

**CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL**



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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 3 June 2004

Title: DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW: FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Report of: Carolyn Taylor and David Taylor

Report reference: SP/24/04

Summary:

This is the Final Report, including Action Plan, of the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review. Members should decide whether the document fulfils the Scope set by the Committee in March 2003.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- (i) agree that the Review fulfils the Scope set in March 2003
- (ii) refer the Final Report and Action Plan to the Executive and the Full Council for approval.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: *****

1. Introduction

The Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee, at their meeting on 13 March 2003, approved the Scoping Report for the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review. Since then, the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee has been monitoring the progress of the review and, since July, two members of the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee have been playing an active part by attending meetings of the Review Group with officers.

2. Final Report

The Final Report, including the Action Plan, was approved by the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 6 May and forwarded to Management Overview & Scrutiny so they could decide whether the Final Report fulfilled the Scope they set. The Scope is set out in the Final Report (attached) at paragraph 1.4, pages 5-8.

3. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) agree that the Review fulfils the Scope set in March 2003
- (ii) refer the Final Report and Action Plan to the Executive and the Full Council for approval.

Democratic Engagement: Best Value Review Final Report

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Executive Summary

The remit of this review was to examine the democratic engagement of the authority and look for improvements. Although democratic disengagement is recognised as a national problem, this should not preclude Carlisle City Council taking action to improve the situation locally.

Support for Democratic Engagement

Carlisle City Council will not improve its democratic engagement unless the measures in this report are backed up by high-level support at both political and officer level. It is difficult to overstate the need for political support for democratic reengagement.

Young People

It is widely recognised that democratic disengagement is particularly acute for young people and this review confirmed that. One of the strongest messages to emerge from the work with the 'attainers' (young people entitled to vote for the first time) was that this group considered the political parties, councillors and candidates to be making insufficient efforts to communicate with them. Some respondents stated that the main reason they did not vote was because they did not know enough about the candidates.

The Citizenship curriculum teaching provides the ideal opportunity for Members (with some officer support) to go into schools and talk to young people about local politics. Such an approach received strong backing in the Citizens Panel results. Young people stressed that this should be done in an informative and entertaining way. The proposed 'attainers' event could be an annual event and would provide a good way of reaching those young people entitled to vote for the first time.

There is also a need to build upon and extend existing initiatives such as Young Mayor and Young Executive and integrate these into the policy making process in the Council. At present, the engagement with young people is usually entirely separate from the policy development processes within the Council. Young people will quickly become cynical if their contributions are not being recognised.

Meetings

Many people consider official meetings of the council to be boring and difficult to follow. Of course, some elements of official business will always be of little public interest but all meetings should be accessible and intelligible to the general public. Recommendations are made in the report that focus on what officers can do to improve the quality of agendas and reports. But it is also clear that Members can take steps to improve the quality of meetings themselves. In particular, the agendas and work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny committee are intended to be largely Member-led. It is worth

noting the public appeal of open meeting to debate a single subject (48% of respondents) and holding meetings in different parts of the district (29%).

Interaction between Members and the Public

The results of the Citizens Panel questionnaire highlight the appeal of street surgeries (where a postcard drop is done in an area advising that a councillor will be available to call at individual houses at a given time and date if you put the postcard in the window) and surgeries involving others in addition to the city councillor (county councillor and police).

There is also a considerable proportion of the public who claim to know very little about their councillor or what he or she does. The most popular remedy for this (from the Citizens Panel work) was for councillors to make greater use of leaflets to each households.

It is also clear that Members need greater support to carry out their local democratic roles. For some Members, this support consists of training opportunities; others expressed a need for improved flows of information within the authority.

Voting

One of the findings to emerge from the questionnaire completed by the 'attainers' was that for those already voting, there was a preference for the traditional methods of voting – in a polling booth. But for the large numbers who did not vote, there was enthusiasm for alternative methods such as internet, phone texting and alternative locations for polling stations. These findings were echoed by the Citizens Panel.

Although the mechanisms of voting are defined by national government, it is strongly suggested that Members look to put the authority at the forefront of pilot efforts to try out different mechanisms for voting.

Consultation

The results of the Citizens Panel show that the public are unconvinced that they have a real impact on council policy. The review also found evidence that consultation work carried out by the authority does not always use best practice, particularly with regard to co-ordination, feedback and evaluation. As part of the Best Value Review, therefore, we have drawn up a Corporate Consultation Policy which stresses the dangers of consultation fatigue and the importance of carrying out high quality consultation. Members and officers must ensure that consultation is used selectively and in a meaningful way.

Action Plan

The review found that the extent and quality of democratic engagement was variable. A wide range of improvements are incorporated into the improvement plan and some actions have already been implemented.

1 Introduction

1.1 What is the Problem?

The problem is the perceived low level of engagement between Carlisle City Council and the citizens of the district.

The disengagement between local councils and their communities is by no means unique to Carlisle – it is perceived to be a problem across much of the UK. In Carlisle, the limited level of engagement is apparent from turnouts of around 30% at local elections, low public attendance at meetings of the Council and limited engagement in policy consultation. There is some evidence at both national and local level that disengagement is particularly acute for young people.

In practical terms, this means that the democratic accountability of the authority is reduced. If few people understand or are interested in the council's activities then its accountability is diminished. Further, if few people are engaging with the policies pursued then there is little guarantee that those policies are in line with the wishes of the citizens of Carlisle.

1.2 The National Policy Background

Concern over this issue formed part of the focus of the Government's White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* which was published in 1998. The paper was framed around the need for stronger links between councils and the communities they serve – to provide a 'bigger say' and a 'better deal' for local people. The document also established the community leadership role of local authorities and specifically brought the new duty on councils to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas.

Following the publication of the White Paper in 1998, the Government produced *Local Leadership, Local Choice* which provided a more detailed vision of this area and also included a draft bill. This draft bill was refined and ultimately introduced as legislation to form the *Local Government Act 2000*. The Act incorporates the various strands of Government policy and establishes new constitutions for councils to make them more accountable.

With the thrust of national policy well established, there have been a number of research projects aimed at improving the level of engagement between citizens and their local councils. For example, some studies have focused on how to engage young people whilst others have examined innovative ways of consulting residents on policy initiatives. The Government has also enabled a number of pilots for alternative methods of voting – findings from the most recent elections in May 2001 are now available.

Beyond national policy on the role of local government, it is also worth noting the development of the National Curriculum, within which the subject of Citizenship has been introduced – this incorporates a number of different

concepts but amongst them is an understanding of, and an engagement with, local councils.

1.3 The Corporate Policy Background

This Best Value Review reflects the aims of the City Vision plan and also the Corporate Plan 2002-2005.

The *City Vision* plan defines the agreed community vision for Carlisle for the next ten years, up to 2012. This was drawn up following extensive consultation with the public and partners. Under the 'Communities' section of the document, the vision for Carlisle is described as "A safe, clean, attractive place to live where people feel included and their needs recognised." Of specific relevance to this Best Value Review, the key priority for Carlisle City Council is "To ensure we effectively act upon the views of the people of Carlisle, involve our communities more actively in decision making in the city area and improve voter turnout at elections."

In terms of increasing voter turnout, it must be acknowledged that there is a limit to what Carlisle City Council, as a local authority, can do. This point has been explicitly recognised in the withdrawal of 'Percentage Turnout for local elections' from the national list of Best Value Performance Indicators, with the explanation that "the Government is not of the opinion that it is sufficiently within local authority power to increase voter numbers palpably." Of course, democratic engagement is about much more than the proportion of the electorate that votes in local elections.

Carlisle City Council sets out how it will deliver the *City Vision*, along with partners, in the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan for 2002-2005 sets out a number of objectives and some of these can be considered to be directly relevant to this Best Value review:

- CO1: Encourage community participation and inclusion in the Carlisle area**
- CM3: To develop our community planning process to ensure it addresses the aspirations and needs of our local communities**
- CM4: To reinvigorate democracy and improve voter turnout at elections**

For each objective, the Corporate Plan lists a number of detailed actions which the Council intends to pursue - these are considered in further detail in the Baseline section of this report (Section 2).

1.4 Scoping

There are several different components to the way in which the authority can be considered to democratically engage with the public. The review team considered the key themes to be:

- Access and opportunity in official meetings of the Council;
- Policy Aspects;
- Interaction between Members and the Public and the Mechanisms used;
- Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups;
- Electoral Aspects

These divisions were used during the review and are used throughout this report. The scoping process defined the key questions that the review would attempt to answer and these are reproduced below. It was explicitly recognised that the review would not try to provide full answers to all the questions listed but, as it developed, to focus on those questions or areas where there lay the greatest potential for change and improvement. The scope of the review was agreed with the Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During the scoping process, it was also noted that one of the 4 'Cs', Compete was of very little relevance to this Review. Democratic engagement is by its nature a function which can only be effectively carried out by the authority itself.

The questions below formed the scope of the review:

Theme 1: Access and opportunity in official meetings of the Council

- Find out *why* people do not attend meetings – is it the content? The time at which meetings take place? Do they consider them relevant? What about the style of meeting?
- What do people who have attended meetings think of them?
- What changes can be made to the format of meetings to make them more relevant to the public? Should there be a facility for the public to ask questions?
- Could new types of meeting be used to stimulate greater interest in the business of the council?
- How can we be more welcoming when the public do attend?
- What mechanisms do the public use, or want to use, when they are concerned about an issue?
- Should we target particular subjects/meetings and use the Communications Unit to ensure that people know about these meetings?
- What have other authorities done to increase the interaction with the public at official meetings?

- What role could the website play? How effective is the *Focus* magazine? Is the content and frequency appropriate?

Theme 2: Policy aspects

- Are we fulfilling our responsibility to consult?
- Are people getting a genuine opportunity to comment on and influence policy? Are we being sufficiently imaginative in the methods we use? What other methods are available?
- Should we have different scales and methods of consultation depending on the importance of the issue?
- Have other authorities used referenda? Could this be appropriate for Carlisle?
- Do those people who are currently consulted feel that their views are important and help to shape policy?

Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public and the mechanisms used

- Do the public believe that they have good access to their Councillors? Would they prefer other/different mechanisms?
- Is area working of relevance here? Can we link with the review going on in Corporate Resources O&S Committee?
- Which are the most effective mechanisms for Councillors to communicate with people? Newsletters? Regular public meetings?
- How can we as officers make better use of the information which Councillors (particularly back-bench) gain by talking to their constituents?
- Is there a suitable mechanism to enhance the role that back-bench Members currently fulfil?

Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

- Evidence shows that (nationally) levels of youth voting and engagement with politics generally are low. Why?
- How can young people be encouraged to register and vote?
- How can the workings of the council be made more relevant to young people?

- How can younger people be encouraged to take greater interest in local politics?
- How can young people's views be reached and used to shape policy? Youth Council?
- What role can we play in the 'citizenship' teaching at schools, thereby engaging people *before* they are entitled to vote?
- Would a newsletter aimed at young people be effective? Or a special section in *Focus*?
- Which other groups are we particularly failing to engage with? Older people? Some ethnic groups? Those living in rural areas?
- Are there other types of group (particular issue-groups or community groups) that are not fully engaged?

Theme 5: Electoral aspects

- Find out *why* people are/are not voting.
- How can we ensure that people *know* there is an election going on (recent MORI work shows around 1/4 of people didn't know last May (across the country))?
- How can we encourage more people (particularly young people) to register to vote?
- What would be the effect of introducing different mechanisms to vote?
- What things have other authorities done to raise registration and turnout?

1.5 Review Team

The team undertaking this Best Value Review was comprised from a number of different Business Units. The team was as follows:

- Rob Burns (Economic and Community Development)
- Rhian Davies (Economic and Community Development)
- Ian Dixon (Legal and Democratic Services)
- Lesley Dixon (Strategic and Performance Services)
- John Egan (Legal and Democratic Services)
- David Mitchell (Legal and Democratic Services)
- Carolyn Taylor (Joint Leader) (Strategic and Performance Services)
- David Taylor (Joint Leader) (Member Support and Employee Services)
- Lynne Wild (Strategic and Performance Services)
- Jennifer Williams (Strategic and Performance Services)

In line with the Constitution, the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee was responsible for overseeing this Best Value Review. As part of this process, and to provide further challenge within the review, three Members of the Committee became members of the review team:

- Councillor Joe Hendry
- Councillor Geoff Hodgson
- Councillor Doreen Parsons
- Councillor Judith Pattinson (until May 2003)

We have, of course, also been assisted by many people both within the City Council and outside. Specifically, we offer our thanks to:

- Helen Hutchinson and Jackie Errigo from Cumbria Institute of the Arts;
- The first-year journalism students (2002-2003) from Cumbria Institute of the Arts;
- David Williams, Nicola Mitchell, Councillor Ray Knapton

2 Baseline Information

In undertaking this review, it was important to establish the 'baseline' information about how the Council deals with the various aspects of democratic engagement at present. This section summarises previous, current and planned future activities of Carlisle City Council as they relate to democratic engagement.

Theme 1: Access and Opportunity in Official Meetings of the Council

This area deals with two separate issues: first, does the Council carry out enough of its business in public? Second, how can we encourage the public to attend those meetings at which they are welcome?

Taking the first question, many meetings of the Council are open to the public:

- Full Council;
- Executive;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings;
- Development Control Committee;
- Licensing and Regulatory Committee.

However, attendance by members of the public at these meetings is, in most cases, rare - we have not kept any records of public attendance at council meetings but a survey in the Focus magazine in Autumn 2002 showed that 89% of the respondents had not attended a council meeting. Of the 11% who had attended meetings, more than half had been to Parish Council meetings.

One would expect that public attendance/involvement at the Development Control and the Licensing and Regulatory Committees would always be largely based around straightforward interest in a particular item under

discussion. As such, these meetings are of less interest to this Best Value Review than the remainder, which deal with strategic and policy issues and could, therefore, be considered to offer more general interest to an engaged public.

Of course, there are many meetings which take place amongst council officers, sometimes also involving Members, which are not open to the public. For the practical operation of the authority, this is always likely to be the case. But such meetings should not obscure the transparent workings of the authority.

In attempting to answer the second question 'Why does the public not attend council meetings?', it is perhaps easier to invert the question: 'Why should members of the public attend meetings?' Ideally, one would imagine that if items of real interest to the local public are being discussed and that the public have some opportunity to ask questions or contribute then more people may attend meetings. But even if these criteria are met, a member of the public must know that the meeting is taking place, have the time to attend the meeting and feel confident enough to take part in the discussion.

Carlisle City Council has already introduced some changes in practice to try and enable and encourage greater public involvement in meetings. The Council has already undertaken the following:

- Introduced capacity for public questions and petitions at meetings;
- Resolved to take as much business in public as possible;¹
- Held meetings in different parts of the City's area (in 1993, 7 committee meetings were held 'in the community' attracting a total of 9 members of the public);
- Given the public an opportunity to speak in Planning Committee meetings;
- The Council is currently investigating the future use of web-casts from the Council Chamber (this is a priority action in the Corporate Plan);
- Focus magazine (produced every 12 weeks and delivered to every household) carries basic details of official meetings of the council;
- The Council's website has been revamped, is updated daily and includes basic details of official meetings of the council.

¹ Enshrined in the Council's constitution - particularly Article 13.02(d) which says that all of the Council's decisions will be made in accordance with a presumption in favour of openness and Rule 19 of the Executive Procedure Rules which says that all meetings of the Executive will be in public unless impossible because confidential or exempt information is being discussed.

Further planned changes are detailed in the Corporate Plan:

Priority for Action	Year 1	Years 2/3
Ensure all Council Minutes and Reports can be accessed by the public on-line	Develop internal web service by March 2003	Develop external web service by March 2004
Promote public involvement in council meetings	Trial themed Q&A sessions at full November council Survey levels of satisfaction and participants involvement in November 2002	Include Q&A in other appropriate meetings from June 2003 (dependent on trial)
Broadcast meetings via webcam	Trial with full council by March 2003	Include other meetings from June 2003, dependent on trial Include outside events from July 2004
Implement the Freedom of Information Act	Define scheme of publication by March 2003	Implement scheme by March 2005

However, some other perceived problems remain and were identified by the review team:

- There is much popular confusion over the respective functions of the City and County Councils;
- There exists little popular understanding of the functions/roles of the new Executive/Overview and Scrutiny system;
- The content and quality of the meetings are patchy;
- The written documents associated with the meetings (agendas, reports, minutes) are often in an inaccessible style and are not easily accessed by interested members of the public;
- Executive meetings are perceived by some to be 'rubber stamping' (with the real decisions having taken place before the meeting) rather than true debate;
- The annual 'State of Carlisle' debate envisaged in the Council's Procedure Rules has not been established as a regular item in the Civic diary;
- We don't actually do very much to promote attendance at public meetings.

Perhaps inevitably, the less public involvement/attendance there is at public meetings, the more the meetings develop an 'internal' style, in which little explanation of the discussion is given and jargon can predominate. This could be considered a vicious circle for public accessibility to meetings since if a member of the public did attend such a meeting, they would be unlikely to return.

Theme 2: Policy Aspects

Carlisle City Council has undertaken a good deal of consultation work in recent years and it is clear that we are fulfilling our statutory duty to consult – amongst the strongest successes was the comprehensive consultation

undertaken with the public and stakeholders in producing City Vision, the council's community plan.

