving incentives and benefits to the wrong people, for instance)".*

In summary, although participants in the SLD groups were apparently more negative about some of the options presented, in fact this reflects the findings of the BES. Although many people have heard of climate change, the link between the news stories and the need for local action is not always made. Equally, even when it is made, some are reluctant to take personal responsibility for a global problem until they can link it to personal benefits (e.g. reduced utility bills) or, as in the case of BES, personal risks of inaction (i.e. risk of future security of carbon fuels and potential for higher fuel prices). The SLD research supports the need for further education of the

wider public, before they are willing to participate in the step-change required to meet our international targets and obligations.

The positive message from BES (where participants had 2-3 days to consider the issues fully) is that the right messages do exist, but that they will take time to impart (though not necessarily in the form of 2-3 days of intensive effort) and are likely to be about personal financial impact (i.e. in the future the cost of carbon-based energy could increase significantly) rather than climate change (which people find hard to relate to their personal lives).

Appendix 2 – Research instruments

Discussion Guide

Strengthening Local Democracy (CLG)

Discussion Guide (2 hours)

FINAL VERSION: 8 September 2009 (post pilot)

This discussion guide is only seen by the discussion moderator. It is not a script. It is a tool to guide discussion and elicit relevant opinions from those participants in the group. Therefore not all the probes will be used in every group.

Not all of the question modules below will be asked in every group discussion as we are taking a modular approach to the research.

Core questions are indicated in yellow.

Objectives:

- To gather opinions from the general public on a range of issues and proposals outlined in a current Government consultation called *Strengthening Local Democracy*. This research will inform the Government's response to the consultation later in the year.

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
1. Welcome and introductions **Welcome** • Introduce self, Ipsos MORI, and explain the aim of the discussion, and its role in the wider study, i.e. one of 10 discussions which aim to gather opinions from the general public on a range of issues and proposals outlined in a current Government consultation *Strengthening Local Democracy*. The discussion is about how councils can be better equipped to act on behalf of local people. The proposals are very specific and we need to make sure that we focus on getting feedback on them to inform this consultation – therefore, please don't take it personally if the moderator asks you to move on – we have a lot to get through tonight.	The welcome serves to orientate respondents and put them at ease. It also lays down the 'rules' of the discussion including those we are required to tell them about under MRS Code of Conduct and DPA guidelines.	**15mins**
• *NOTE TO MODERATOR Because the consultation is very specific, we will need to keep bringing people back to the actual proposals if they veer off into related territory such as quality of councillors, what they get for council tax and local council performance. More detail on this later.*	The introduction serves to 'warm up' respondents, helps to establish the group dynamic and gives them a chance to start talking about the issues in a fun and non-threatening way.	
• Housekeeping: timing, mobiles, toilets, fire exits		
• Gain permission to record workshop (start audio recording/in London remind them we may be observed by Sec of State. Explain anonymity, confidentiality issues i.e. that comments will not be attributed to them personally, all personal details are confidential, and persons will not be re-contacted.	Take long piece of string and put across the room.	
Introductions • First names, introducing the group to each other		
Warm-up exercise • I am going to ask you two questions. If your answer is you know nothing then stand at the end nearest me. Those of you who know a lot, stand at the other end. And those who know something, stand somewhere in between. • Q1 Apart from providing services such as bin collection, street cleaning and so on, how informed are you about what else councils do?		

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
• Comment on the distribution. Ask at least **two people** at different points on the line why they are standing where they are. • Q2 In your area, do you think your council has the ability and power to make a real difference to the quality of life? • Comment on the distribution. Ask at least **two different people** at different points in the line why they are standing where they are.		
2. Background to the consultation and general powers Explain that we are here to talk about whether councils have the powers they need to deliver on local priorities. In order to do this, we needed to find out what people know about the role councils have in the local area. Refer to single A4 **pre-task** sheet and hand out fuller version of it **(Info card 1)** and read it out. *NOTE TO MODERATOR: in this section prompt with ideas from other groups (e.g. "in a group I did yesterday someone suggested…) if participants struggle to think of examples of councils having/not having power* • What, if anything, on this card surprises people? • What impression do you have of councils in terms of their power to make things happen? Why? Hand out Info card 2 and read it out. • To what extent do councils have enough power to get things done that matter to you? • How acceptable is it for councils to use such powers to tackle issues identified as a priority for the local area? • To what extent are you aware of your local council doing something to tackle priority issues which required some flexibility of their powers? • What do you think restricts councils' ability to make a difference locally (please give examples of issues that have not been tackled)? • What other issues (if any) do you think the council should have greater control of? Why is that?	**Notes** This section will uncover awareness/knowledge of powers and initial thoughts on the powers of local government. Hand out Info card 1 N.B. We are talking about enabling councils and councillors to act as a collective body, through proper systems and processes which we describe in more detail (e.g. scrutiny), not individual power to do what they like Test principle that Council has general authority to act. Explore perceived barriers and obstacles to using existing powers. Explore whether issues of interest are broader than current scope	**20mins**