There are many methods and types of consultation and many different groups that could be consulted on any given matter. The methods include focus groups, one-on-one interviews, citizens' panels. The type of consultation may be exploratory (to find out views on a subject), document-based (seeking views on a particular policy document) or option-based (offering the range of options under consideration). It is a complex matter to determine the most appropriate approach in each case.

One of the most powerful tools at hand for consultation with the public is the Citizens Panel, which consists of around 1000 representative members of the Carlisle public. The panel is consulted 4 times each year on matters concerning different aspects of the Council's services and may also be used to set up focus groups.

Although we are doing a reasonable job of consulting on some of the larger, strategic issues (eg Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of housing stock, Customer Contact Best Value Review), other consultation is *ad hoc* and often fails to reflect best practice. In particular, consultation is often considered rather too late in the policy development process and without adequate resources being set aside by the relevant Business Unit.

In defining our approach to consultation, we must also be very wary not to contribute to 'consultation fatigue' of the public and stakeholders. It is difficult to determine how big a problem this is but it is much less likely to occur if we follow good practice for consultation throughout the authority. Recently, there has been public comment and letters in the local newspaper, suggesting that some consultations have been inappropriate or unnecessary. In particular, the consultation exercise for the 2003/2004 budget was viewed by some as being 'phoney', and some people argued that councillors were elected to make decisions just like these and should not need to undertake consultation. Against this, it should be noted that public consultation on the budget is considered good practice.

Some further planned actions are detailed in the corporate plan:

Priorities for Action	Year 1 Targets	Year 2/3 Targets
Involve more of our communities in consultation to aid decision making	Increase membership of citizens panel by 25%	Increase response rate to 1000 respondents per questionnaire
Percentage of people who feel involved in decision-making in the city	Undertake survey and establish targets	
Local events for local democracy week	4 events	5 events in 2003/2004 6 events in 2004/2005

Other problems perceived by the review team include:

- Research and consultation are often seen as 'bolt-ons' to the policy development process;
- There is limited co-ordination of consultation or attempts to refine our methods, based on previous experiences;
- The current Consultation Strategy is out of date and little used;
- There is often insufficient feedback to the people consulted on how their views have influenced the final policy direction.

Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public and the mechanisms used

The way in which the public communicates with its elected representatives on the council is a major part of the democratic accountability of the authority. For many people, their local councillor is the first point of contact when they encounter a local problem. Members often make themselves available to their constituents through regular surgeries and various other mechanisms e.g. newsletters, attendance at other community functions and distributing constituency referral forms.

Clearly, it will always remain the choice of the individual Member what mechanisms he/she wishes to use to communicate with his/her constituents. This review can only consider what best practice appears to be and examine how officers can facilitate any changes/improvements in the process.

At present, officers arrange ward surgeries for Councillors. They also assist them in preparing Constituency Referral Forms (which identify their constituents' specific concerns) and processing the return of those forms. However, for reasons of political restriction, there is a limit to which officers of the Council can assist Councillors with these matters. For example, it would be inappropriate for officers to get involved in the production of newsletters for councillors. Wherever communication has a party political flavour, it would be most appropriate for this to be funded, produced and distributed by the parties themselves, rather than the Council.

One of the other main problems in this area is the question of information flows between Members and officers of the Council. It is some Members' perception that it is much more difficult to find out about what the Council is doing than has historically been the case. Members also argue that the relationships between Members and officers have weakened. Although these concerns relate to many Members, it is particularly acute for those not on the Executive or on an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

Youth Engagement

The level of youth engagement with local and national politics has become a 'hot topic', particularly since the last General Election in 2001. At that election, it is estimated that just 39% of people aged 18-24 voted, compared to a historically low turnout for the population as a whole of 59%.

Turnout at local elections is generally much lower than that experienced in general elections. From a sample of 8 wards in the May 2002 election, the turnout of 'new attainers' (those eligible to vote for the first time at that election) was 25.8%, compared to the figure for all the electorate of 31.7%. In common with most of the country, the young people of Carlisle are disengaged from the local political process. Anecdotal evidence from members of the team confirms this impression.

Carlisle City Council already undertakes a number of activities to attempt to engage the youth of Carlisle:

- The Council has been instrumental in the setting up of the citywide Youth Forum. This forum is still finding its feet and developing its ways of working;
- The Council has also participated in National Democracy Week and had the Young Mayor and Youth Parliament session as part of that week;
- The Community Support Unit provides funding and delivers services to children and young people. The City Council plays an active role in the ongoing process of developing a strategy for youth work in Cumbria;
- Tullie Time Travellers is designed for 7-12 year olds and meets monthly. This group is consulted on changes to the Tullie House service and also has inputs to displays and projects;
- Face2Face project – this is a mobile unit for 5-18 year olds that was launched in Easter 2003.

Other actions in the Corporate Plan are shown below:

Priorities for Action	Year 1 Targets	Year 2/3 Targets
Develop a Young People's Council as a voice for them in decision making	Steering group established by Feb 2003	Council established Sept 2003
Develop a programme of events with supporting resource material for schools and community groups on the concept of citizenship	Develop a programme of events based around the Anne Frank exhibition Oct 2002	Participate in the North West Museums and Galleries Education programme phase 2 Citizenship initiative 2003
Marketing campaign targeting first time voters		1 campaign in April 2003 1 campaign in April 2004, 1 in Sept 2004
Develop the 'citizenship package' with local schools	Trial packs with one primary and one secondary	Roll out to 100% of schools (dependent on trial)
Examine extending the Citizens Panel to incorporate more views of young people and other hard to reach groups	Undertake research into best practice by March 2003	To ensure the views of young people are appropriately represented in decision making

Other points noted by the team:

- We play a very limited role at present in the Citizenship teaching within schools;
- A 'cultural shift' will be required to fully enable genuine participation of young people. This shift will be necessary for both officers and councillors to acknowledge that young people are full partners;
- Our current methods of communication do not specifically target young people. The magazine, *Focus*, and the website would be the most appropriate mechanisms for reaching young people. The website has a 'corporate' look, not a 'fun' look;

Engagement with Other Groups

Beyond the identified problem of youth disengagement, there is a need to check that other groups are not especially disengaged. As detailed in previous sections the Corporate Plan stresses the need to improve engagement and this includes an emphasis on engaging with 'hard to reach groups'.

Priorities for Action	Year 1 Targets	Year 2/3 Targets
Examine extending the Citizens Panel to incorporate more views of young people and other hard to reach groups	Undertake research into best practice by March 2003	To ensure the views of young people are appropriately represented in decision making

It was identified by the team that we did not have a complete contact list of 'hard to reach' groups within the authority.

Theme 5: Electoral Aspects

The electoral aspect of democratic engagement is both the most high profile and the easiest to measure. It is well known that the turnout for all elections has been falling since around 1990 and historically turnout at local elections has been relatively low for a long time.

In Carlisle, turnouts for local elections are around the national average (in 2000, the average turnout in shire districts was 32.2%) and are fairly stable (recent figures – 2000: 30.7%, 2002: 31.7%, 2003: 31.4%).

There are statutory duties which the returning officer must carry out – specifically, publishing the notice of election, a statement of persons nominated and the notice of poll. The issuing of poll cards to all electors is also a statutory duty.

Beyond these duties, we already undertake a number of activities to increase electoral registration and voter turnout:

- Used a bus poster campaign to encourage registration (Sept/Oct) and voting (March/April);
- Press adverts to publicise availability of postal voting;

- Registration and postal voting adverts in community publications and Council magazine;
- Leaflets and posters distributed to schools to encourage registration and voting among 16-18 year olds;
- Leaflets to young voters, as identified from the electoral register, to encourage voting;
- TV advertising to encourage voting (one occasion)
- In 2003, a high profile campaign was launched to encourage young people to vote. The 'Don't Vote, Don't Moan' campaign used images produced by a local design student and involved posters, flyers and postcards;
- Postal vote information distributed with canvas forms;
- Carry out an annual review of polling arrangements.

In a survey of Focus magazine readers, 79% considered themselves to be well-informed about elections. Postal voting was made available on demand in February 2001. Since then, the Council has promoted the availability of postal voting and this has resulted in a large increase in the numbers of the electorate adopting to use this method. Before October 2002, the number of postal voters was 2300 and this has now increased to more than 4600 (6% of electorate).

There is a considerable focus on improving electoral performance in the Corporate Plan:

Key Indicators/Priorities for Action	Year 1 Targets	Year 2/3 Targets
Increase Voter turn-out	31.7% (actual)	38% in May 2004
Develop initiatives to make polling stations more appealing to encourage voters		Pilot in 2 wards (depending on pilot results) roll out to 10 in 2004
Marketing campaign to encourage voting		1 campaign in April 2003 1 campaign in April 2004, 1 in Sept 2004

3 Providing Challenge in the Review

3.1 Challenge Mechanisms

As a review team, we were aware of the need to ensure that there was adequate 'challenge' provided within the review and we were conscious that many reviews are criticised for failing to tackle this element properly.

We ensured that challenge was provided throughout the review process using the following mechanisms:

- Update reports and analysis were regularly discussed by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and considerable challenge was provided by Members of the Committee;

- The introduction of 3 Councillors onto the review team at an early stage. The Councillors were invited to all team meetings and played a full and active role;
- Involvement of journalism students from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts at an early stage of the review;
- The setting up of a 'reference group' during the course of the review. The group comprised the following members:
 - The Media (broadcast and print);
 - Schools (teachers and students);
 - City Council Staff
 The primary purpose of this group was to act as a 'sense check' on the course of the review and its findings.
- Challenge was also provided within the team by discussion sessions of work completed by the various team members.

Details of the work carried out by the students from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts are provided below:

3.2 Work completed by Cumbria Institute of the Arts Students

The first year journalism students at the Cumbria Institute of the Arts undertook three main tasks as part of this review which formed part of their formal coursework:

- They completed questionnaires after attending meetings of the Council (Executive, Council and Development Control);
- Short articles which were written after shadowing a City Councillor for the day;
- Feature articles on topics related to this review.

In addition, an informal feedback session was held in October 2003 to ensure that the developing findings of the review adequately reflected the students' views.

This section of the report aims to summarise the learning from the written pieces by the students and the conversations held. The points made by the students have been broken down by the sections of the review. Included below are both the views of the students themselves (from conversations held and the questionnaires completed) and the views of other young people (from the articles).

Theme 1: Official Meetings of the Council

- The students did generally feel welcome within the Civic Centre and at meetings;
- The Executive meeting was not interesting – 8 out of the 12 students classified the meeting as 'boring' and one as 'very boring'. One student noted that there was no debate and that it was obvious that it had been

'cooked up' beforehand. As a result, the meeting was both confusing and boring.

- Difficult to identify the Members and work out who was speaking and why – half of the students declared that it was 'difficult' to understand what was going on in the meetings. One contributory factor was that the 'contact officer' on the report was not always the person speaking to the report.
- Not easy to work out what is going on from the Agenda – difficult to understand. One student also considered it difficult to get hold of information before the meeting.
- Facility to speak/ask questions (instantaneously) within the meetings would be welcomed by half of the students. It is interesting to note that 2 students thought there should be the facility to speak/ask questions but that they would probably not use it themselves. This might suggest that the meetings seem a little intimidating.
- The overall 'democratic engagement' provided by the meetings seems rather limited, even for those who attend – when asked how involved with the Council they felt as a result of attending the meetings, 11 of the 12 students attending the Executive selected 'not very involved' or 'not very involved at all'.
- Students were happy to attend Council meetings as part of their course but would not now return to a meeting for their own interest. Indeed, attending a meeting at the council seemed very strange to fellow students – "incomprehensible"!
- The students were disappointed not to be able to attend the mayor-making *en masse* – seemed strange that their numbers should be restricted when we're doing a review into Democratic Engagement;

Theme 2: Policy Aspects

- No comments.

Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public

- Members were generally very approachable and helpful to students wishing to shadow them. Also, perception (albeit from only one student) that the Member was well known in their constituency.
- Most of the pieces written after shadowing a Councillor identified the interaction and involvement of Members with the communities they serve.

Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

- Councillors are generally seen as old and not in touch with young people. A quote from one of the articles when a student attended a City Council meeting: "Entering the room, I suddenly become very aware of my age – by my estimation no one here is under fifty." Younger councillors could help this situation. There is also some cynicism that councillors are only interested in young people at election time.

- Considerable (and largely unrecognised) confusion over the difference in roles between the City and County Councils amongst both the students and some of those interviewed.
- Some indication that for young people with limited awareness of politics, that attention is focussed on national Government, not local. One quote from a young person interviewed: "I didn't have a clue what that was all about, city or county councils mean nothing to me. So ultimately someone lost out on a vote. If a campaigner took the time to talk to me and tell me why my vote was important I probably would have made the effort but they didn't so I didn't bother"
- One feature piece concludes that the Citizenship work in schools does not have a high profile and has not yet made an impact. A quote from a pupil interviewed seems to point to a way forward: "And make it fun. If it's boring, we won't go ... Teach us what you want, but please, don't bore us: It might be useful to know how the Government works, and how our taxes are going to be sorted, but if it's not interesting, we won't learn a thing."

Theme 5: Electoral Aspects

- From those young people interviewed, voting is generally not seen as important and apathy is significant – "cannot be bothered to go to the school to vote". But also the view that voting would not make a difference predominates: "I don't see the point in voting. It's a hassle to get to the voting place, and I don't have the time to do it. At the end of the day, it won't make my life any better, so why should I?" It is important to distinguish between these two reasons.
- Amongst young people, there seems to be some resistance to the conventional method of voting (unwilling to go somewhere out of the way) combined with an enthusiasm for alternative methods of voting: postal, text, mobile phone, e-mail, internet. As one student argues "Texting and e-mailing has proven to be successful for other non-political elections, so what is to stop the same happening in this respect?"
- One of the students thought that part of the problem was that young people find decision-making difficult and tend to wait for one person to take a lead.
- From some of those interviewed by the students, the poor image of politicians (particularly at national level) also contributes to people being disengaged and less likely to vote and there is a recognition that the national press coverage often does not help with this.
- Within the articles, there appears to be a recognition that some people could be 'reached' by better education, canvassing, engagement etc. but that others would remain uninterested. There appears to be a real disconnection between young people and politics, particularly local politics.
- One of the councillors interviewed defines the problem as "Young People find politicians too old but they are still not willing to take part themselves."
- Within the articles, there is also some defence of both not voting and spoiling of ballot papers as valid demonstrations of disaffection with the existing parties and systems.

These points are considered further in Section 6 of this report, which analyses the significance of the various inputs to the review and considers their implications.

4 Compare Work

The 'compare' element of this review was particularly important – the apparent loss of democratic engagement has become a topical national issue during the last few years. As such, with encouragement from national government, many local authorities have attempted to improve their links with the public they serve. The review team, therefore, sought out those authorities from which Carlisle could learn new approaches and best practice.

The compare work was once again undertaken according to the 5 themes of the review. An individual member of the team was responsible for each theme and their findings were discussed and challenged within team meetings. The following sections detail the work carried out.

4.1 Theme 1: Access and opportunity in official meetings of the Council

In the scoping of the review, 10 questions are posed under the key issue of access to meetings of the council. In carrying out the compare work, we have looked specifically at how other authorities have tackled three of these questions:

- What changes can be made to the format of meetings to make them more relevant to the public? Should there be a facility for the public to ask questions?
- Could new types of meeting be used to stimulate greater interest in the business of the council?
- What have other authorities done to increase the interaction with the public at official meetings?

The Local Government Association set up Designs on Democracy, a project in which five local authorities attempted to increase public participation in the democratic process. These were:

- London Borough of Camden;
- Lancashire County Council;
- Shropshire County Council;
- Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council;
- West Lindsey District Council.

The project aimed to:

- Increase public participation in local democracy
- Make political management arrangements more transparent and accessible to the public

- Modernise local government and rebuild links with local people
- Engage schoolchildren and young people, in particular.

The five authorities tackled the three questions posed by Carlisle City Council, as above, by introducing new elements into official council meetings. Other authorities contacted during this Compare Work who adopted similar approaches are Exeter and Chester City Councils.

The five authorities in the Designs on Democracy project undertook a number of initiatives, some of them similar. Among the schemes were:

- Web-casting council meetings;
- Executive Question Time/ Cabinet in the Community;
- State of the Area Debate;
- Citizen and Democracy Pack;
- Area Boards.

Below we pick out those initiatives of particular relevance to Carlisle City Council.

4.1.1 *Camden*

Executive Question Time was introduced to encourage greater community involvement as well as experimenting with different formats and layouts of meetings.

Six Executive Question Times were held at venues across the borough on different days of the week for two hours each. Questions were ad hoc but later meetings became more focused on specific subjects. The meetings each attracted between 30 and 50 people.

Camden has been web-casting meetings since March 2002. Monthly Council, fortnightly Executive and Development Control and Licensing Committees have been web-cast and demand to increase the facility is growing.

Currently, the full council meetings are the most popular, but indications are that the Development Control and Licensing Committees will be taking over.

To summarise, both projects have shown the council that it can reach a wider audience, but it believes both need further development. The council is increasing the number and type of meetings web-cast from this summer. Decision-making is more transparent and is reaching a wider audience.

4.1.2 *Lancashire*

The council held a series of three Executive Question Time "Cabinet in the Community" events around the county, chaired by a local TV presenter, at which members of the public were able to ask questions. It was on the lines of the TV programme Question Time and professional lighting and sound equipment was used. There were no agendas, papers or presentations and

officer attendance was kept to a minimum. Between 30 and 60 people attended each one.

There was positive feedback from the Executive Question Time events with people appreciating the fact the councillors had come to their area to answer their questions. The authority is planning to hold three such events a year in different parts of the county.

Lancashire began web-casting its Cabinet meetings in September 2002 and from this summer it is extending web-casting to cover meetings of the Lancashire Youth Council Executive as well as that Executive's meetings with the county council Cabinet.

Average viewing figures for the web-cast Cabinet meetings were 500 in each month. Public attendance at these meetings is almost unknown. The council believes web-casting provides an opportunity to increase transparency and brings the democratic process closer to more people.

4.1.3 Shropshire

The County held its first annual debate in July 2002 in a local hotel. Local personalities spoke for and against the motion, "The Quality of Life in Shropshire is Improving". The audience consisted of 200 invited guests and members of the Citizens Panel and some tickets had been distributed through the local radio station. The debate was followed by an audience discussion.

A report on the action taken since the last debate was produced for the event in 2003. As a result of last year's debate, Local Listening Forums were set up to take forward local issues with 10 local members taking a lead.

4.1.4 Trafford

The council developed four Area Boards to cover the borough to bring decision making closer to local communities. Of the four, three took part in the Designs on Democracy initiative, including Sale, which used the council's consultation bus, Merlin, as a road show in one of its wards. The aim was to connect service priorities with local priorities and give local people the chance to meet with councillors, service representatives and other agencies.

The bus stopped at two shopping areas on a Saturday after a leafleting campaign had made people aware what was happening and when. The day was successful with many residents meeting councillors and officers for the first time.

4.1.5 Exeter City Council

Under the City Council's new constitution, question time for members of the public has been introduced before Overview & Scrutiny committees and Planning. The three O&S committees look through all reports going to the

Executive in advance in order that the Executive can take on board any comments they have.

It is very uncommon for members of the public to attend either the Executive or O&S meetings, although there is good attendance at planning meetings, especially when there is a big issue on the agenda.

The City Council's big initiative for promoting democratic engagement, launched in 1999, is the Community Forum Programme, which is in partnership with the County Council, Health Authority, Police, Local Transport providers and the Fire Authority.

There are five showcase meetings each year in the Guildhall in the centre of Exeter. A partner is selected in advance to do a 20-minute presentation on a given subject at each event and then there are questions from the floor.

There is a "Who wants to be a Millionaire" style voting system, which is borrowed from the Community Safety Partnership. There is also an open Q&A session, which covers any topic.

For the first two years of the scheme, events were held at different locations throughout the district but for the last two years they have been based in Exeter, for ease of transport.

The events alternate between evening and afternoon sessions and attract between 70 and 100 people. Written questions can be put by the chairman if people do not want to ask their own question and over tea and coffee at the end, members of the public can talk one to one with officers. The events are well marketed through newsletters to residents' groups, mailshots, advertising in the local media and the Council paper. The Council believe they would boost attendance if they chose more controversial subjects for debate.

4.1.6 Chester City Council

The authority has almost given up trying to tempt people to attend formal meetings and has decided that "effective engagement is more than getting people to sit in rooms for meetings. We're more interested in improving communications, generally and engaging the community".

In 1998 the City Council set up a series of seven local panels, corresponding to wards. These developed, from 1 April 2003, to become Area Committees with delegated authority and budgets.

The total operational budget for the seven is £150,000 and they have varying budgets, from £12,100 for the smallest up to £28,100 for the largest (depending on the number of councillors).

The council says this system engages backbenchers and involves local people in decision making. The money is spent on things like additional street lighting, grants to the village hall and additional CCTV cameras.

4.2 Theme 2: Policy Aspects

Improving consultation is at the heart of the Government's agenda for local government. As part of Best Value we are required to consult for the purpose of deciding how best to improve services. The Local Government Act 1999 does not set out how this consultation should take place but guidance has been issued. Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 placed a new duty upon local authorities to prepare a community strategy that seeks to promote and improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the area. When preparing the community strategy a local authority is required by the legislation to consult and seek the participation of all the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations which provide services or whose actions affect quality of life in an area.

It is useful to consider what is meant by consultation before embarking on the compare aspect. Involvement/consultation on policy aspects can range from making publicly available material and information more comprehensive and accessible to seeking to engage citizens more directly and actively on particular issues. The Audit Commission uses the following working definition:

"Consultation has been defined as a process of dialogue that leads to a decision".

This definition implies that there is an ongoing exchange of views and information, rather than a one-off event. The idea that consultation will lead to a decision is an important one. People become disillusioned with being asked for their views where they can see no purpose. However, it does not necessarily follow that the outcome of the consultation will result in a decision which those being consulted have asked for. Local authorities have to consider a range of factors in making decisions and consultation is only one of these.

The LGMB publication "Involving the Public"² outlines that there are a range of activities which are classed as consultation:

- Market research – finding out what people want and think through surveys and focus groups;
- Consultation – this allows for two-way communication or dialogue;
- Participation – providing for involvement in decision making by the public. It can include devolving power for some services or budgets.

In the public sector all these activities can be going on at the same time, there is not necessarily a progression from market research to a devolution of power. There is a range of tools and techniques which can be employed within each of these areas.

In this 'compare' work, we have looked to other authorities for their practices in the following two areas:

² Local Government Management Board "Involving the Public", Adrian Barker 1999.

- Democratising policy areas or providing opportunities for involvement in decision-making. This allows for joint decision making and ideally would enable the public to set the agenda for their involvement. There is a longer-term partnership with the public and stakeholders.
- Consultation or providing opportunities for two-way communication or dialogue. This involves listening and responding to the public on particular issues. It is short term and can involve one off consultations. It seeks views on a number of options or asks the public what it thinks about certain approaches that have already been identified.

4.2.1 Good Practice and Benchmarking

In considering which authorities to examine, we looked to the following for guidance:

- Surrey County Council's BVR "Listening and Responding to the Public" identifies 6 good practice authorities: Hertfordshire County Council, Kent County Council, City of York, LB Camden, LB Lewisham and LB Southwark. These were identified from a Local Government Management Board publication "Involving the Public".
- The Historic Cities Benchmark Group (developed by Viv Coleman, Carlisle City Council) and the Nearest Neighbours Group.

From these sources, we selected four authorities for detailed compare work:

- City of York (good practice authority);
- Surrey County Council (recently completed BVR Listening and Responding);
- Chester and Worcester (both on Historic Cities and Nearest Neighbour Benchmark Groups).

In addition, we have also attempted to identify good practice using the Audit Commission's own good practice guide and the LGMB publication "Involving the Public".

The Audit Commission identify four main principles of good practice in consultation:

- It should be related to a decision that the authority intends to take ;
- It should be competently carried out;
- It should be inclusive; and
- It should be used in practice.

4.2.1.1 Surrey County Council

As part of their Best Value Review (BVR) "Listening and Responding to the Public", Surrey looked at their corporate approach to consultation and that of the service departments.

Surrey adopted a Consultation Strategy in 1999 to provide a framework for consultation activity. A consultation website was established to improve co-

ordination of activity. However, the BVR found that it was hardly used at all by service departments. A consultation manager was appointed to act as a reference point for those planning consultation to ensure a co-ordinated approach. A Consultation Action Plan 2001-2002 proposed the use of databases, the consultation website and S-net and the provision of guidance to co-ordinate and ultimately reduce consultation activities. Some joint consultation with partner organisations is also to be set up on high-profile issues such as community safety, traffic and transport, housing and education, through the umbrella of the 2010 group. The Chief Executive's Department has used consultants to carry out customer research to identify service priorities for ten years. The information is used in the preparation of the Corporate Plan. This work is organised by the County Council's Marketing Officer. However, there is little evidence that this information is recognised or used in service departments. The County Council's Policy Committee adopted a Marketing Policy in April 2000 to guide this work and a Members' Marketing Group was formed to steer the Council's approach to market research to establish people's needs and wants, designing services to meet those needs and wants and communications to ensure public awareness and take-up services.

Community planning is being introduced under the Local Government Act 1999. This is likely to involve consultation to identify how local services can best meet local needs and to identify local priorities. This local consultation is likely to be organised on a multi-agency basis. The Assistant Directors Partnership has the role of co-ordinating consultation in their areas.

Consultation and customer research activities undertaken in service departments were:

- one-off consultations on policy and strategy documents, major changes to service provision e.g. library and fire station closures, highway and environmental improvement proposals;
- on-going surveys which monitor satisfaction with services, such as user surveys; and
- on-going dialogue with service users as in user forums, liaison groups, community meetings, etc.

There was an enormous amount of consultation and customer research activity in service departments - in the year before the BVR at least 150 major one-off consultation exercises were undertaken, with about 100 of these in the Environment Department. In addition there was a very large amount of work on on-going surveys and on-going dialogue with service users. Social Services, for example, have relatively elaborate procedures for service monitoring and there is an increasing trend in many services to use regular consultative forums.

A very wide range of consultation techniques is in use. Public meetings tend to be used for controversial issues, although these can be confrontational rather than promoting dialogue with the public. One-off consultations are often by correspondence or meetings with specific organisations, but issue forums or focus groups are also used. A wide range of meeting types to facilitate on-

going dialogue is in use including representative groups or user panels. Opinion polls have been used only occasionally, telephone and postal questionnaires more frequently. Customer feedback forms are used extensively in libraries, Fire and Rescue and Trading Standards. Relatively little use is made at present of consultation via the Internet. Some consultation is undertaken jointly, for example, Social Services with the Health Authorities.

Most consultation and customer research is organised by in-house staff. It is estimated that at least 500 staff are involved in a variety of ways in public consultation across the County Council with about half that total being in the Environment Department. These staff rely on experience rather than training or guidance, and this influences the planning of consultation and research and the choice of techniques used. This also means that there is little attempt to involve hard-to-reach groups such as young people or ethnic minorities. Social Services and Environment departments have professional research officers. There has been relatively little use of consultants except in Fire and Rescue and Trading Standards.

Little feedback is provided to consultees. Significant use is made of the results of consultation in some departments, particularly to influence the shaping of service delivery. However there is evidence that there is also "gesture" consultation taking place - sometimes to justify proposals and in some cases to publicise proposals rather than to influence decisions.

There seems to be little evidence of departments attempting to obviously limit the expectations of their consultees and service users. There is relatively little use of customer satisfaction monitoring and no use of consultation on how the public wish to be consulted. Consultation and customer research is almost never evaluated.

The outcome of their comparison with other best practice authorities and other authorities highlighted the following issues:

- consultation activity is on the increase;
- best practice authorities give clear and strong overall leadership and direction to consultation in policies and management;
- most authorities use in-house staff to organise much of their consultation;
- best practice authorities encourage the sharing of good practice;
- most staff need to be actively guided on the most appropriate ways to plan and organise consultation;
- many authorities have a corporately maintained up to date database of contact names of individuals and representatives of local organisations;
- best practice authorities consult on consultation;
- best practice authorities are moving towards quality assurance guided by a central consultation manager or team; and
- best practice authorities evaluate consultation.

Surrey's Action Plan for "Listening and Responding to The Public" identified the following recommendations:

1. enhance corporate leadership and direction of consultation and customer research and strengthen the ability of the corporate communications group to provide effective support, guidance and co-ordination;
2. improve the direction and co-ordination of consultation and customer research work in service departments and ensure good practice;
3. encourage individual staff to own the effectiveness and implications of consultation.

4.2.1.2 City of Worcester

Worcester works as part of an LSP and has developed a community plan which is used for the development of policy in its broadest sense. A Consultation Strategy exists and a variety of techniques are used: user satisfaction surveys, door-to-door surveys, service department feedback, focus groups and conferences. Worcester does not have a Citizens Panel.

Worcester, like many other authorities, including Carlisle, has consulted on its priorities - interestingly, scrutiny committees (called Performance and Review Committees) have an involvement in policy development and have held public meetings on issues of public concern eg. flooding.

A recent peer review carried out in the authority by the IdeA highlighted a number of actions for Worcester to enable it to improve its performance on communication and consultation. These are targets for 2003/04:

- review the council's communication and information function;
- re-launch and improve corporate briefings;
- initiate a State of the Council roadshow to be held annually in future;
- disseminate new vision and priorities internally and externally; and
- prioritise and co-ordinate consultation activity.

4.2.1.3 Chester City Council

Chester's Performance Plan identifies consultation and communication as one of its six key principles underpinning its corporate plan. In developing this principle Chester states that it will:

- consult, listen and talk to communities, groups and individuals to help influence decisions; and
- develop a variety of communication methods to ensure everyone has access to information.

A Consultation Strategy is the starting point for Chester's activities. It also has a Research Standards Panel (RSP) that plans and manages the council's consultation. It is made up members of the Cabinet, the Examination and Review Committee and Chester College. The main role of the RSP is to agree the Research and Consultation Plan and ensure quality standards are met.

Consultation and primary research are part of a wider programme of secondary and desk based research. Like the other authorities examined

here, Chester uses a variety of consultation tools – postal surveys, phone surveys, doorstep surveys, feedback leaflets and focus groups. Chester's website includes a section that highlights those issues on which Chester is seeking views - currently street furniture and a proposed area redevelopment.

During 2003/04 Chester will be introducing a new system of Area Committees "to help to improve local democracy". Nine Area Committees were introduced in 1999 and these are to be replaced with 7 with a brief to:

- take decisions about some services at local level;
- make recommendations to the council about some services;
- consult on other decisions which have a wider impact; and
- inform people about council services and priorities.

Each Area Committee will have a manager to support the new arrangements and to ensure representation and participation over a wide range of community interests.

Chester has a Residents' Survey Panel that it shares with the Primary Care Trust. It carries out 3 main surveys each year. One of the surveys this year will inform CPA and Best Value Reviews. As in Worcester, the Review Committees have an active role in policy development, holding inquiries and reviews into matters of public concern.

4.2.1.4 York City Council

York is considered to be a good practice authority in terms of its consultation and involvement opportunities.

York has a Consultation Strategy but this is not currently in widespread use in the authority. In terms of corporate consultation on major policy areas and priorities, York uses its Citizens Panel, "Talk About". It has a separate business panel. "Talk About" has been running since 1996 and draws from a core of 2,500 residents. About 4 consultations are carried out with the panel each year. Feedback to the panel is directly through a newsletter. Discussion groups of about 8 are often held with Talk About members. In addition, York carries out an annual satisfaction survey along the lines of the statutory BV survey.

Consultation within service departments is not centrally co-ordinated although the corporate centre provides advice and assistance. The Research Team is generally the first point of contact and the details are included on the website. Service based consultation tends to be *ad hoc* and not necessarily planned at the start of each year. York does not carry out any systematic review or evaluation of its consultation activity.

York does seek to try to ensure that its activities are inclusive. Good examples include an Older Peoples Assembly. In terms of councillor involvement in policy development, York uses politically balanced advisory panels to advise the Executive on policy issues. Hour long debates on topical

issues and key policy areas are held before Council meetings. These debates involve a presentation by council officers, followed by discussion and question and answers. These are open to the public.

4.2.2. Analysis

The issues which arise for Carlisle as a result of the compare work are not so much about methods, but about overall practice. They fall into five main headings:

- co-ordination, which is an issue to be picked up in the revised Corporate Consultation Policy;
- evaluation of consultation exercises following completion;
- feedback to those taking part in consultation activities and within the authority itself;
- the role of the scrutiny function in policy development and community leadership/planning; and
- understanding costs, though this would perhaps be better considered as part of the co-ordination activity.

Carlisle uses a range of techniques to carry out its consultation. It has a Citizens Panel and a LSP (City Vision and the Carlisle and Eden LSP) which we use to develop the corporate framework and determine priorities. Satisfaction surveys are used to inform the Council on performance and service departments use a range of techniques to inform their work. We have a Corporate Consultation Strategy which seeks to develop a corporate approach. Good practice suggests that this is one area where authorities could be doing more - only one of the case study authorities (Chester) appears to have a systematic and high level approach to this with its Research Standards Panel. The key tasks of the Research Standards Panel in Chester are planning ahead, evaluation, quality standards and dissemination of the results internally and externally.

Carlisle has a Corporate Consultation Policy (being revised as part of this review) but it is fair to say that the existing policy is not in widespread use. Although the Panel which is used at Chester may be too cumbersome for Carlisle, we do need to give some thought as to how the revised policy can be properly integrated and adopted across the authority.

Feedback is important for people taking part in consultation exercises, both in terms of what has been said and how it is used. A related matter is the dissemination of results/outcomes of consultations across the authority. This together with an evaluation of the technique used in each case would be a valuable internal resource – preventing the reinvention of the wheel and encouraging co-operation on consultation. The revised Corporate Consultation Policy tackles this issue, in that it suggests the development of a database accessible in public folders. The inclusion of cost details, as part of the database would be a useful addition. Like all of the case study authorities we are uncertain as to the amount we spend on consultation throughout the authority.

One issue which arose from the comparison with other authorities was the role of elected members in policy development. Some may argue that by virtue of the fact that they are able to vote on new policy direction at Council is consultation enough. Many authorities (eg. Chester, York and Worcester) are taking a much wider view of the role of all elected members in the development of policy for the authority itself and on community planning and community leadership issues.