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
• Are councils' existing powers enough for them to tackle priority issues, or do they need extra authority to act in the interests of local people? Why do you say that? • How do you feel about the idea that greater powers are only given to councils that can demonstrate local support for a particular course of action to solve a local problem? • Why would this be more or less desirable as a pre-condition to granting more powers?		
3. Using climate change as a detailed example **READ OUT** **Let's turn to the specific problem of environmental protection and climate change so we can get into more detail about just how far you think councils' powers can be extended to tackle a serious problem.** **The potential costs of climate change are huge and we are feeling the effects of it now in everyday life (flooding, extreme temperatures, and drought). Almost all councils have agreed to tough targets for reducing harmful carbon emissions that cause temperature rises.** **This is because together, <u>through local effort, the Government has pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 34% by 2020</u>. Tonight we are going to focus on how to achieve this reduction (it is not a negotiable figure so we have to find the most acceptable way to achieve it).** **The kinds of things councils need to do is reduce the amount of carbon emissions from local homes. These are produced when we use up electricity and gas to heat our homes and heat water.** **Councils already are doing things to reduce carbon emissions and here is a very general list of things they can do. We have not included the specific names of grants and initiatives in the list as it would be too long.**	**Ask in London, Corby, Huntingdonshire only** Fact: Domestic energy use accounts for 13% of UK green house gas emissions Hand out Info card 3	**40mins (take 5 minutes from Scrutiny)**

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
Read out Info card 3 • To what extent are you aware of your local council doing things to tackle environmental issues such as climate change? • What more do you think councils can do to ensure all types of homes and communities are doing their bit, not just the vulnerable/those in social housing? • What do you think prevents councils' ability to ensure all types of homes and communities are doing their bit? **Let's do a quick exercise to help us understand the current situation and to help us think about whether extending powers is a desirable solution.** **READ OUT Think of a typical street that has a mix of homes, some council homes, some housing association and some private homes (rented or owner-occupied). Many of these homes are old and are not energy efficient. The same applies to the shops in the street and the school that was built about 50 years ago. Thinking about our discussion about powers, what things should the council be able to do in order to make the buildings more energy efficient? There are four basic options to consider as part of this quick exercise. Read out options for exercise 1.** • Take a sticky dot and indicate which option you think comes nearest to what you think is the most appropriate response. • Why did people choose… (go through options A to D)? Why is one option acceptable but another may not? • What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option? If you were the council which one would you pick and why? How do you think the public would react if that was chosen?	Demonstrate exercise 1 If group get pre-occupied with the cost aspect of this example, please emphasise that we are really here to talk about the concept of extending powers to tackle a large problem locally. In principle, are councils able to do enough? The most extreme option in the retrofit exercise disperses costs across whole market so has equitable impact and minimal impact on the poorest. Also the risk is that if energy efficiency measures are not sought then eventual costs for us all (in terms of energy price increases) and carbon emissions will be much higher. Demonstrate exercise 2	

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
As we just discussed, councils have a part to play in reducing green house gas emissions and are likely to consider renewable energy sources as part of this. **Renewable energy is energy generated from natural resources – such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides and geothermal heat – which are renewable (naturally replenished).** **Your local council may decide that it wants to promote renewable energy as part of its future plans. Show options for exercise 2. This could involve:** • Setting requirements for new homes to get their energy from renewables (e.g. generating their own electricity through solar panels or having to source heating from renewable sources such as woodchips) • introducing district heating schemes for existing homes rather than homes having their own boilers • a council setting up its own wind turbine scheme to generate renewable electricity to power local buildings or to sell back to the grid • councils agreeing to big wind farm schemes. – Put a red sticky dot on the ideas you think are a bad idea and a green sticky dot on those you think are a good idea – Moderator to ask people about the relative popularity of all options – why is that least popular, and the one with the most green dots – why is it most popular? Any disagreements? – Are these the sort of things you would expect your council to be doing in order to meet climate change targets? Why/why not?	Re (7) LAs don't normally have ready access to energy funds, and would like to be able to control more of this money for expenditure on things like large refurb programmes	

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
These exercises were just a couple of examples of what a council can do to tackle climate change but there are others. They were necessarily extreme to help make a point about the type of powers councils might have to get in order to make a difference. • What more should councils do on behalf of the community which goes beyond what they are currently allowed to do in order to tackle climate change. Why do you say that? If time allows, prompt with: 1. Energy generation (partly covered already with district heating systems and renewable energy sources) 2. Local transport (discouraging private car use and encouraging use of public transport/walking/ cycling) 3. Planning (being stricter on granting non-energy efficient planning applications, promoting sites for local energy generation) 4. Leading/inspiring behaviour change (providing incentives and encouragement for people to be environmentally responsible e.g. switching thermostat down, not filling kettle full) 5. Working with community groups/third sector (working with and funding these groups to do more educational work and provide other services) 6. Large "adaption" agenda (ie. Extra flooding measures in vulnerable areas) 7. Coordinating funding streams on local energy and refurb (by controlling local energy generation and large scale refurb schemes).		

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
4. Using Scrutiny as a detailed example Let's turn to a specific function that councils have, called Scrutiny Committees. Read out **Info card 4.** • What, if anything, on this card surprises people? • To what extent were you aware of your local council scrutiny function? • Before coming to the discussion, we asked you think about the kinds of local issues you would like councillors to look into. What did you come up with and why? **Councils tend to choose subjects that reflect their stated local priorities (found in their Local Area Agreement/Community Strategy). One reason is because the current law states that a number of organisations have to co-operate with the council's scrutiny function if it is about a local priority. These are listed in <u>INFO CARD 5</u>.** **Sometimes a topic comes up which has previously not been a priority. For example, In South Cambridgeshire the council wanted to look at a housing development and invited a number of organisations to provide information (<u>INFO CARD 6a</u>).** **Luckily, organisations such as the county council and the water company volunteered to help and benefitted from it but they were not obliged to.** • To what extent do you think that is right to limit the duty to cooperate with scrutiny to the organisations in info card 5? Why do you say that? PROBE Water companies and similar companies are not included – how much does that matter (if at all) • And who is in favour of expanding the range of bodies that need to co-operate, to include orgs like water companies? Why? • Which local public services do you think could benefit from coming under the local authority scrutiny from councils?	**Ask in all focus groups** This section will uncover awareness/knowledge of scrutiny Hand out Info card 4 Glean if some are outside council control Hand out Info card 5 (I added Police as missing from Helen's list) Read out Info card 6a if more information required. If needs be, you can also use infocard 6b which draws in the Worthing Rail example. But use Infocard 6a first.	**40mins (Less 5 mins if climate change module asked first)**

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
• And the scope of subjects for scrutiny – should Councils feel free to extend this to anything residents feel need looking at, rather than their stated priorities? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of doing this? • In the example we showed, all recommendations have been accepted by the county and the district councils involved and welcomed by all others. How do you feel about an obligation for bodies to respond to recommendations (not necessarily accept them)? • And how can local people become more involved with or influence scrutiny committees? If necessary prompt with: • Citizens as expert advisers to committees – Citizens giving evidence – By suggesting topics – How else? – Would you personally be interested in any of these options?		
5. Sub-regional accountability **READ OUT** **There are a number of important issues that many local councils find it difficult to tackle because they need managing at a wider regional level. Local transport planning and attracting businesses and industry to the area are two examples of issues that may be best done at a sub-regional level. Refer to Info card 7.** • To what extent are you aware of your local council being part of a wider city region or sub-region to tackle regional issues? Let's look at a real example – read **Info card 8** (Leeds MAA) • Now you know these regional partnerships exist, would you know how to find out what these regional partnerships do and if they are doing a good job at developing the region's economy? Does it matter to you?	**Ask in Manchester, North Kent and Leicester only** Hand out Info card 7 Hand out Info card 8a and if needs be card 8b	**35mins**

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
• And would you know how to find out how they make decisions? Does it matter to you? • As info card 7 states, different partnerships have different decision-making and governing processes. In some areas they have a joint governing board made up of the Leaders of the different member councils and they oversee what the partnership does. • Is this sufficient reassurance that the people in charge are accountable to local people? (IF REQUIRED – remind people that their council, ,and council leader are elected) • For example, what if things go wrong and attempts to improve transport are not very successful. How would you complain and would you expect an identifiable person to be answerable? Who? Again, does it matter? **We're now going to discuss three options for how the partnerships between local councils could be structured:** **1. Establishing 'city-region leader' – whereby existing sub-regional partnerships could elect, from among their members, a single leader who would be a figurehead for the partnership** **2. Establishing mayors for city- and sub-regions directly elected by the population who works with members representing each council** **3. Establishing a combination of a directly elected mayor and directly elected sub-regional scrutiny body – this is similar to the model of the mayor and assembly established in London** **4. Something else – could be either your own idea of how it could work or maintain the current system**	*NOTE TO MODERATOR: IT IS WORTH CONSIDERING ASKING PEOPLE TO MOVE AROUND THE ROOM TO SHOW WHICH IDEA THEY PREFER. CAN STICK UP OPTIONS ON THE WALL.*	