The process of comparison offers some guidance on some of the review scoping questions:

1. Are we fulfilling our statutory responsibility to consult?

Carlisle uses a variety of techniques to consult in line with the practice of case study authorities eg Citizens' Panel, consultation on corporate priorities, LSPs, satisfaction surveys, focus groups. We are fulfilling our statutory responsibilities for Best Value and community planning.

2. Are people getting a genuine opportunity to comment on and influence policy? Are we being sufficiently imaginative? What other methods are available?

Difficult to respond to the first part of the question, because we don't have clear records of how consultation is influencing policy development – this will be assisted when consultation is better co-ordinated. We are using a variety of techniques and appear to be as imaginative as the case study authorities, but there is always something to learn. It would seem that there are lessons to be learned from elsewhere on the role of scrutiny committees in policy development.

3. Should we have different scales and methods of consultation depending on the importance of the issues?

We need to be clear about the purpose of the consultation and need to consider what is most appropriate in particular circumstances, though not necessarily linked to importance. Should not have a 'one size fits all' approach because it depends upon the people/ groups who are to be consulted and the purpose of the consultation.

4. Have other authorities used referenda? Could this be appropriate for Carlisle?

None of the case study authorities have used referenda. The LGMB good practice guide does not recommend referenda, because they are best used for really big issues. These appear to have limited use in local government, though balloting is seen being used more frequently as more authorities ballot their tenants on LSVT.

5. Do those people who are currently consulted feel that their views are important and help to shape policy?

This must be a question for the public. We will have some information collected from tenants, because this was a performance indicator for housing.

4.3 Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public

This section details the compare work carried out with other local authorities in Member interaction with constituents. There are three sub-sections : the initial compare work with authorities, two longer case studies of authorities and finally a short section summarising the possible changes which could be made in Carlisle, based on the findings from elsewhere.

4.3.1 Initial Compare Work

There are three separate but linked areas which determine the quality of member interaction with constituents:

- How information about the councillors is disseminated – would people know how and when to contact their councillor?
- What mechanisms are most effective at linking the councillor to their constituents – this can, of course, be viewed from the councillor's perspective and that of the member of the public. Are queries/complaints always followed up and the response fed back to the member of the public?
- Are Members happy with how officers then deal with the queries/problems raised?

The text below deals with the first and second of these issues. The third is an area to be explored as part of the 'consult' work to follow.

4.3.1.1 How do others ensure that the public know who their councillor is and when/how they should be contacted?

At present Carlisle City Council publishes some information to enable the public to find out about their councillors. On the Council's website, an interactive map is provided of the wards of the District, which then gives details of the Councillor(s) for that ward. These details comprise a name, photograph, address, telephone number and e-mail address (although not all councillors have an e-mail address). The names and telephone numbers of councillors are also included in each edition of Focus, the magazine delivered to every household. A survey in Focus in Autumn 2002 showed that 70% of respondents did know who their Councillor was.

Although the contact information for councillors seems to be freely available, no details are given on the website or in Focus of the dates and venues for councillors' surgeries. Similarly, no guidance is given at these points on the sort of problems with which a councillor may be able to help. Dates and locations of surgeries are usually advertised in the local newspaper. Some councillors hold surgeries on a monthly basis, some less often and others not at all. The surgeries usually take place in a community centre or other public building.

From a cursory examination of other authorities' websites, it is apparent that it is common practice for contact details of Councillors to be included. Many

authorities offer different mechanisms to find a councillor – from maps, by surname and, perhaps most usefully of all, by postcode (e.g Surrey and Camarthenshire).

Some authorities also put details of their Members' surgeries on their websites (e.g Barnsley, Redcar & Cleveland, Brent, Corby, Newham). However, few (if any) authorities offer much explanation of the purpose (from a citizen's perspective) of the surgeries and/or guidance on the circumstances in which a councillor may be able to help. Barnsley identify the purpose of the surgeries as :

"To identify specific ward-based issues, which may be raised by local people, and refer them to senior management, Cabinet or full Council for appropriate action."

The London Borough of Brent provides rather more information than most on the purpose of the council and councillors and the format of councillors' surgeries. This information is clearly aimed at the general public. Leicester City Council, Camden and Newham also provide some of this information.

The level of information provided about the councillors varies from authority to authority – some have sought to clarify the role of councillors by using job descriptions – indeed, job descriptions have been drawn up for Councillors in Carlisle. However, these are not used extensively. Many authorities also provide details of which committees and panels each Member sits on.

Some authorities include more information on each councillor (in the form of annual reports and CVs) e.g. Tameside have a 'Know Your Councillor' section. Notably, many authorities also provide information to the general public on how to become a councillor and what they could expect if they were successfully elected.

4.3.1.2 How do councillors at other authorities connect with their constituents?

The mechanisms that individual councillors use to connect with their constituents are largely a matter of personal preference. The established mechanisms include:

- regular surgeries;
- attending 'community' meetings (e.g. parish council meetings, residents' associations);
- newsletters and
- one-on-one contact through meetings, conversations and e-mail.

There appears to have been relatively little research into the effectiveness or otherwise of these various mechanisms, or indeed the most useful balance.

Some focus group research in Scotland (*Perceptions of Local Government: A Report of Focus Group Research*, 1999) found that people wanted their councillors to:

- take a more proactive role;
- communicate more with their constituents;
- provide information about what they have been doing on behalf of the community; and
- be easily accessible.

This research found that a very low percentage of the participants had ever contacted their councillor. There was also an age distinction – older participants were keener to contact their councillors whereas younger people tended to say that they would not. Once again, this highlights the need to engage younger people as part of this review.

Perhaps the most prominent feature for most authorities is that they offer training for members (particularly new members) on aspects such as:

- *Engaging the Community and Effective Community Leadership* is a course run by the South-East Employers training;
- *Effective Casework and Advice Surgeries for Councillors* is run by the East Midlands Local Government Association.

This sort of training is also available to members in Carlisle, as part of the NorthWest Employers Organisation's range – they run a 'Surgery Skills' training session.

Clearly, the mechanisms of interaction will be partly dictated by the level of support available to Members. Most authorities provide a limited amount of administrative and secretarial support to Members and tend to focus the majority of support on those Members who are part of the Executive or sit on the various panels – Overview and Scrutiny, Planning etc. North Devon District Council is unusual in having drawn up a Member Support Strategy which defines in some detail what Members can expect from the officers of the Council along with what is expected of the Councillors themselves. This approach is in line with the guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's guidance on the new constitutions, in which it is stressed that "Local authorities will need to ensure that the roles of councillors outside the executive are meaningful and well-supported."

Carlisle is currently in the process of drawing up a policy on Members' Development, including training needs. The 'Member Support and Employee Services' Business Unit currently provides 'member support' only to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

An LGA initiative aims to increase the number of councillors with their own websites – the 'LGA Info CouncillorSite Solution' is currently running at pilot level but is looking to provide fairly simple sites for Councillors which are easily updated by the Members themselves. The LGA's survey of councillors

found that 87% of Councillors would use an easy-to-manage website to support their work as a Councillor. This could be explored in the next stages of our review.

The two authorities which were chosen for more detailed consideration were Surrey County Council and Bristol City Council.

4.3.2 Detailed Case Study Work

4.3.2.1 Surrey County Council

The Best Value Review of most relevance to this aspect of the Democratic Engagement Review is one carried out by Surrey County Council on "Listening and responding to the public" which was completed in January 2001. This review focussed on three areas:

- Consultation and customer research;
- Complaints
- Members' involvement in listening and responding to the public

Although we are not considering complaints as part of this review, the other two areas are included in the scoping of our review. The review was completed more than 2 years ago and so much of the resulting action plan has been implemented.

The comparison work here focused on one element of the review: 'Members involvement in listening to and responding to the public'. The 'key findings' from this part of the review were:

- There is scope for more Members to conduct surgeries, with officer support for booking accommodation and producing publicity material;
- ICT and e-service could be used more to help the public contact Members;
- More information about Members should be available through the call-centre and website;
- A job profile would provide useful information to Members, officers and the public;
- The role of Members in consultation should be strengthened
- Members would like more training to support them in their local role.

Some of the specific proposals in the action plan are detailed below:

Recommendation	Actions
Clarify and publicise the local role of Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt job profile • Publicise job profile to Members and the public • Consider sending out leaflet telling people who their councillor is after each election • Consultation plans should clearly set out how Members will be involved
Improve officer support for Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise type of officer support

in their local role	available to Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaflet/letter sent to all staff reminding them of the need to keep Members informed about matters affecting their ward • Provide officer support with organising publicity etc for surgeries
Improve public access to Members using e-service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Members in developing their own websites through training and software • Enable public to search for Members by their own postcode (also make this possible via call to Call-Centre) • Greater publicity for Members' e-mail addresses
Improve training opportunities available to Members to help them deliver their local role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key components of new training could include training on consultation, developing and maintaining websites and media relations/dealing with difficult people

The Best Value Review was completed in early 2001 and monitoring of the action plan has now ceased. Although not all recommendations were implemented, it is clear that the principles of the review continue to be reflected in the Council's approach. From conversations with officers at Surrey County Council, some other points emerge:

- Surrey County Council is piloting Personal Development Planning and 360^o feedback for Members;
- From surveying Members' training and information needs, it has become clear that:
 - Members were dissuaded from using the IT systems because they were cumbersome to get access to from home;
 - IT skills training should include basic web-searching;
 - Members would like induction training to focus more on their roles and less on the issues which they are likely to encounter;
 - Members also feel that it is difficult to get 'into' the organisation – to know who to contact about a particular matter;
- There is a perception that area-working has made Councillors more accessible to the public.

Many of these additional points reflect the need to refine any improvement plan in the light of experience and to ensure that any changes made do indeed address the problems they were intended to. Initial feedback from the personal development and 360^o feedback pilots has been positive with Councillors reporting that the process has proven extremely useful. Although such an approach is commonplace for officers, it is innovative to start offering such a service to Members.

Although there are differences of scale and resources between the way a County Council approaches Member involvement and the way a District

Council like Carlisle would deal with these matters, it is clear that we may be able to make improvements based upon what Surrey County Council do.

4.3.2.2 Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council drew up a Bristol Democracy Plan in 1998. This document detailed the perceived problems and lack of democratic engagement in Bristol and proposed a number of changes to improve the situation. The plan focussed on many of the areas covered by this Best Value Review - particular issues which emerged were the level of officer support available to Councillors and the need to create space in Councillors' diaries for them to fulfil their role as ward representatives. Some of the recommendations made are shown in the table below:

Objective	Issue	Action
To strengthen councillors' representational role	The scope for providing councillors with more practical support	Examine feasibility of more support for councillors (in terms of ward issues and running surgeries etc) Improve induction training
To encourage wider citizen involvement in informing the council's decisions	The scope to encourage local people to attend and have their say at council and committee meetings	Examine scope to rationalise and simplify procedures by which people can ask questions etc Have annual 'state of the city' debate

As a result of the plan, the Council set up a Bristol Democracy Commission to examine what the City could do to improve the democratic health of the City of Bristol. The Commission was chaired by Paul Burton of the University of Bristol's Centre for Urban Studies and reported in May 2001.

Some of the recommendations of the Commission are listed below:

- Working effectively as a Councillor requires a full time commitment that makes it difficult to combine with full or even part-time employment elsewhere.
- The City Council, possibly in conjunction with the political parties, should hold workshops for potential candidates at which the roles and responsibilities of Councillors are presented. These should cover both the theory and the reality of being a Councillor and describe the support that is available for those who stand and succeed in being elected to office.
- Councillors should have access to more high quality training, both in substantive areas of policy interest and in matters of process such as effective decision making, communication skills and conflict resolution.

- Greater support should be given to Councillors in carrying out their representative role. A ward support officer should be assigned to each ward to help the member(s) engage with their constituents in effective, creative and imaginative ways and hence enhance their representative role.
- Communication and information technologies should continue to be used to ensure that relevant, digestible and up-to-date ward information is available to members and to constituents.
- Neighbourhood forums should be set up to cover units of 2 or 3 wards in the city.

The majority of these recommendations were accepted and acted upon. The Commission also recommended the introduction of an elected mayor to overcome some of the partisan politics. This was, however, rejected by the City Council in favour of a Leader and Executive model. Nevertheless, it appears that the Commission's conclusions and recommendations did help shape the Council's overall approach to democratic engagement.

The Democracy Plan itself is currently being revised. From conversations with officers at Bristol City Council, it is clear that the original plan was criticised for having been drawn up without full and proper consultation. Partly as a result of this, it was perceived that the plan was not 'owned' either by staff or by the political leadership of the authority. For these reasons, it appears that its implementation was hindered to some extent and its influence on the policies, plans and actions of the Council has not been as great as was envisaged. Nevertheless, we can learn from many of the proposed improvements contained in both the Democracy Plan and the Democracy Commission's report.

4.3.3 Suggestions for Improvement

There are some specific areas that emerge from the compare work where Carlisle City Council may be able to make improvements:

- Clarify and publicise the role of Members;
- Clarify, improve and publicise the methods of contacting Members;
- Improve officer support to Members in pursuing their local role, particularly surgeries;
- Consider potential improvements to information flow between Members and Officers;
- Improve training opportunities for Members in pursuing their local role;

From other authorities' experiences, the need for senior political and officer ownership of the improvement plan is once again underlined.

Potential Areas for Improvement	Possible Actions Required
Clarify and publicise role of Members	<p>Offer explanatory text on website and in Focus.</p> <p>Further refine Members' Job Descriptions</p> <p>Include text on 'how to become a Councillor' and consider running workshops in conjunction with political parties for potential candidates</p>
Clarify, improve and publicise methods of contacting Members	<p>Offer postcode searching to find Councillors on website (also ensure service is available through customer contact centre).</p> <p>Offer support for any Member wishing to set up their own website.</p> <p>Send out additional information with Council Tax Bill.</p>
Improve officer support to Members in pursuing their local role, particularly surgeries	<p>Produce document outlining different types/approaches to surgeries.</p> <p>Provide information on website about purpose and timing of surgeries.</p> <p>Provide officer resources for Member support.</p>
Consider potential improvements to information flow between Members and Officers	<p>Put onus on Heads of Business Units to let Members know about significant developments in their Wards.</p> <p>Extend and refine referral system.</p> <p>Produce a 'Members Handbook' which can be used as the principal source of information for Members.</p> <p>Provide a Members Section on the website.</p>
Improve training opportunities for Members in pursuing their local role	<p>Enable Members to carry out their own Personal Development Planning and 360° feedback, possibly making use of job descriptions.</p> <p>Improve induction process for Members to embrace necessary skills for local representative role.</p> <p>Offer opportunities for Members to attend training in surgery skills etc.</p> <p>Explore other aspects of Member training, including accessing information through IT.</p>

4.4 Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

Two authorities were considered in detail.

4.4.1 Barnsley

Proposals have been developed to increase the democratic engagement of young people. Barnsley held a Young People & Democratic Engagement Member Policy Workshop, which included both key politicians and young people co-opted from local youth organisations. As a result, Barnsley undertook detailed consultation with young people and prepared a report with recommendations to the Council on how to make progress.

These included:

- The promotion of democratic engagement with young people should be recognised as a corporate priority which requires specific co-ordination with a clear action plan and identified lead officer to ensure and monitor progress;
- The Council should help young people to set up local youth councils and forums;
- The Council should provide information direct to new voters to explain the value of and how to access, election processes;
- The Council should support and encourage local elected members in ways to contact local young people and action the specific approaches identified in this report;
- The Council should establish a rolling programme of events or conferences to encourage wider involvement, input and consideration of issues identified and important to young people;
- The Council must recognise that education and awareness is key to developing broad democratic engagement. The ambition of the new National Curriculum on Citizenship stated in the Crick Report of 'no less than a change in the political culture of the country both nationally and locally' should be actively supported by the Council;
- The Council, supported by its corporate lead officer, should develop and ensure application of good practice guidelines for use in all consultation and broad engagement process with young people;
- The Council must recognise that to overcome cynicism, and achieve lasting improvements in involvement, young people must be able to see clear positive outcomes from their input into new ways of involvement.

In response to the recommendations, the Council set up a Youth Engagement Unit with a dedicated budget which includes 3 senior youth workers and 12 part time workers.

The Council's response also makes it a corporate priority to address real concerns and cynicism expressed by young people, for a number of legal as well as political reasons, e.g. to meet obligations of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and consultation duties under Best Value.

Some particular examples of projects include:

- The Council sponsors and encourages two young people, elected by their peers to sit on the UK Youth Parliament;
- They took a group of young people to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg;
- 'Speakeasy' sessions are held where young people and Councillors meet to discuss a variety of issues;
- The development of a 'shadow' youth council.

4.4.2 *Dumfries and Galloway*

Young people are actively involved in the whole process including the planning stages of activities including the following:

- Interviews for Members of Staff – Young people have been involved in the interview process for senior staff within the Social Services Dept. Acting in an advisory capacity, their views were taken into account by the selection panel. Feedback on the final decision was offered to those participating;
- Developing Services and Opportunities – A number of initiatives exist where young people have been actively involved in developing services and opportunities for other young people. These include:
 - the running of a Youth Café;
 - the setting up of an information technology initiative;
 - a campaign to save what became a major youth resource centre;
 - the setting up of a youth action team which is looking at service provision in its own area.
- Students' Councils – Student Councils exist in most secondary schools. They offer an excellent opportunity for young people to take part in the decision-making processes of school life and ensure their voice is heard. They also provide a structure through which students can be consulted on wider issues;

- Youth Strategy Executive Group – Made up of over 20 young people and 8 Councillors representing all political groupings, this group meets every two months to consider policies and issues affecting young people across Dumfries & Galloway. The young people are also involved in a range of practical initiatives;
- Developing & Managing Services – Young people have been involved in the development of the largest youth centre in the region. This included working with architects and meeting with senior council members and officials. A Youth Management Committee is now being developed to ensure that young people continue to influence provision.

Young people need to be taken seriously and convinced that their contribution will make a difference to the quality of their life. As such, young people will benefit from:

- the experience of negotiating and listening to other opinions;
- the opportunity to develop their ability to respect and respond to the needs of others of different ages, different abilities and different cultures;
- the opportunity to learn new skills and increase knowledge;
- reinforcing their self identity and increasing their self esteem and self confidence;
- developing their leadership qualities;
- building a mutual understanding between other young people, their communities and those providing services;
- learning to be active citizens and therefore increasing their chance to take a more active role in community life;
- being valued as young citizens;
- the promotion of their personal and social development;
- encouraging their independence and autonomy;
- opportunities to influence decisions and policies;
- developing empowerment and equality;
- owning a decision in which they have participated, even when they do not agree with it;
- being able to make a contribution to change;

- an increased sense of ownership and a deeper understanding of taking responsibility;
- having the diversity of their ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds acknowledged and valued.

4.4.3 Analysis

It is clear we only scratch the surface in our attempts to empower young people and encourage their involvement, although in a Cumbrian and even a regional context, we do more than most other Authorities of our size.

However, to do what is clearly needed to improve this aspect of our work, requires several steps to be taken including:

- A much more co-ordinated approach between agencies and organisations who provide services for young people;
- Develop a more formal link between the City Council and the Youth Panel to enable regular dialogue between the two;
- The concept of the Youth Executive and Young Mayor to be integrated into the development programme for the Youth Workers, so that it can become more relevant and meaningful;
- A significant increase in the amount of money available to support young people's development;
- Regular opportunities for groups of young people to meet with Councillors to address issues;
- To develop, with other partners, including schools, but particularly with agencies working with disaffected and disengaged young people, an Action Plan which will create more opportunities for all young people to become involved in identifying issues and in the decision making processes.

Many of these initiatives could be undertaken without any additional funding. However, a good deal of additional officer time will be required to pursue a step-change improvement in the authority's support of youth engagement. This will inevitably require additional resources to be committed.

4.5 Theme 5: Electoral Aspects

The five review questions relating to electoral matters identified in the scoping are considered in turn below.

4.5.1. Why do people vote/not vote?

There are various pieces of general research into the reasons why people vote or do not vote at local elections. Comparison of the research findings might reveal similar explanations for non-participation and suggest appropriate practical steps that could be taken to arrest the decline in turnout.

An opinion survey conducted by NOP for the Electoral Commission to gauge attitudes towards local elections, carried out after the 2002 local elections confirmed earlier research that people are more likely to vote if they consider that an election is relevant to them and that their vote matters. The relevance of an election and the 'visibility' of elected representatives and institutions are key motivators to voting. Two thirds of those surveyed had never met their local Councillor and a similar number could not name one. Other factors which the public said would encourage them to vote at local elections include:

- the Council having more scope to make local decisions (60%);
- more opportunities to participate in local democracy between elections (52%);
- the Council having more scope to determine taxes/spending (51%).

Reasons for not voting were varied but included –

- lack of time (45% of non-voters);
- would not make a difference (41%);
- lack of knowledge of the issues (37%)

These findings echo an earlier MORI survey on voting attitudes carried out on behalf of the Local Government Association in 1998 –

- 37% had no opinion;
- 17% felt that voting would make no difference to local taxes and services; and
- 10% considered that their vote made no difference.

The Commission reported that non-voting is also related to non-registration (although there is some evidence to suggest that non-registration can be an effect not a cause). 13% and 15% respectively of 18-24 and 25-34 year old non-voters said they were not registered to vote. Nearly 70% said they did not know enough about the candidates and about 60% said they would be more likely to vote in local elections if they had more information about who their candidate was and what their views were.

Previous research for the Commission has shown that the 'how' and 'when' are less important motivators to voting than the 'who' and 'why'. The results of the survey of first-time voters in the May 2003 City Council elections (see Section 5.4) tends to support the view that the reasons why young people do not participate in elections has more to do with disengagement from the political process rather than the practicalities of voting.

Access and convenience are, nevertheless, issues for non-voters who want voting to be made easier. The 1998 MORI survey asked about the following initiatives to encourage people to vote -

- extending the voting period
- weekend voting
- polling stations in different locations eg supermarkets
- telephone voting
- postal voting
- voting by internet/digital TV

The survey results suggested that the changes that were most likely to increase the number of people who would vote were (in order of preference):

- polling stations in shopping centres
- telephone voting (in particular among 18-24 year olds)
- polling stations at supermarkets
- extending voting to more than one day
- voting by post

Since that survey was conducted, different voting methods have been piloted at local elections in 2000, 2002 and 2003 and the results of the pilots have shown that the expressed preferences have not in fact been borne out in practice. In 2000 and 2002, all-postal ballots were the only alternative to voting conventionally at a polling station that had significantly increased turnout.

The Electoral Commission's report into the 2003 pilot schemes confirms the effectiveness of all postal ballots in raising turnout. The issue of alternative voting methods is considering under question 4 below.

4.5.2. How can we ensure that people know that there is an election going on?

Individual voters are made aware that elections are taking place in a number of ways. The Returning Officer is required by law to publish a Notice of Election and a Notice of Poll within each ward where elections are taking place and to send a poll card to every elector at his/her registered address. In addition to these statutory requirements, elections have also been publicised locally by means of –

- press notices;
- adverts/articles in the 'Focus' magazine;
- posters on buses;
- the Council website;
- direct targeting of first-time voters;
- general press/radio/local TV coverage;
- activities of candidates/political parties.

Although the wording of the poll card is prescribed by Regulation, the size, format and method of delivery are at the discretion of the Returning Officer. The cards issued at elections administered by the Council's Returning Officer are ¼ A4 in size. Some Returning Officers issue larger cards (A5 size or even an A4 letter e.g. Cambridge) and thereby have been able to include additional information e.g. a map showing the polling station location and/or postal voting information.

Poll cards for elections in the City Council's area are delivered by Royal Mail and, although occasional reports of non-delivery are received, this method is generally fast and efficient. Hand delivery, while unlikely to be cost-effective in rural wards, is a method used elsewhere in urban areas e.g. Cambridge.

Official election notices are normally only displayed on notice boards in each urban ward (which double as polling station locations signs), on Parish notice boards and in the Civic Centre. In other authorities, a variety of locations are used e.g. libraries, bus stops, car parks, shopping centres and other media are employed e.g. car parking tickets, car stickers, till rolls, mail franking and Council promotional material.

Darlington Borough Council has raised awareness of elections through

- a publicity campaign using cartoons on Council vehicles
- the Council's website
- monthly Council newsletter

Stroud District Council has tried a variety of publicity methods including

- bus advertising in conjunction with neighbouring authorities
- messages on beer mats
- displaying road banners
- participating in road shows

Although the turnout in Stroud is higher than average (39.8% in 2002 and 36.7% in 2003), the Council has no measure of the effectiveness of any particular type of publicity and its influence (if any) on turnout.

4.5.3 How can we encourage more people (particularly young people) to register to vote?

Registration is fundamental to the democratic process because those who are not included on the electoral register are unable to vote. The Council's Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for compiling and maintaining the register of electors for the City. The register is revised each December following an annual household canvass conducted according to residence on 15th October. Individuals may also apply at any time to change their entry on the register if they change their name or address and the register is updated accordingly on a monthly basis.

The overall response to the annual canvass in the Carlisle area has consistently been around 97- 98% in recent years. Since last December when the 2002/03 electoral register was published, 471 people have been added to the register (0.6% of the electorate of 80,000) under the monthly 'rolling' registration procedure and 1102 (1.4%) have been deleted.

Very few electors are therefore taking the opportunity locally to re-register whenever they change address but are waiting until the annual canvass period. Stroud District Council has been proactive in publicising rolling registration through contact with estate agents and house builders, and distributing information with Council Tax bills. The Council is able to gauge the most effective means of publicity by tracking the sources of registration forms.

The layout of the annual registration form and the way in which the canvass is conducted both affect the level of response to the canvass. This in turn may have an effect on the completeness and accuracy of the register. If householders do not complete the form themselves and the Registration Officer has to obtain the necessary information from another source, there is a greater chance that the information may be inaccurate or that electors are omitted from the register. Research reported by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister highlighted good practice likely to result in a more accurate register, as follows (the practices marked with an asterisk are already followed by the Council's Registration Officer):

- pre-print and bar-code registration forms*
- use personal canvassers*
- use calling cards if no one in when canvasser visits
- pay canvassers by results
- mention the availability of credit on forms to encourage people to register*
- contact non-responding households by telephone*
- use a prize draw (or similar) to encourage registration
- use a letter threatening prosecution at the end of the registration period*
- consider prosecuting non-responders
- target students by use of advertising and contact with the Students Union
- liaise with other local authority departments (e.g. Council Tax)*
- work in a consortium with other authorities to try to increase registration.

A similar range of publicity methods described in Section 4.5.2 has been used to raise awareness of the need to register and the registration process. First time voters and those approaching voting age in the Carlisle area have been sent information during the canvass period and in advance of elections about how to register or how to vote. Stroud District Council has organised -

- visits to school 6th forms

- mock elections in schools
- a poster design competition
- Local Democracy Week events (a proposal for this year is to organise a debate with the local MP on the issue of lowering the voting age).

4.5.4 What would be the effect of introducing different mechanisms to vote?

Current voting procedures are set out in statutory election rules which define how and when polls are to be conducted. Different ways of voting e.g. by telephone, internet or by all postal ballot can only be used at present as part of a pilot scheme approved by the Secretary of State. Other authorities have participated in pilot schemes in recent years and the effect of introducing different mechanisms to vote can therefore be assessed by looking at the results of these schemes.

Electoral Commission reports evaluating the 2002 and 2003 schemes highlight those alternative voting methods that have been most successful in raising turnout and also those experiments that made little difference to participation levels. While voting by internet, telephone, digital television or text messaging may make voting more convenient when offered alongside conventional voting, the average turnout in councils which piloted e-voting methods in 2003 actually fell by 1.5%. On the other hand, the use of all-postal ballots raised turnouts to more than 50%.

Darlington and Copeland, for example, both piloted all-postal ballots and achieved turnouts of 51.5% and 55.7% respectively. Stroud, on the other hand, offered telephone and internet voting in addition to traditional methods but although 21% of those who voted did so electronically, overall turnout did not increase. Electronic voting simply gave electors more choice.

In the light of the latest pilot results, the Electoral Commission has recommended to government that there should be a statutory presumption that all local elections be run as all-postal ballots unless there are compelling reasons why an all-postal pilot would be inappropriate or disadvantageous for a group or groups of electors. The Commission, however, also recommends that all-postal voting should not progress beyond pilot status until household registration is replaced by individual voter registration and there are improved funding arrangements for electoral services.

These findings are relevant to any decisions which might be made about the Council's participation in any future pilot scheme. There are unlikely to be any pilots at the ordinary local elections in 2004 if parliament approves the government's proposal to combine the local and European Parliamentary elections on the same day in June 2004. County Council elections take place in 2005 so if the Council wished to pilot new voting methods, the only opportunity in the near future is likely to be at a by-election.

While the City Council has not volunteered to undertake a pilot scheme, the availability of postal voting on demand since early 2001 has been publicised with canvass forms, on poll cards and on the Council's website. A number of Councillors have also been active in promoting postal voting. The number of postal voters has increased from around 2300 in October 2002 to almost 4600 (6% of the electorate). Of those, some 70% voted in the May 2003 elections compared with an overall turnout of 31%.

4.5.5 What things have other authorities done to raise registration and turnout?

In addition to the steps outlined in sections 2 and 3 above, other action taken to increase registration and/or turnout include

- regular review of places used as polling stations in consultation with disability groups (Darlington)
- working with other agencies e.g. postal vote awareness via Meals on Wheels (Stroud)
- automated telephone registration (over 100 authorities nationwide in 2003) – to be introduced in Carlisle this year.

5 Consult Work

The other main strand of a Best Value Review is the 'consult' work. Given the subject of the review, it was particularly important that the work was 'outward facing' and looked to involve the key groups involved in democratic engagement.

5.1 Consult with Members

This included a workshop session with the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and also focus groups with the three main party groups. These were all carried out towards the beginning of the review in an attempt to define where the main problems were and suggestions for improvements. As one might expect, the views expressed in these sessions varied considerably (detailed notes from the groups are reproduced in Appendix 3). Nevertheless, some consistent themes did emerge and these, along with other main points emerging from consultation with Members, are highlighted below.

Theme 1: Access and Opportunity

Members identified the modernised structure as having reduced the level of democratic engagement. The system of meetings tended to reduce the level of debate and involvement of both the public and 'backbench' Members. It was also noted that there was little public knowledge of how the modernised system worked.

There was some concern that the official workings of the Council were not being made 'transparent' – that insufficient information was being made

available for the public/Members to understand what decisions were being made and what the committees were discussing. Members were open to the prospect of changing aspects of official meetings to make them more engaging and attractive to the public. This might involve more 'question and answer' sessions at the beginning of meetings or meetings with a single theme of direct interest to the community. There was also support for web-casting of meetings.

Area working received support from many members and was identified as a key component in improving democratic engagement. Alongside this, Members were supportive of a stronger community focus for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Theme 2: Policy Aspects

Some members believed that the public was being given a real say in policy development but others expressed scepticism about the extent to which public opinion was genuinely used to shape policy. There were also concerns about the use of the Citizens Panel – some Members felt that this failed to reflect the views of 'hard to reach' groups. Last year's Budget consultation was criticised as being gesture consultation.

The extent of consultation was questioned – the balance between representative democracy (through Councillors) and direct consultation was raised. In general, it was felt that the authority should be selective and only consult when it was likely to be productive and a genuine influence on policy.

The importance of feeding back to those consulted was emphasised, even where decisions were taken against the views of the public. Members also thought that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could do more 'outreach' work, seeking to act as a channel for the community's views.

Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public

There were several recurring themes from the consultation with Members. Firstly, Members expressed concerns that the information flows between Members and officers were now less good than they had been historically. There was now less day-to-day interaction between Members and officers and this had led to a deterioration in the information flow between the two groups. Although Members Briefings are useful, they provide largely historical information, rather than informing Members of forthcoming events. Some Members suggested that the onus should be on Business Unit Heads to make sure that Members were adequately informed about developments, particularly ward-specific issues. Members were also generally agreed that there was a need for some research support for Members to help fulfil their local representational role.

The lack of dedicated space for Members to work in was also a problem. With no specific room detailed as a Members Library, it was more difficult for

Members to keep up to date with Government papers etc. A Members Library could also provide a 'clearing house' for information from officers.

Other issues raised were that the system of referral forms (largely pursued by Labour Members) works fairly well and could be expanded to all Members with greater support from officers. Some Members also pressed the need for a slightly different approach to induction, with training in a variety of the skills needed for local representation.

Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

Members were supportive of the need for greater efforts to connect with young people. Against this, Members commented that the confrontational nature of both local and national was a turn-off for young people.

Various measures to improve the links with young people were supported and these included stronger links between the developing Youth Panel and the Executive. There was a general recognition that Councillors would need to be more directly involved, through talking in schools, assisting with the Citizenship education etc.

Some Members were concerned that the current Youth Forum did not adequately represent all groups in society and that young people would be better engaged within an area working initiative.

On 'other groups', it was recognised that there was an information gap in the authority in that there was not a complete list of representative groups and contact details within the authority. Some Members were concerned that people on low incomes should be included as a 'hard to reach' group since they were often excluded.

Theme 5: Electoral Aspects

Members were supportive of different methods for voting but emphasised that it was important to make voting seem relevant to people as well as making it easier to vote. Some Members considered the current polling stations unattractive and were, therefore, very supportive of 'remote' voting mechanisms. They were also concerned that any new methods must be proven to be secure.

Members suggested that more extensive advertising of postal voting (perhaps on the council's fleet of vehicles) could be effective.

5.2 Consult with Citizens Panel

The key questions (as laid out in the scoping work) were used to produce a questionnaire that was sent to the City's Citizens Panel in September 2003.

1550 questionnaires were sent out and 778 responses were received. The data was then input by CN Research. The survey was targeted at asking questions about Council meetings, who attends and how many attend, who votes, why and when they vote, what is the best method of contacting your local councillor. How can the youth be encouraged to vote and are they adequately consulted?

The key points to emerge are highlighted below.

Meetings

- 92% of respondents have never attended a council meeting, of those that have, 50% attended a full council meeting;
- 48% of respondents stated that the council should hold open meetings to debate selected subjects to encourage people to attend meetings.

Policy Aspects

- 56% of respondents said they would contact the Council directly if they had a complaint to make;
- 57% said they think the people of Carlisle do not get to influence what the council does;
- Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents (84%) thought the people of Carlisle should be able to influence the council more;
- Nearly two thirds of respondents 65% feel that their views as Citizens Panel members help to shape Council policy;
- 92% of respondents felt that if they were not a member of the citizens panel they would not feel involved in the decision making process.