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
PROBE • ASK THOSE STANDING BY CITY REGION LEADER: What did you think about establishing 'city-region leaders' – whereby existing sub-regional partnerships could elect, from among their members, a single leader who would be a figurehead for the partnership? What are the advantages and disadvantages? • Why do you say that? • ASK THOSE STANDING BY MAYOR ONLY OPTION: Or how about mayors for city- and sub-regions directly elected by the population who works with members representing each council? Why do you say that? • ASK THOSE STANDING BY COMBINATION OPTION. Or a combination of a directly elected mayor and directly elected sub-regional scrutiny body – this is similar to the model of the mayor and assembly established in London. *ASK IF ANYONE WANTS TO MOVE OPTIONS AND WHY. TRY TO DELIBERATE BASED ON VIEWS EXPRESSED* • What would be the best means of achieving more direct democratic accountability at the sub-regional level? (of the ideas above or new ideas) • Finally, thinking back to our conversation about the local scrutiny function, how useful would it be for the activity of sub-regional partnerships to be required to provide information to scrutiny committees and to consider their recommendations on sub-regional matters?		

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
6. The relationship between central and local government To end this discussion, I want to spend half an hour thinking about how we ensure there is clarity around what local councils can do and what central government can do in your local area. • We are going to do a little exercise like the one at the beginning of the discussion with the long string. I am going to ask you two questions. • If your answer is you know nothing then stand at the end nearest me. Those of you who know a lot, stand at the other end. And those who know something, stand somewhere in between. • Q1 As you know, local councillors are elected by residents to sit on councils to make decisions on their behalf. How much do you know about the circumstances in which central government can direct local decisions – for example, when a council service is not performing well. Or when central government is felt to be too prescriptive about how a service is to be delivered in a particular area, not allowing sufficient local flexibility. • Comment on the distribution. Ask **three people** at different points on the line why they are standing where they are. • Another question. Q2 – which of these comments comes closest to what you think: – A) Local councils should be protected from undue central direction – B) Central Government should be able to direct local councils if they appear to abuse their powers or overstep their role • If your answer is A – the council needs protecting, stand next to me. If it is B – central government should be able to direct, the stand away from me. Those of you who think you are somewhere in between, go somewhere in the middle. • Comment on the distribution. Ask **three different people** at different points in the line why they are standing where they are.	**(one Leicester, one London, one Corby group)** Take long piece of string and put across the room. If group require example to understand idea of central direction of local decisions – can say where central govt decides whether to call in planning applications for their decision where planning proposals may cause regional/national controversy, rather than leaving for council decision. Hopefully, we'll get a range of views and it gets a debate going. Do people feel central government needs to ensure minimum standards – please note?	**35mins**

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
• **What problems, if any, are you aware of that your local council has suggested were caused because central direction has stopped them doing something they thought necessary?** At present, the relationship between local councils and central government is governed by a series of informal agreements which are not consolidated into one formal agreement. We want to ask about the proposal to create a more formal agreement that unifies all the agreements and clarifies the respective roles of central and local government in terms of who has ultimate say on local decisions. • **What do you see as the advantages of having a more formal agreement?** Who would benefit most and why? (Check if they think public will benefit). • **What principles should be included? By principles, we mean broad rules of behaviour rather than the detail of how things might work.** • For example, how about the principle of local independence – that decisions that affect a local area (more than others) should be taken within that area and not outside it? • Another example – how about the principle local councils, in return, must act openly and fairly? • Or that local councils must ensure local people are informed about what it does and allows opportunity for local people to challenge local decisions? • What other principles should be included in the agreement? It is also proposed that a formal agreement should outline a process for dealing with any situation where either body overstepped its role.	This concordat is currently signed by ministers on behalf of government and the local government association on behalf of councils. But it is not statutory, rather, it could be described as a series of informal agreements. Test the principle of subsidiary Note the flipside: if people feel central government should be able to set and outline nationally acceptable minimum standards (e.g. re protection of vulnerable children)? Is there tension between opting for 'more local autonomy' but also wanting the government to guarantee that 'postcode lotteries' are kept to a minimum.	