Interaction between Members and the Public

- 70% of respondents said they knew who their councillor was;
- 51% of respondents said they did not know much about what their councillor does;
- Only 29% of respondents had contacted their councillor in the last five years, of those who had 62% said they were satisfied with how the councillor dealt with their enquiry;
- 80% of respondents are unlikely to attend a councillors surgery in their ward;
- 51% of respondents said that they would be likely to use a street surgery;
- 62% of respondents said they would attend a meeting in their ward if county councillors and other representatives were available;
- Nearly half of respondents (45%) said that leaflets would help councillors become more available;
- The telephone is the preferred method for getting in touch with their councillor;
- 63% believe they have good access to their councillors.

Electoral Aspects

- Most respondents (72%) did not give an answer to the reason they did not vote at the last local elections, however 6.4% said they did not vote because they were away on holiday;

- If there were more choice in the way people vote the top three preferences were, At usual polling station (50%), By post (35%) and Via the internet (22%).

Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

- 91% of respondents think the council should do talks on voting and its importance in schools and youth clubs;
- 89% of respondents think the council can obtain young people views by going to schools, colleges and universities;
- 53% of respondents believe that promoting political parties at 6th form, colleges and universities could encourage young people to vote;
- Respondents think that young people are not adequately consulted (53%) as well as the elderly (47%).

5.3 Consult with Staff

After the initial consult work with staff and the compare work, the review team came to the conclusion that consultation with staff would be most effective if it was based on a draft action plan. In this way, staff were asked for their opinions on the changes proposed and also asked to identify where improvements had been overlooked.

Amongst the points made were:

- That in many cases 'hard to reach' groups were best involved by officers and Members going along to the meetings of those groups, rather than attempting to persuade representatives to attend official meetings of the council;
- The need for training for officers to use 'simple English' in meetings rather than jargon;
- The need to re-involve marginalised Members in the authority;
- Central processing of information for Members about developments in their wards would be desirable;

5.4 Consultation with Others

5.4.1 *Attainers*

'Attainers' refers to the group of people who have newly reached voting age at the last election. The Review Team decided to send the 351 attainers at the 2003 election a questionnaire designed to test their reasons for voting/not voting. The questionnaire sent and the detailed results are found in Appendix 2. For some answers, the group was split into 'voters' and 'non-voters' according to their behaviour at the local election in May 2003. Some of the key points raised by this work were:

- There was good awareness amongst respondents of the 'Don't Vote, Don't Moan' publicity campaign by the Council;

- Reasons for not voting were many and varied but in addition to the 'apathetic' reasons (not thinking it was important, forgetting, not being bothered), there were also a fair number stating that they did not feel sufficiently well informed to vote or that no candidate adequately represented their views;
- Of those who did vote, around half voted because they 'felt it is important to vote'. Just 11% voted because they were 'interested in local government'.
- Although voting in a general election was considered to be more important than voting in a local election, around 90% of respondents considered that voting in general or local elections was either 'very important' or 'fairly important'.
- The respondents showed good awareness of postal voting (83%).
- Interestingly, non-voters preferred new forms of voting (post, internet, mobile phone messaging) whilst voters tended to prefer the traditional forms of voting at a polling booth.
- Some of the most interesting findings from this research were provided in the open-ended question asking for other comments on voting. Many pleas were made here to the candidates to communicate better with young people and for better information on the importance of voting to be provided. The unprocessed answers are given on the final page in Appendix 2 and form a powerful message to those looking to re-engage young people in local politics.

5.4.2 *Parish Councils*

Parish Councils in the District were sent a copy of the scoping paper for the review and asked for their comments. The full comments are reproduced in Appendix 4.

The key issues highlighted by Parish Councils included the following:

- An overarching point is that the way to improve democratic engagement is to show people that, when they become engaged, it makes a difference. As a City Council, we need to be able to show how the outcome changed as a result of the consultation and engagement;
- Reinforcement of the need to re-engage with young people through a variety of different mechanisms – in schools, via youth councils etc;
- The role of Local Strategic Partnerships in improving democratic engagement;
- The poor quality of meetings along with the use of language in reports and on agendas that was inaccessible for the public;
- Support for trying alternative voting mechanisms (postal, internet etc);
- Two councils questioned whether City Council consultation was meaningful, suggesting that reports differ little from consultation to final version. The need for feedback after consultation was emphasised;
- The need for consultation to be adventurous in the mechanisms employed – using consultation bus etc;

6 Analysis of Consult and Compare Work

6.1 Theme 1: Access and opportunity in official meetings of the Council

The absence of the general public from most meetings would seem to demonstrate that, on this level at least, the authority is not engaging with the public. More than 90% of the Citizens Panel respondents had never attended a Council meeting. It is worth noting that around 40% of people who had not attended a council meeting said that this was because they did not know the dates and times when meetings were held or that they did not know it was possible to attend.

The work by the students from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts demonstrated that official meetings of the council are quite unappealing. The lack of appeal of these meetings stems from a variety of reasons: the venues in which the meetings are held, the style in which business is conducted, other housekeeping issues, the style that reports are written and the audience for which they are intended.

It seems quite clear that the vast majority of council business which is taking place in public meetings is not really accessible to the public. The concept of accessibility goes beyond simple understanding of what is happening in the meetings and encompasses the potential for engagement with members of the general public at the meetings. There is limited potential for members of the public to pose questions at public meetings of the council and relatively little use is made of the existing mechanisms available to do so.

The compare work with other authorities highlighted that few authorities had succeeded in attracting members of the public to routine meetings of the council, whatever 'housekeeping' changes they had made to the style and content. What had worked was taking topical issues and promoting quite a small number of meetings, generally with a single issue focus to each meeting and often with some of the authority's partners also present. Meetings which were outside of the usual venues for Council meetings also tended to attract a larger number of members of the public. These two findings were echoed in the results of the Citizens Panel questions: the two most popular changes identified to improve meetings were 'organise open meetings to debate a selected subject' (48%) and 'hold meetings in different parts of the district' (29%).

This analysis leads us to make two main conclusions – firstly, that the way we do business in official meetings of the council (agendas, minutes, reports, procedural aspects etc) makes them less accessible than they should be. There is sometimes a lack of clarity in the 'furniture' of the committee meetings – for example, by reading an agenda, a member of the public should be able to understand the business that the Committee is undertaking and what the Committee is hoping to achieve. This is not always the case. But also, some reports written for the public meetings of council are not written in such a way that a general audience can easily understand them. It is

acknowledged good practice for reports to be written so that only a very limited amount of prior knowledge is required to follow them. In other words, wherever possible, reports should be 'stand alone' and written with a general audience in mind, rather than just the Executive.

Secondly, the level of direct engagement and dialogue with the public through official meetings is extremely low and needs to be improved. There is little opportunity for the public to be more involved and where opportunity does exist, only very limited use is made.

A third, related, conclusion is that as we introduce changes to meetings so that they provide more interest and enable a better dialogue with the public, we need to promote those meetings through the website and press. Even if we introduce new mechanisms and publicly focussed meetings, these measures are unlikely to succeed unless we make it clear that things have changed and emphasise just how people can ensure that their views are accounted for.

There is a further element of promotion/education which became clear during our research: it is apparent that we need to make clear how the modernised structure of Executive and Overview and Scrutiny works. We should also aim to clarify the distinction between the roles of Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council.

- As a democratically accountable public body, we should ensure that any aspects of the authority's work to which the public have access are as easily understood as possible;
- To improve the democratic engagement of the authority, different types of meeting held in different locations are required;
- We need to ensure that we promote official meetings with content that is likely to be interesting to the public;
- We need to undertake a process of providing information and education about the modernised political arrangements at the council and the responsibilities of Carlisle City Council.

6.2 Theme 2: Policy Aspects

This theme centres on how well the authority approaches and manages consultation. Of course, consultation covers a huge range of activities – it can range from a simple consultation on a single aspect of service delivery to a full consultation on the direction of the authority. Similarly, the nature of consultation can vary dramatically – for example, it can be used to guide the development of policy at a very early stage or to select from a given number of options at the end of the policy development process.

An important piece of background information for the analysis of this theme was that there has been a huge increase in consultation in recent years from both public and private bodies. There is also considerable evidence that this rise in consultation activity threatens to devalue the process of consultation and reduce its effectiveness. So-called 'consultation fatigue' from the public

and organisations alike is much reported. It is therefore important that we define Carlisle City Council's approach to consultation so that it does not contribute unduly to that fatigue.

The evidence highlights that the authority has undertaken some large consultations rather effectively, but that there are a number of aspects of consultation work where we could improve our performance. In an overall sense, we are failing to take an adequately corporate approach to consultation – this is particularly true for some of the smaller, more routine pieces of consultation that the authority undertakes. There is also a danger of undertaking 'gesture' consultation, where the aim is to appear to consult, rather than truly seeking people's views so as to help shape policy.

The findings from the Citizens Panel showed that more than half of respondents (57%) thought that the people of Carlisle did not get to influence what the Council does and nearly 85% thought that Carlisle people should have more influence over what the Council does. These findings are disappointing and will take considerable effort and good practice to overcome.

There are some specific fundamentals where we do not always match best practice:

- Co-ordination: Consultation is sometimes carried out by staff within a business unit with little reference to the Research Officer in the Policy and Performance Unit responsible for consultation. Inevitably, this means that we lose any sense of a corporate approach to consultation and that there is the potential to consult the same people many times about similar issues;
- Feedback: Feeding back to those consulted about the outcome of the consultation. By consulting, one raises people's expectations of change. It is, therefore, very important to feed back to those consulted, explaining exactly what changes will be made. At present, there is regular feedback to the Citizens Panel but this is not found in all the consultation work of the authority;
- Evaluation: Assessing the effectiveness of the consultation we undertake.

There are various possible mechanisms to bring a more consistent and coherent approach to consultation. A Corporate Consultation Policy was developed to fill some of the gaps identified early on in the course of the review. The introduction of this revised policy should help to improve the consistency of the way we consult and places the emphasis on business unit heads to make sure that consultation is planned properly and undertaken with the co-operation of the Research Officer (Lynne Wild).

However, we are concerned that some authorities which have introduced consultation policies have found that little attention is paid to these documents. We need a mechanism to ensure that the Corporate Consultation Policy is implemented and adhered to.

We believe that there may be a need to provide a mechanism to ensure that the authority's approach to consultation is a more considered one which is corporately 'owned'. This will not necessarily be a resource-intensive task but might require the input of someone with a little distance from the day-to-day work of the authority. We are particularly encouraged by the option taken by Chester City Council which set up a Research Standards Panel that included a representative of Chester College along with Members of the Executive and the Scrutiny Panels. The Research Standards Panel agrees the Research and Consultation Plan for Chester and ensures that quality standards are met.

A new Corporate Consultation Policy has emerged from this review. Rather than press ahead with a mechanism to make sure this policy is being used, it may be more appropriate to allow a 'bedding in' period before reviewing how well the new policy is working and whether an additional mechanism, such as a Research Standards Panel, is required.

Although it is always difficult to measure performance in areas like consultation, it seems likely that the authority would benefit from taking part in some regular benchmarking activity for consultation, thereby enabling it to track and develop best practice more regularly.

There is another mechanism which could be used more extensively to gather public views – the Overview and Scrutiny Committees which are seen by many as having a 'community outreach' role. The Overview and Scrutiny function is still developing and the O&S Support staff plan to pursue a more community-focussed approach in the next year. They are also working to pursue more policy development work and this should ensure that Councillors generally are more involved in the process of consultation.

- The public do not believe that they influence policy but would like to do so;
- Consultation lacks a corporate approach and does not always employ all aspects of best practice;
- Experience from other authorities shows that the new Corporate Consultation Policy will need support and enforcement if it is to be effective.

6.3 Theme 3: Interaction between Members and the public

The heart of the authority's democratic engagement must lie with the interactions between the elected Members and the public. We examined this area by considering both the mechanisms by which Councillors interact with the public and also the assistance that we, as officers of the Council, offer in support. Of course, in examining changes which individual Members could make, officers can only offer advice and guidance on best practice, rather than make particular changes.

The overwhelming message which emerged from consultation with Members, the public and the compare work with other authorities was that the desire for meaningful, localised ways of working was very strong. It is noteworthy that the support from Members was, broadly speaking, across the political

spectrum. It is perceived that this way of working is the most effective mechanism to reinvigorate very local democracy.

Beyond the question of local working, the level of support offered to Members was a common theme. In general, it was considered that Members did not receive adequate support from officers to fulfil their local role – the support sought ranged from practical research support to simply being informed of what the Council was doing, particularly on a ward-basis. The perception of Members was that there was a gulf developing between the officers and Members of the Council.

The facilities available for Members were also queried and the absence of a Members Room (for use by all Members) was highlighted. Such a room could be particularly useful for improving general communication between officers and Members through the use of noticeboards, library facilities etc.

Another key element of enabling Members to fulfil their local role is training. It must be ensured that induction and training are focused in the right areas. This matter is already the subject of work by the Head of Member Support and Employee Services. There is also a need for officers to highlight best practice in some areas – for example, a best practice guide to running surgeries could be provided.

Moving to the public side of the relationship, the popular discussion of public engagement with local authorities usually refers to apathy and a lack of interest from the general public. But this appears to be only a partial picture. We found that a significant proportion of people are interested but are not being 'reached' by officers and Members of the authority.

For example, the evidence from young people (particularly from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts students and from the Reference Group) shows that there may be a group of people who would show interest in local government if we improved the ways in which we communicate with them. The remedy lies with both officers (communicating about what the Council does and how it operates politically) and Members (communicating political messages). This conclusion is also echoed in findings from the Electoral Commission which show that 70% of people did not know enough about the candidates and 60% said they would be more likely to vote if they had more information about the candidates. Some of these issues should be dealt with by the efforts to improve meetings of the council but other changes will be necessary.

From the Citizens Panel findings, there is a reasonable level of satisfaction (more than 60%) in individuals who have contacted a councillor in the last 5 years. Two specific approaches to face-to-face engagement between members and the public received support – just over 50% of respondents said they would use a 'street surgery' (where a postcard drop is done in an area advising that a councillor will be available to call at individual houses at a given time and date if you put the postcard in the window) if it were offered and more than 60% said that they were likely to attend regular meetings in the ward where the city councillor, county councillor and other representatives

(e.g. police) were available. Beyond the issue of face-to-face contact, there was strong support (45%) from people for leaflets from councillors keeping people up to date.

- There is a strong desire from Members for more localised ways of working;
- Support and training for Members must enable them to fulfil their local role;
- Officers and Members need to improve the level of communication about the political workings of the council so that members of the public who *could* be interested do indeed become engaged.

6.4 Theme 4: Youth Engagement and Engagement with Other Groups

Youth Engagement

The problem of youth disengagement from local politics and local authorities is one which is recognised as a national issue. Our own research confirmed that this is also the case in Carlisle. From the comparison research, however, it is not clear that other authorities are pursuing initiatives significantly different from those planned within Carlisle City Council.

There must also be a note of caution sounded for this theme – as with the electoral theme below, this is generally recognised as a national problem and one which an individual local authority can only attempt to tackle in part. It is also the case that many of the improvements to encourage better democratic engagement generally across the authority will, of course, assist engagement with young people too.

As noted above though, it does seem to be the case that there may be a proportion of young people who could be engaged and involved in the council but who are not always being reached. This would seem to imply that if the authority stepped up its efforts to engage young people, there would be a receptive audience. The most obvious areas to pursue here are assisting schools in the delivery of Citizenship classes, through the provision of materials and the involvement of Councillors, and the continued development of initiatives such as the 'Young Mayor', 'Young Executive' and the Youth Panel. There is also evidence that youth initiatives such as the 'Don't Vote, Don't Moan' are making an impact and could usefully be extended. Importantly, the evidence also indicates that this may need to be backed up with a greater presence from the political parties, councillors and candidates. In essence, young people complained that candidates did not make the effort to communicate with them so they did not bother voting. One example of a way of overcoming this would be to hold an annual event to which all 'attainers' (those reaching voting age) are invited to discuss policy matters with Councillors.

The age of councillors was also raised by some of the young people we talked to and they suggested that younger candidates for Council would make them more likely to vote and be interested in local politics. Obviously, candidate selection is a matter for the political parties but the authority could use the

website and other communications to encourage young people (or, indeed, any member of the general public) to consider standing to be a councillor. Other authorities provide such information and some even run workshops for prospective candidates to help them understand what the work of a councillor entails.

- Work with young people needs to be extended and used to influence policy more directly (Youth Panel, Young Mayor, Young Executive)
- Work with young people needs to involve Councillors more (Citizenship teaching, 'Don't Vote, Don't Moan' campaigns);
- Information and encouragement of general public to put themselves forward as candidates for local elections.

Engagement with Other Groups

In considering which other groups could be especially disengaged from the council, the review team became aware that there was not a systematic approach within the authority to help engage with any of the so-called 'hard-to-reach groups'. Within this review, we attempted to involve some of these groups through the Reference Group.

It was apparent that the problem of engaging many of the 'hard-to-reach' groups was one being faced by other public bodies in Cumbria. It also became clear that, due to the relatively small numbers of ethnic minorities in Cumbria, there is a real risk of these groups being consulted by many different public bodies. This issue has been recognised by others within Cumbria and the County Council facilitated a Joint Working Group on Race and Equality Issues which met for the first time in October 2003. This group is intended to co-ordinate efforts to improve the links between public bodies and some hard to reach groups. The group includes representatives of the other District Councils in Cumbria along with the Police, Health Authorities and other public bodies. The Joint Working Group is now in the process of developing a plan for co-operative working on consultation with the various groups. The Review Team decided that the question of democratic engagement with other groups was best pursued through the Joint Working Group as there was a high risk of merely duplicating its work in this Best Value Review.

6.5 Theme 5: Electoral Aspects

Although the turnout for local elections is a useful indicator of the overall interest in local politics and the authority, research shows there to be a limited amount that a local authority can realistically do to increase the proportion of the electorate turning out to vote.

Nevertheless, as a responsible local authority, we must ensure we are doing all we can to engage with the electorate (or potential electorate) so that, all other factors being equal, they will vote. In effect, this review set out to ensure that we are removing all potential barriers to voting. Further, it would be hoped

that turnout might increase over time as an effect of other changes resulting from this review.

Unfortunately, the members of the Citizens Panel who did not vote at the last local election were not particularly forthcoming in giving reasons (more than 70% did not answer the question). Although some said they were on holiday, could not decide who to vote for or did not receive information about the candidates, there are few clear messages to be drawn from the findings.

The compare work we did with other authorities demonstrated that no local authority could claim with certainty that changes in practice have improved turnout. There are, however, some relatively minor changes that we could make to our procedures for registration and voting which might increase turnout. In particular, it seems likely that some imaginative working with other authorities and partners could help to target particular groups of society to ensure that they are on the electoral register and are aware of their opportunities to vote.

But more significant increases will only come with a reinvigorated local democratic process. People need to be convinced that voting matters. That is something which is primarily a matter for Members and the political parties. It does seem apparent that the sheer frequency of election by thirds (ie one third of the council is elected each year) tends to diminish the appetite of the electorate for voting and this is something which the authority could look at.

On the matter of voting mechanisms, of course, there have been various pilot systems around the country for different methods of voting which have had some effect on voting turnout. Aside from pilot schemes, the mechanisms for voting are prescribed by central Government.

However, it was a clear message, particularly from young people, that flexibility about the mechanisms used for voting could be helpful – that methods such as phone voting and internet voting would bring increased numbers of young people. But there also remains a strong preference from many for retaining the traditional form of voting at a polling station. From the Citizens Panel findings, it is very clear that older voters retain a preference for the traditional polling station. The enthusiasm for modern forms of voting should also be tempered with the evidence from pilot schemes which indicates that electronic forms of voting did little to increase turnout.

Given that the authority has no choice at present about the methods used for voting, it may be that we establish a position whereby the authority looks to be at the forefront of piloting new voting mechanisms. Carlisle has not previously taken part in pilots for different voting systems and the evidence from local young people would suggest that a willingness to try out new methods would be a step forward for the authority.

Young people offered a clear message about the candidates. Even for those young people who are interested in local politics, the candidates are often failing to connect. This picture emerged from the work done by students at the

Cumbria Institute of the Arts and the results of the attainer questionnaire. There is also a perception that young people do not see a candidate that represents their views. In summary, the much talked about 'apathy' is only a partial truth – some people are saying they would be interested in local politics but can find no reason to engage.

- Willingness to try new forms of voting;
- Work in partnership with others to reach people not on register and follow remaining elements of best practice.

7 Action Plan

The previous section of the report has developed the review team's analysis of the problems as highlighted by the evidence we sought. This section has taken that analysis and details actions which will be taken within the authority to put right those problems.

NB The Action Plan is presented as a separate document.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Corporate Consultation Policy

This policy was agreed in December 2003. It will be fully implemented in 2004, once Lynne Wild returns to post.

Text of Corporate Consultation Policy:

Introduction

Improving consultation with local people is at the heart of the Government's agenda to modernise local government. The Consultation Paper – Modernising Local Government. Local Democracy and Community Leadership (1998) comments: *"The Government has a clear vision of successfully modernised local government. It will be characterised by councils which are once again engaged directly with their local communities. Such councils will actively promote public participation. Such open and in-touch councils will be at the centre of their local communities."*

Developing a clear corporate framework to guide and inform arrangements for consultation across the Authority will benefit the Council by:

- Delivering services that are more responsive to local needs;
- Ensuring that local people have a better understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve;
- Promoting a wider acceptance by local people of Council decisions.

Effective consultation can strengthen local democracy because it encourages a closer relationship between decision-makers and the people affected by their decisions. Local people become more aware of public policy and council officers and councillors develop a better understanding of the public's point of view. A good example of consultation impacting on policy in Carlisle City Council is with the budget planning process. The political party in power changed their budget priorities to reflect the priorities highlighted by research carried out with the electorate.

The intention is that this document should enable you to decide whether using consultation is appropriate, give you some idea of the format it could take and who you may wish to consult.

This document is not intended to be a stand-alone guide through the consultation process - it is only a starting point.

Corporate Approach to Consultation

The public's perception of the authority can be shaped by how we consult. It is, therefore, important that there is a corporate approach to consultation. This is not to say that individual business units should not undertake consultation, just that this should be carried out after seeking advice from the Policy and Performance Team.

It is particularly important that consultation is only undertaken after due consideration and planning. It is vital that each Business Unit plans well ahead for when it wishes to consult, includes details in the annual Business Unit Plan and sets aside funds from its budget to undertake the consultation. A common complaint from people who have been involved in consultation is that they never receive any feedback telling them how their views have been incorporated into the decision-making process, which can heighten feelings of consultation fatigue and encourage cynicism about the authority's motives. Feeding back to participants the results of any consultation exercise is an essential ingredient in consultation best practice and must be included in any consultation exercise.

An important part of this policy is to ensure that the public is not being subjected to 'consultation fatigue', by constantly targeting certain groups or people for consultation. It is the intention that all current research will be entered on a consultation/research database, which will be accessible in the public folders. This will allow officers and Members the opportunity for joint working on consultation issues throughout the Authority. It should also help structure the timetable for consultation throughout the year.

Once established, the database could be linked to a page on the Website which includes details of past, current and future consultations. In addition to being able to explore the results of previous consultations, it would also be possible for members of the public to register their interest in upcoming consultations.

Why Consult?

The Government White Paper "Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People" stresses the need for local authorities to consult more:

"The Government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils..."

Beyond the Government's wishes, good consultation on important aspects of policy and service delivery will ensure that the Council is responding to the needs of the public that it serves.

Consultation is useful when considering some broad aspect of policy (e.g. City Vision) but will often also be appropriate when reviewing specific aspects of the services the Council provides (e.g. the refuse collection). We are also required to undertake some consultation work as part of our statutory duties – for example, consultation on planning applications and the Local Plan review.

It is important to ask yourself the question "What will we learn by consulting?" and to ensure that you are not pre-judging the outcome of the consultation. Work through the checklist at the end of this document to make sure that consultation will be a useful step. Here are a few examples of when **not** to consult:

- When the policy development process cannot be modified;
- When there is only one option open to the council;
- When we already have the recent views of people from an earlier consultation process (eg in City Vision);
- When the aims of the consultation are not well defined.

Who to Consult?

It is important to consult everyone who may be affected, including groups, which are sometimes hard to reach for example, ethnic minority groups. Remember that some groups may have already been consulted by the Council on a similar matter and you may be able to use the results from this work. Stakeholders could include:

- Councillors;
- People living in the district;
- People working in the district;
- Users of Council services;
- People who don't currently use Council services;
- Council-tax payers;
- The local business community;
- Staff;
- Trades Unions;

- The voluntary sector;
- Other public agencies and partnerships that we work with.

How to Consult?

There are different consultation methods available and it is important to match your needs to the appropriate consultation methods. The methods will vary with both the purpose of the consultation and the people/organisations being consulted.

Research can be continuous, as in the process of producing performance indicator information, or it can be a one-off research exercise to help shape policy or highlight improvements or changes to services.

Research methods essentially split down into quantitative and qualitative. Some of the quantitative methods that are available are:

- Citizens Panel Questionnaires (self-completion and telephone);
- User satisfaction surveys;
- Employee surveys;

Some qualitative research methods include:

- Focus Group discussions;
- Workshops;
- Forums;
- In-depth interviewing;
- Mystery shopping.

Any given piece of consultation may make use of just one or a number of these different methods. For example, different types of consultation would be used to carry out the following:

- To determine what the people of Carlisle considered to be the main goals for the city in the future (City Vision) – several different methods were used, both quantitative and qualitative with all the different stakeholders;
- To help select a particular Budget option and priorities for spending from a number determined by previous research – a relatively simple survey and voting system would be used to canvass households in the district;
- To determine what higher education students think about the services they receive from the Council – this would mostly involve qualitative work, probably focus groups.

The method and type of consultation for your particular needs is best decided in conjunction with Lynne Wild, Research Officer, Policy and Performance Team.

Other things to consider

Scale: We have already noted the problems of fatigue on behalf of those consulted. This is important. As an authority, we must be careful to consult only when it is appropriate. Beyond this, the scale of the consultation must be suitable to the task in hand. For example, revising the Community Strategy will require widespread and extensive consultation with the different stakeholders in the community. However, considering a change in the delivery of a particular service can be dealt with in a simpler way, perhaps through a question to the Citizens Panel.

Resources : Consulting always has a cost – usually both a direct financial one and an indirect one of officer time. It is also worth remembering that you are using other people's resources – their time and effort – when you consult them.

You should set aside resources for the consultation part of the process. As noted earlier, the most effective way to do this is through considering what consultations may be required as part of your Business Unit Planning process.

What to do next

Work through the checklist below, thinking carefully about what you want to achieve by consulting.

Checklist

Question	Answer
What are you consulting people about?	
Who are you consulting - who is likely to be affected by or have a direct interest in the issue?	
Has the target group been consulted recently about a similar issue?	
How and when will the target group be consulted?	
What will be the outcomes of consultation - how will it affect Council policy or practice?	
How will you continue to communicate with those you have consulted?	
How will you feedback results and actions taken to participants?	
Have you contacted Policy & Performance? (Lynne Wild, Research Officer)	

Carlisle City Council is committed to ensuring consultation is carried out in a considered, effective, open way that can genuinely shape policy. The principles outlined in this document reflect best practice and should be used as a reference point for all consultation work carried out by the authority.

Appendix 2. Attainers Questionnaire and Findings

During August 2003 a questionnaire was mailed to all the eligible attainers turning 18 by the May elections 2003. This included 72 young people that voted and 279 that did not vote in May 2003. The questionnaire was carried out to look at the reasoning behind why young people choose to vote or not to vote, as part of the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review. By the end of fieldwork 64 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 18%.

Were you aware of a marketing campaign aimed at first time voters, which was carried out in May called "Don't Vote, don't moan"?

Overall, 70% were aware of the marketing campaign and 30% were unaware of the campaign. Of the young people that voted, 87% were aware of the campaign. For those that did not vote, only 55% were aware of the campaign.

5 (16%) of the 31 that voted said the campaign encouraged them to vote. 20 (65%) said they would have voted anyway and 6 (19%) did not answer the question.

Why did you NOT vote at the May election? (Asked to the 33 that did not vote)

The 33 that did not vote gave the following reasons for not voting in the May election, see Table 1. (Some gave more than one reason, so the base number of responses is greater than 33)

Table 1

Absolute Break % Responses	
Base	36
Why did you not vote at the May election?	
On holiday/away from area	4 11%
Couldn't be bothered	3 8%
Forgot about it	7 19%
Ill health	1 3%
did not know about the election	2 6%
Did not think it was important	3 8%
Did not know where the polling station is	2 6%
Some other reason	14 39%

Some other reason (14):

- Did not find it fair on any group when I did not know anything about whom I would vote for or against
- I also know too little about politics to justify making a mistake in voting and then moaning about it later
- Wasn't sure what each parties offered
- Poor advertising. No representatives made themselves known. Poor organisation
- Didn't know who the candidates were or what their campaigns were
- Didn't feel informed enough about who to vote for
- I was working at school did not get the chance
- I chose not to vote because of your "Don't vote, don't moan" campaign
- Didn't want to vote for either of the candidates
- Left it too late to vote by post
- Hadn't followed the campaigns, so it would not be right voting
- No standing candidate that represented my views
- Did not know how to register
- Moved house, did not get mail till after elections

Why did you vote at the May election? (Asked to the 31 that voted)

Over half the voters did so because they "feel it is important to vote", see Table 2. (Voters could tick as many boxes as applicable, so the base number is greater than 31)

Table 2

Absolute Break % Responses	
Base	44
Why did you vote at the May election?	
Just happened to be passing polling station	2 5%
Feel it is important to vote	23 52%
Parents/relatives asked you to go with them	8 18%
Interested in local government	5 11%
Because of the "don't vote, don't moan" marketing campaign	4 9%
Some other reason	2 5%

Some other reason (2):

- Mam was standing (as a Councillor)
- I want to make sure that people I feel are best for the part of Carlisle in which I live are successful

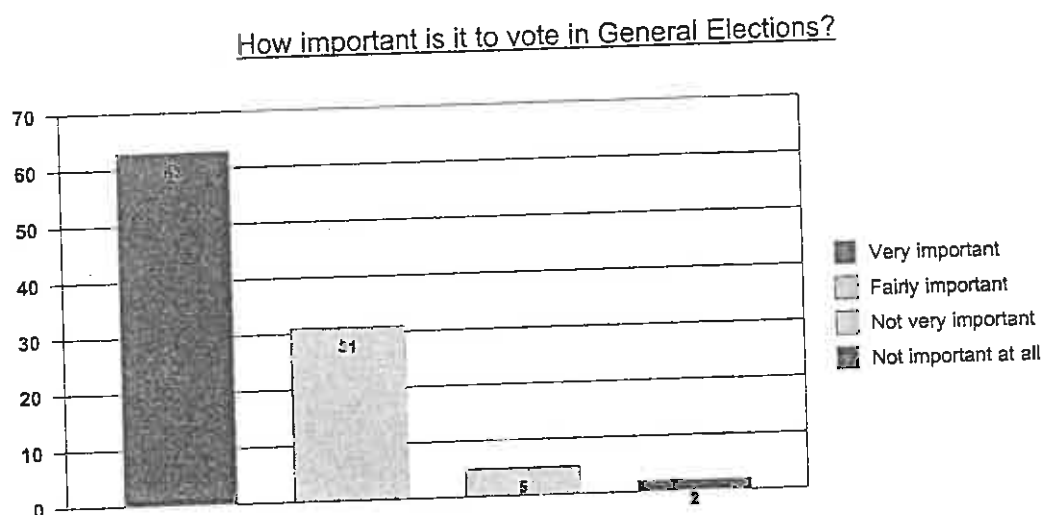
Do you know what a General Election is?

Overall, 92% say they know what a General Election is.

How important do you think it is to vote in General Elections?

Almost two thirds of young people think it is very important to vote in General Elections. Over nine out of ten thinks it is important and less than one in ten think it is not important to vote in General Elections, see Chart 1;

Chart 1



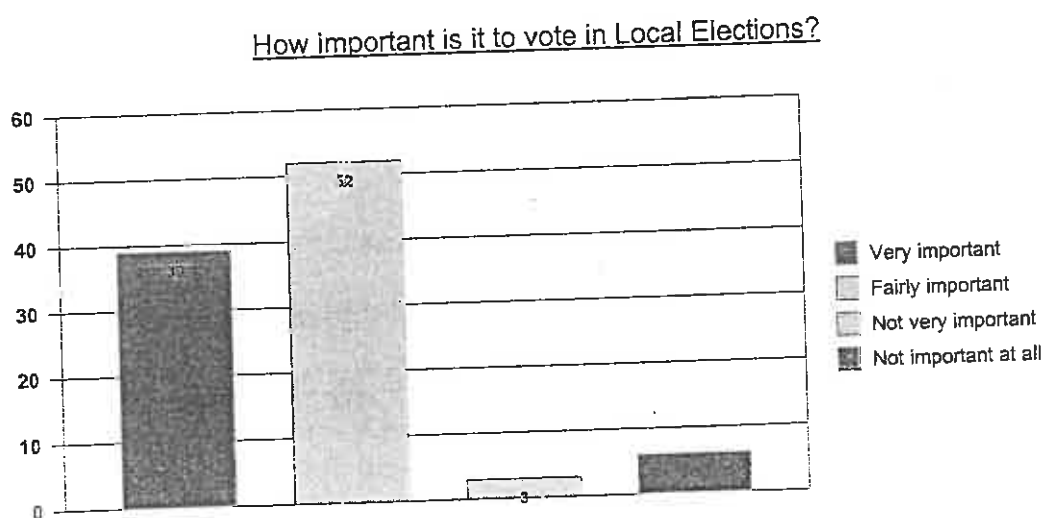
Do you know what a Local Election is?

Overall, 92% say they know what a Local Election is.

How important do you think it is to vote in Local Elections?

Over half of young people think it is fairly important to vote in Local Elections. Nine out of ten thinks it is important and less than one in ten think it is not important to vote in Local Elections, see Chart 2:

Chart 2



Do you intend to vote in the next local and general elections?