Discussion Area	Notes (not seen by group participants)	Approx Timing
NOTE TO MODERATOR: WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE FEEDBACK IS ON HOW TO POLICE THE PRINCIPLES, NOT ISSUES (I.E. IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING SOMEONE TO COMPLAIN TO IF YOU DON'T LIKE A CENTRAL OR LOCAL GOVT POLICY) – USE SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES ON INFOCARD 9 IF REQUIRED TO HELP PEOPLE TO FOCUS • **How do you think this agreement should be policed?** • PROMPT WITH: How about the idea of the courts being involved? What are the pros and cons of that idea? • PROMPT WITH: Or how about the involvement of an independent organisation to whom you as a citizen can make a complaint which can be investigated judged (i.e. an ombudsman, but perhaps say a watchdog) • What other suggestions do you have? • **Would you as a citizen like to be able to raise a concern if you thought that local councils and/or central government were not acting in the spirit of this agreement?** • **What sort of penalties or system would you put in place to make sure all parties follow the formal agreement?**		
7. Conclusions • Any final points on the topics: a. General powers b. Powers relating to climate change c. Scope of scrutiny d. Accountability of sub-regional partnerships? e. Relationship between local and central government • What else would you like to add that we haven't discussed and you think is relevant? **THANK AND CLOSE DISCUSSION**	Warming down the discussion, allowing people to bring up any issues or topics that were not relevant in the main discussion	**10mins**

Infocards

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Info card 1: The role of Councils

- Councils are where democracy happens at a local level
- Residents elect councillors to sit on local councils to act on their behalf
- Councils are responsible for many services
- Councillors do not deliver services themselves (they are not paid workers) but they make strategic decisions about the local area e.g. what the priority problems are and what most needs attention
- They look in to what the council and some other local services are doing to make the local area better e.g. protecting the environment
- And they look at how the council spends money.

We will discuss today

Whether there are things you think the council should be able to control or have powers over which they currently do not?

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Info card 2: Council powers

- Councils have a range of powers granted through a series of laws and Acts that enable them to deliver day-to-day services and to protect communities
  - For example, a council can issue "litter clearing notices" requiring businesses to clean up their mess under Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005
- Sometimes unexpected local problems that are not directly related to a council service area or specific law need to be tackled. Councils have a further general power (called power of well-being) to deal with these without needing to seek approval from Parliament… as long as they are not acting illegally and so long as they are acting to improve the well-being of the area
  - For example:
    - To purchase run down/derelict private housing in an estate from private landlords (Wakefield)
    - To employ extra Police and Community Support Officers (Kensington & Chelsea).
- And existing powers to councils in some areas could be strengthened or changed if government believes this is necessary.

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Info card 3: Tackling climate change

- Councils can help council tenants, vulnerable people and those on low incomes to improve their homes, so that they do not use so much energy, through:
  - Giving advice to residents
  - Giving grants for improvements
  - Giving or co-ordinating other support
  - Or making improvements directly (free cavity insulation for over 70s, or fitting solar panels to council housing such as in Kirklees)
  - Making sure newly built homes are energy efficient
- Should councils be able to do more to tackle climate change, and if so, what?

Let's do an interesting exercise with some cards ……

Exercise 1: Street Retrofit

A) Do what they currently do now e.g. offer help to those seeking it out/vulnerable

B) Requireeveryone in council and HA housing to have refurbishment to a high standard of energy efficiency

C) Require private home owners (including landlords) to have refurbishment to a high standard of energy efficiency

D) Enforce whole street refurbishment including schools, shops etc

Exercise 2: Renewables

A) Requirements for **new homes** to get their energy from renewables: (e.g. generating their own electricity through solar panels or having to source heating from renewable sources such as woodchips)

B) Introducing district heating schemes for existing homes (communal heating rather than homes having their own boilers)

C) A council setting up its own wind turbine scheme to generate renewable electricity to power local buildings or to sell back to the grid

D) Councils agreeing to big wind farm schemes

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Info card 4: Scrutiny function of councils

- This is a process in which councillors formally investigate an **issue of local concern** through a committee inquiry
- It is similar to a parliamentary inquiry

Form committee	A committee is formed of councillors (local equivalent of MPs) from a range of parties
Gather information	Council workers (local equivalent of civil servants) provide the committee with relevant information People and organisations with an interest in the issue can submit written or verbal evidence to the committee, some can be required to give information
Make recommendation	At the end of the committee inquiry, the councillors make recommendations to the Council Leadership (the local equivalent of the Cabinet) as well as some other local partners with whom they share targets/formal agreements called LAAs.

- Issues can include many things (usually stated local priorities): How the council spends money, how local services or improvements are delivered, or other priority issues of importance to the community
- Local people can suggest topics for councillors to look in to.

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Info card 5: Partners with a duty to co-operate with scrutiny

- Arts Council of England
- Broads Authority
- District Councils
- Environment Agency
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Health & Safety Executive
- Highways Agency
- Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission
- Home & Communities Agency
- Job Centre Plus
- Joint Waste Authorities & Waste Disposal Authorities
- Learning & Skills Councils
- Local Probation Boards
- Metropolitan County
- Passenger Transport
- Authorities
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
- National Parks Authorities
- Natural England
- Primary Care Trusts, NHS Trusts and & NHS
- Foundation Trusts
- Regional Development Agencies
- Transport for London
- Youth Offending teams

The local police are also subject to council scrutiny, but this is covered in a slightly different way and not part of discussions today

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Info card 6a: Arbury Park Housing example for Scrutiny

- A housing development near Cambridge had caused residents some concerns
- So the District Council set up a scrutiny group to learn what had happened during the development and to inform the planning of future housing developments. It met 17 times over six months.
- In addition to meeting local people as part of the scrutiny group, councillors met a whole range of organisations – some of which were not obliged to co-operate but did so: such as the utilities (gas, electric, and water), transport providers, the county council, health services
- The review has revealed a number of lessons learnt and has made recommendations that should benefit future developments, for example:
  - in the location of primary schools and phased school admissions
  - new design guides
  - effective communication with new residents about nearby GP services
  - closer working at an earlier stage with utility services (energy providers in particular) to improve the construction process.

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Info card 6b: Worthing Rail Scrutiny

- Worthing Borough Council invited Southern Rail and Network Rail to attend a Scrutiny meeting to discuss timetabling issues and services provided by Southern Rail as well as litter/fly tipping issues on and near the tracks. There were also concerns about the closure of a level crossing barrier which caused severe tailbacks in a particular road.
- Southern Rail and Network Rail co-operated and provided useful information on why problems were occurring.
- After the committee had met, it was felt that the litter and trackside fly-tipping problems had improved.
- A 'Quality Rail Partnership' was set up to act as a consultative group involving the rail operators and the local Councils in the wider area to discuss issues of concern at an earlier stage.

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Info card 7: City regions and sub-regions

- A number of councils have come together to form regional partnerships called city-regions or sub-regions. Greater Manchester, Leeds, Leicestershire and North Kent are examples of regional partnerships.
- Councils that make up these partnerships agree with the Government some joint priorities and targets in exchange for more freedom and flexibility to deliver economic growth.
- For example, they will be allowed more flexibility to better integrate housing, transport, planning, regeneration and employment/skills programmes and the funds associated with them.
- Each regional partnership has its own arrangements for decision-making.

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Info card 8a: Leeds City region example

- The Leeds partnership focuses on two priority areas which are limiting the economic prosperity of the city region:
  - Improving transport links and traffic congestion along key commuting routes; and
  - Problems with the labour market, specifically skills gaps in key sectors (financial & business services).
- Benefits of the Partnership's work include:
  - Bringing together the collective funds for local transport development (£40m per annum) across the different council areas from 2011. By agreeing financial freedoms with the Government (DfT) they will be able for the first time to pool Local Transport Plan funding to deliver fully integrated transport schemes and bus priority routes across local authority boundaries.
  - Getting decisions made more quickly - The partnership is working directly with DfT to reduce the significant amount of evidence needed for investment decisions on major transport schemes.They have agreed better ways to bring forward major investments in key regional road and rail schemes such as the Leeds Station Southern Access Scheme.

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Info card 8b: Tyne and Wear sub-region example

- The Tyne and Wear partnership focuses on the key barriers to making the local economy more competitive (e.g. improving transport infrastructure) and getting more people involved in the local economy.
- For example, the partnership between the various councils is looking at innovative ways to improve employment and skills:
  - It has established a new Employment and Skills Board which puts businesses and employers right at the heart of planning approaches to address the structural skills problems faced by both employers and individuals.
  - The partnership is implementing new arrangements for 14-19 education within the City Region, and linking this activity to the wider employment and skills strategy and over-arching economic development agenda.
  - The partnership has put in place a joint plan with Government toget additional national resources that will be earmarked to help local people access jobs and sustain employment.
  - Looking to the future, the Partnership is currently carrying outan Economic Review which will assess the economy across Tyne and Wear City Region (i.e. identify the future industries, jobs, skills, infrastructure and economic opportunities that will exist over the next 20 years, and to identify what role the public, private and third sectors could take to build a more prosperous economy.

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Info card 9: Possible principles which the formal agreement could include

- Local government enables democratic local decision-making
- Local government (councils) is granted powers and duties by parliament to ensure community well-being
- And should have the powers to influence other organisations that impact on local well-being
- Local government should be free to act without unnecessary control from central government unless there is critical or sustained underperformance
- But Local government should act in line with accepted standards of financial management and efficiency
- Local government must be fair and open
- It should ensure people are informed about what it is doing and can influence this.

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OPTIONAL:List of some services provided by unitary and top tier councils

- Adult education classes and evening classes
- Arts and cultural activities
- Car parking
- Children's centres and nurseries
- Children's social services
- Employment services
- Home helps and home care
- Housing services
- Libraries
- Parks and open spaces
- Play service (including adventure playgrounds, holiday schemes, toddlers clubs)
- Primary schools
- Some recycling facilities
- Secondary schools
- Services for older people
- Services for people with disabilities
- Waste and rubbish collection (unitary only)

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OPTIONAL: List of some services provided by lower tier councils

- Arts and cultural activities
- Bus passes for over 60's
- Car parking
- Council tax and Housing Benefits services
- Housing services but not Council housing
- Health protection services such as food safety inspection, noise nuisance and air pollution
- Planning services
- Protect listed buildings
- Public conveniences
- Some recycling facilities
- Street cleaning
- Tidying parks and open spaces
- Waste and rubbish collection

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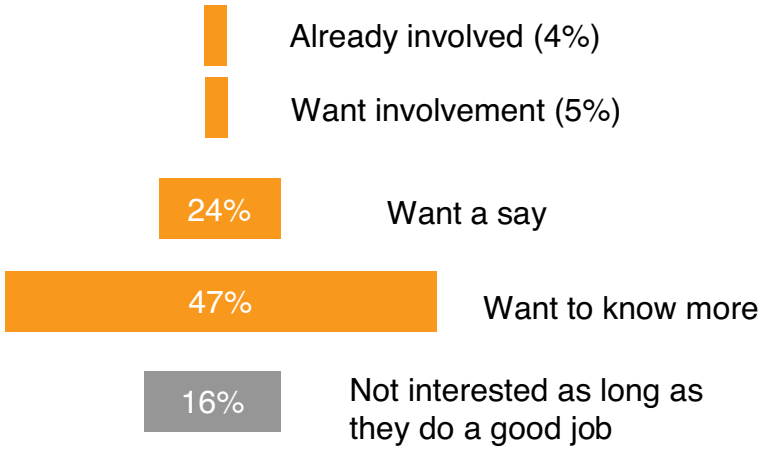
OPTIONAL: Not everyone wants to be involved directly – How public services work together



Base: 1,009 GB adults, 18+. August 2009. Source: Ipsos MORI

Sample recruitment questionnaire

DISCUSSION GROUPS – COMPOSITION:

Group: 9	Date:	Thursday 10 September	
	Time:	6.00-8.00pm	
	Venue:	Booked	
		Please recruit **10 for 8** Mixed gender – at least 4 female and at least 4 male Aged 18-34 (spread of ages) ABC1 and mix of employment status (limit to 1 student) White ethnic background mainly but mix is a bonus Mixed on satisfaction with the council	
	Areas of recruitment:	Anywhere in Corby Borough Council Area	

Group: 10	Date:	Thursday 10 September	
	Time:	8.00-10.00pm	
	Venue:	Booked	
		Please recruit **10 for 8** Mixed gender – at least 4 female and at least 4 male Aged 35-54 (spread of ages) C2DE and mix of employment status White ethnic background mainly but mix is a bonus Mixed on satisfaction with the council	
	Areas of recruitment:	Anywhere in Corby Borough Council Area	

QUOTAS FOR EACH GROUP

(i) AREA: ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE FROM THE CORBY BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

(ii) AGE: PLEASE SEE AGE RANGE FOR EACH GROUP AND GET A SPREAD OF AGES WITHIN EACH BAND

(iii) GENDER: BROAD SPREAD – at least four men and at least four women;

(iv) WORK STATUS: BROAD SPREAD

(v) SOCIAL GRADE: PLEASE SEE RANGE FOR EACH GROUP AND GET A SPREAD OF WITHIN EACH BAND e.g. not all E (on benefits)

Good morning/afternoon/evening, My name is . . . . . from Ipsos MORI, the opinion research company. We are inviting a group of local people together to take part in a discussion about how to improve the way local councils can act in the interests of their communities. This is a piece of important research we are doing for the government (IF ASKED: The specific department is called Communities and Local Government). I wonder if you could help me? This will take place in <VENUE> on <DATE>. The discussion group will last two hours. An audio recording of the discussion will be made for transcription, and the identity of those present will remain confidential. To say thank you for your time and cover any expenses incurred we would like to offer you £40 in cash for attending on the evening.

NB: THE INCENTIVE OFFERED REPRESENTS COMPENSATION FOR THEIR TIME, TRAVEL EXPENSES AND ANY CHILDCARE.

We are looking for particular groups of people, therefore I would like to ask you some questions about yourself. All information collected will be anonymised.

Q1. Would you be interested in taking part?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes	1	continue
No	2	THANK AND close

Q2. **Can I just ask do you live in the area of the Corby Borough Council?**

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes	1	continue
No	2	THANK AND close

Q3. **How long have you lived in this area?**

1 year or more	1	CONTINUE
Less than 1 year	2	THANK AND CLOSE
Refused/Don't know	3	

SHOWCARD A **And how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your Council is running the area?** SINGLE CODE ONLY

Q4.

A	Very satisfied	1	RECRUIT A MIX
B	Fairly satisfied	2	
C	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3	
D	Fairly dissatisfied	4	
E	Very dissatisfied	5	
	Don't know	6	CLOSE

Q5. SHOWCARD B **Which, if any, of the things on this card have you done in the last two or three years?** MULTICODE OK.

	Involved in formal democratic /political activity		
A	Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	1	RECRUIT A MIX OF PEOPLE BUT NO MORE THAN 4 *POLITICALLY ACTIVE PEOPLE* DEFINED AS THOSE WHO HAVE DONE 5+ POLITICAL ACTIVITIES CODES 1-7
B	Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	2	
C	Stood for public office	3	
D	Voted in last local election	4	
E	Urged someone outside my family to vote	5	
F	**Community based activity**		
	Taken an active part in a political campaign	7	
G	Been an officer of an organisation or club	8	
H	Made a speech before an organised group	9	
I	Helped on fund raising drives	0	
J	Written a letter to an editor	X	
	None of these	Y	CONTINUE
	Don't know	1	THANK AND CLOSE

Q6. SHOWCARD C **Do you or any members of your immediate family work in any of the following areas, either in a paid or unpaid capacity? Please read out the letter that applies.** READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

A	Journalism/the media	1	THANK AND CLOSE
B	Advertising	2	
C	Public relations (PR)	3	
D	Market Research	4	
E	A local Council	5	
F	For/as a local Councillor	6	
	No, none of these	7	CONTINUE
	Don't know	8	

Q7. CODE SEX (DO NOT ASK)

Male	1	AIM FOR AT LEAST 4 IN EACH GROUP
Female	2	

Q8. WRITE IN & CODE EXACT AGE

Exact Age ☐☐

18-34	1	GROUP 9
35-54	2	GROUP 10
55+	3	CLOSE

ASK ALL

Q9. SHOWCARD D **Which of the ethnic groups on this card do you consider you belong to? Just read out the letter that applies?** SINGLE CODE ONLY

	White		
A	British	1	WHITE ETHNIC BACKGROUND BUT MIX IS BONUS
B	Irish	2	
C	Any other white background	3	
	Asian or Asian British		
D	Indian	4	
E	Pakistani	5	
F	Bangladeshi	6	
G	Any other Asian background	7	
	Black or Black British		
H	Caribbean	8	
I	African	9	
J	Any other Black background	0	
	Mixed		
K	White and Black Caribbean	X	
L	White and Black African	Y	
M	White and Asian	1	
N	Any other mixed background	2	
	Chinese or other ethnic group		
O	Chinese	3	
	Any other	4	
	Refused	5	

Q10. SHOWCARD E **Which of these best describes your current situation? Please just read out the letter that applies.** READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

A	**Working – Full-time** (30+ hrs)	1	
B	**– Part-time** (9-29 hrs)	2	
C	**Not working –** Unemployed – seeking work	3	
D	Unemployed – not seeking work	4	GROUP 9
E	– retired	5	OBTAIN MIX: 1 STUDENT ONLY
F	Not working – looking after family/children or being a carer	6	GROUP 10: OBTAIN MIX
G	Student	7	
H	– invalid/disabled	8	
I	Other	9	
	Refused/don't know	10	THANK AND CLOSE

Q11. ASK ALL

Occupation of Chief Income Earner

Position/rank/grade
Industry/type of co.
Quals/degrees.apprents
No of staff responsible for

Social Grade		
A	1	
B	2	GROUP 9: OBTAIN MIX
C1	3	
C2	4	
D	5	GROUP 10: OBTAIN MIX
E	6	
Refused/Don't know	7	THANK AND CLOSE

Q12. **Thank you. We would like to invite you to attend our discussion group. If you attend, we will provide refreshments and offer £40 cash as a 'thank you' for attending. The event will last from <TIME> on <DATE> at <VENUE>. I would just like to confirm whether you will be able to attend this discussion?**

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK AND END
Don't know	3	

INVITE AND PASS ON RECRUITMENT LETTER, INCLUDING MAPS OF VENUE.

Finally, we would like you to consider the following two questions before you attend the focus group. HAND OVER COLOURED SHEET OF A4 MARKED *"SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT".*

You are not required to write anything down but we thought it would be useful to get you thinking about how to improve the ability of local councils to act on behalf of their communities. If it helps, you can talk to other people you may live with or know locally about these questions.

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