81% say they intend to vote in the next Local Election and 89% intend to vote in the next General Election, see Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3

Break % Respondents	
Base	64
Local Elections	
Yes	81%
No	19%

Table 4

Break % Respondents	
Base	62
General Elections	
Yes	92%
No	8%

Ten young people gave reasons as to why they would NOT vote in elections:

- I do not know who, or what, I would be voting for and therefore find it unfair to do so
- I don't know enough about what the candidates do for the area, didn't like either party but decided to choose the better one (obviously!). Too difficult with only 2 choices
- Don't know what it is about
- I do not know enough about what and why we have an election
- Don't know enough about it to have an opinion
- It would be harder to find out about local candidates
- The point of voting is choice, no choice is really offered except whether or not to vote
- Unlikely any standing parties will represent my views
- Not important
- Not interested

Are you aware that you can vote by post?

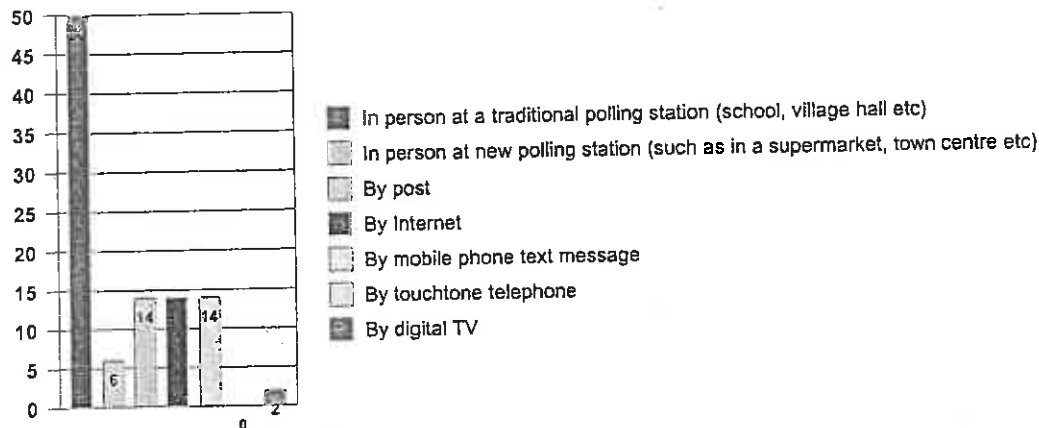
Overall, 83% are aware that they can vote by post. This rises to 94% for the young people that voted and drops to 73% for those that did not vote.

If you could choose from a variety of ways to vote, which would you prefer?

Looking at the entire sample, exactly half prefer to vote in person at a traditional polling station (school, village hall etc), see Chart 3:

Chart 3

Which way would you prefer to vote?



Preferences vary according to voting status. Two thirds of voters would prefer to vote at the traditional polling station, compared to only 36% of non-voters. A fifth of non-voters would like to be able to vote by Internet or mobile phone text messages, compared to only 6% of voters. See Charts 4 and 5. This reveals interesting findings in terms of attracting non-voters through the implementation of non-traditional voting methods, in addition to retaining current voters by also allowing voting via the usual methods.

Chart 4

Voters - which way would you prefer to vote?

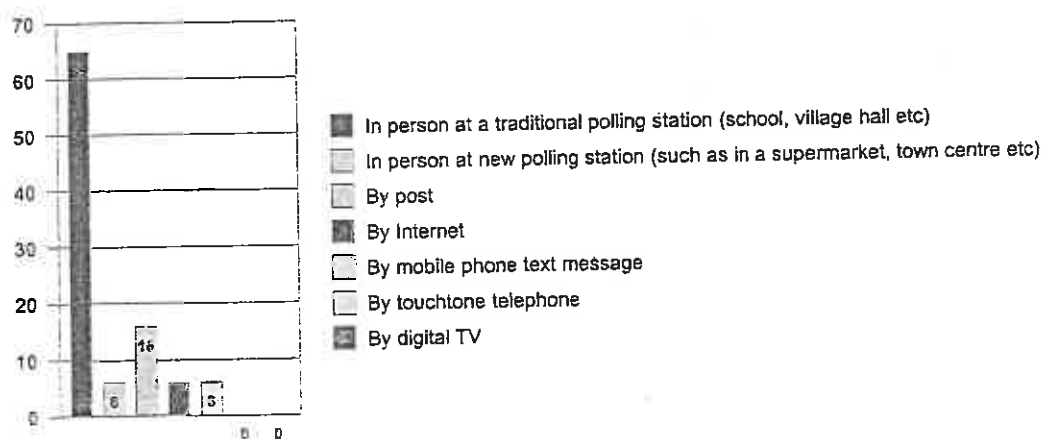
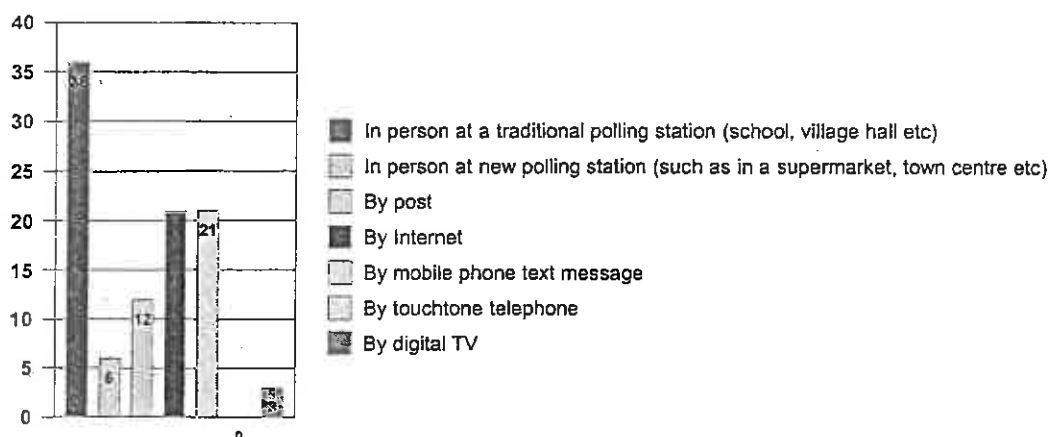


Chart 5

Non-voters - which way would you prefer to vote?



Do you have any further comments on voting, or suggestions for how to encourage people to vote? (26 comments)

- Please make clear the aims of each party in an understandable language which helps us know what we are doing and why
- More campaigning should be done to outline who people can vote for and what effect their vote will have
- Talk to youth groups and colleges
- Yes, teach 'first voters' more about how voting system developed in Britain and why. More info on the parties involved (unbiased!)
- I feel that councillors could make more of an effort in promoting their party by visiting new voters at school or at home
- Why should I take time out for someone who does not make himself known to me?
- For first time voters you should send information on what each party offers
- More information, make something relevant to my age group, things that matter to us
- More campaigns to increase awareness
- More advertisement of what, why, who the parties are and what they stand for and where am I able to obtain more info?
- If the youth feel excluded, include us. The newsletters should apply to the youth too - improvements made could also refer to the benefits to teenagers/youth
- Advertise it more
- Make people more aware of elections and importance of them
- Increased awareness of young peoples' needs and subsequent incorporations of these into local councillors' policies is greatly needed in order to encourage voting. Key=relevance.
- Give young people more interesting information, more stylish to catch their attention other than the usual moan and drone leaflets
- More advertising and more information is needed
- Give people something to vote on
- Make it more interesting for first time voters. A lot of people feel that politics are boring, so to get people to vote, it's image needs to be improved
- I think the 'don't vote, don't moan' campaign in my college was accurate as why you should vote. Something like that again would encourage young voters
- Encourage more children at school to vote
- In relation to Q12, don't allow technology to ruin the strength of a persons opinion - voting 'by text' is not as powerful as moving somewhere to voice your opinion

- My suggestion is that voting is for the people's welfare as well as their town county and country
- We live in the twenty-first century. Bring voting up to date. Ballot boxes are an Elizabethan idea and we need to reinvent a method of voting
- I think the 'don't vote, don't moan' campaign was a waste of money. Yes it told people to vote, but gave no information on the function of the council people were voting for, or outline the main policies of the parties, or details of how to find these out. I had already decided to vote, but struggled to find clear information to decide who to vote for. The campaign postcards had very little information on them and they were not something I would keep. A more informative jargon busting leaflet outlining the roles of the council and student targeted manifestos would have been more useful
- It's up to the individual whether they vote or not and some people will always refuse to, no matter what. Incentives, such as a discounted council tax, should be used to encourage people to vote and reward those who do

11 young people put their names and addresses forward as being willing to discuss voting issues for younger people. The 11 comprise of 5 voters and 6 non-voters.

Appendix 3: Notes from Members' Consultation Workshops

Conservative Group Focus Session Tuesday, 20 January, 1pm

Attendance: Cllrs Lucy Crookdake; Barry Earp; Cyril Bowman; Don Joscelyne; Jacquelyne Geddes and Edward Firth. (Cllr Marilyn Bowman responded using notes as she was unable to attend the meeting.)

The session took the form of a general discussion covering the six themes of the Scoping Report.

Members were generally unhappy about having an open question session at the beginning of Full Council where questions were not submitted in advance as this could not be controlled properly. They felt that the authority had not exploited the forums for open debate that already existed i.e. the Neighbourhood Forums. Although one Member was absolutely opposed to involvement with the Neighbourhood Forums if they were organised by the County. Forums organised by the City Council would not be a problem.

There was support for an annual 'State of the City' debate.

They felt that official papers should be made more accessible to the public, especially budget papers, which, generally, were incomprehensible or, at best, difficult for people to understand. Too often the wording used in reports was either vague or full of jargon and officers should be encouraged to write in a more open and straightforward style that everyone could understand – "use plain English, not Council speak".

The idea of webcasting meetings, whether that was Council meetings or other, more general, meetings, was considered very important by one of the Members as a way of engaging and interesting more people in the workings of the authority and in democracy generally.

One Member was particularly concerned about the duplication of reports and the resulting waste of paper.

There was concern that every effort should be made to try and engage young people and examples of best practice around the region could be duplicated in Carlisle – for example the setting up of Youth Councils in different local areas.

When discussing the support given by officers to Members, there was particular concern over the 'clogging up' of the email system with complex documents being sent through as word documents. Members wanted to see a cleaning up databases and a paring down of the length of documents being sent via email.

Labour Group Focus Session **Thursday, 31 July, 5pm**

Attendance: Cllrs Heather Bradley; Cyril Weber; Joe Hendry; Carole Rutherford; Hugh McDevitt; Mike Boaden; George Stothard; Terry Scarborough

1. Access & opportunity

It was agreed that there was widespread apathy among voters. This was not helped locally by the new Executive structure, which was obscure. People could not understand what issues were coming up at meetings because of the way agendas are presented – almost as though issues were being hidden on purpose.

At Executive meetings only one argument – that of the ruling party – is presented with no opportunity for alternative views to be aired.

Area working was necessary in order to devolve the discussion of local issues to local level. Special topic meetings were a part of area working.

Debates on any issues affecting people had to start at a local level through area working this should feed in through the Overview Scrutiny Committees to the Executive and then to the full council. And to work properly, the area panels had to have devolved budgets.

2. Youth engagement

Politics, both national and local, was confrontational and therefore a big turn-off for young people.

Members suggested setting up 'young' area working groups to make council issues relevant to young people. They felt the current Youth Forum was tokenistic and unrepresentative, made up of middle class young people and not meeting the needs of excluded young people.

Youth issues, they said, should be at the centre of council policies and any promises must be followed through. They cited the success of Harraby Youth Club in reaching young people and suggested this had worked because an individual officer of the authority had taken a personal interest in building up the club and making it work.

3. 'Other' groups

Members said families on low incomes needed to be included in the list of hard-to-reach groups. Expensive public transport meant these people, particularly those living in isolated areas, were distanced from service provision. They suggested this problem could also be addressed through Area Working.

They made the political point that changes in the charge structure for service delivery, with no subsidy for single parents or those on low incomes, meant these groups did not have the same access to services.

4. Policy aspects

Members were asked if Overview and Scrutiny Committees could play more of a role in gathering public opinion on a big issue and the answer was an emphatic yes.

They were also asked if they felt people were getting a genuine opportunity to influence policy and the answer was an equally emphatic no.

Members felt the Citizens' Panel was self-selecting and there was too much credence given to their views. By definition the panel consisted of people who were willing to take part and did not reflect the views of hard-to-reach groups.

They cited the 2003 budget consultation as a non-genuine exercise in consultation and suggested there should be more consultation at ward level.

5. Interaction

All insisted a research post needed to be created to provide administration and information to members. Currently, there was no officer support for the opposition groups and so it was difficult for them to get the information they needed to work effectively as an opposition.

They had asked for help in the past, for example ward briefings, but these had not been forthcoming. They said that as Councillors they needed to know when the streets were being cleaned so they could be well informed in order to let their constituents know what was going on. The current 'Members' Briefing' is inadequate as it tells them what has happened rather than providing genuine information about events happening in their wards. The lack of information and support was a 'turn-off' for Members and potential Councillors.

They complained there was no Members' Library where, for example, Government papers could be deposited and IT support was poor.

They also complained that the new system 'freezes out' the flow of information from officers to members; provides no challenge; has led to a new officer culture where officers seem to be working just for the Executive.

6. Electoral aspects

They agreed that all-postal voting a good idea but made it clear that any new ways of voting must be secure.

They commented that it was all well and good to make the process of voting easy, but you had to make sure that the system was relevant to people before they would make the effort to vote.

Liberal Democrat Group Focus Session Wednesday, 13 August, 5pm

Attendance: Cllrs John Guest; Geoff Hodgson; Ralph Aldersey; Peter Farmer.

1. Access & opportunity

Members were concerned that the new Cabinet system of government in the City Council had created some very negative aspects. Meetings were not exciting, the whole set up of committees and Executive was confusing to members of the public and backbenchers were excluded from discussion and the decision making process.

Also, the new system was supposed to streamline the whole process but instead committee meetings were becoming far too long and agendas should be reviewed.

They were concerned that published announcements of Portfolio Holder decisions were not detailed enough and could be seen as 'hiding' the full circumstances of these decisions.

It was thought that the more relaxed atmosphere of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could provide a useful link between the local democratic process and members of public.

All Members felt strongly that the answer to getting people involved in local democracy was the creation of local area committees. These would bring local issues of relevance to local people and would lead to better engagement.

It was agreed that the web-casting of meetings should be tried in order to stimulate interest in official council meetings.

2. Youth engagement

There was general concern that young people were excluded from the democratic process but acknowledgement that this group is particularly difficult to connect with because of widespread apathy.

It was suggested that, by linking with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions, the needs of young people could be better identified. It was agreed that the City Council should provide more information on how local authorities work and that the Youth Panel should be consulted on a regular basis by the Executive.

Using devices like text messaging could also be an innovative way of reaching this age group.

3. 'Other Groups'

It was recognised that there was an information gap and that a definitive list of hard to reach groups was an essential tool in order to ensure the City Council was making its services accessible to all. It was agreed that the drawing up of such a list should be an Action Point for the Review.

4. Policy Aspects

When asked if they felt people were getting a genuine opportunity to comment on and influence policy, the group said yes, they felt things had improved since 1999. Specifically, customer service had improved, especially with the creation of the new reception area on the ground floor.

Members felt strongly that members of the public should be given proper feedback from any consultation carried out so that they knew that what they were saying was making a difference to council policy.

5. Interaction

Members felt they were vulnerable and needed support in information gathering and with links into the council. They insisted the appointment of research officers to support Members would help. The officers would need training but they would provide a link between other officers of the authority and Members.

They also suggested improved induction for new Councillors. The printed information packs currently distributed needed thinning down as there was too much information for Members. This should be partly replaced with one-to-one training, including training in people skills and information gathering.

6. Electoral aspects

Members acknowledged that falling voter turn out meant other methods of voting should be investigated but insisted that any alternative must be secure.

They also suggested more extensive advertising of postal voting, perhaps using the council's own vehicle fleet for this purpose.

Consultation with Members of Community O&S Committee

Tuesday, 22 July 2003

1. Access and opportunity

Incentives – Councillors cited meetings of Neighbourhood fora where people are given gifts as incentives to attend, e.g light bulbs, security alarms

Themes – Councillors thought starting meetings with a theme and Qs and As from members of the public might stir interest in Council meetings

Meetings open to the general public could be organised on particular issues of interest to the wider public and used as part of an open consultation exercise

Open up sessions before Council meeting to a 'public debate' on a chosen subject

Leader's questions at the start of Council meetings to stir up interest – members of the public to be allowed a set amount of time to raise an issue, ask about it

Meetings needed to be better promoted through local media

More information about meetings should be on the website to promote them better (not just dates of meetings)

Consultative groups could be organised to feed into the scrutiny system

Fliers in the local newspaper to promote meetings

Members agreed it was probably beyond the Council's remit to change the format of the formal Council meetings in order to excite people to attend so it was more fruitful to look at introducing new forms of meeting as itemised above

2. Youth engagement

Fora for young people's ideas – for juniors and seniors

Working on Citizenship with schools needed to be a-political

Councillors debates – open discussions with 6th formers

Support packs – to explain what the Council/ councillors do

3. 'Other' Groups

Use Focus magazine to invite people (with a pre-paid tear-off slip) to write to the Council to complain/ call for action/ comment

Access Group – Churches Together – Faith groups – ethnic minority groups

Difficult to engage these groups and difficult to identify them

Use the BV Review as a research exercise to identify these hard-to-reach groups and establish a central contact database for them and then seek ways of ensuring we consult/ communicate with them

4. Policy Aspects

People don't feel that they are making a difference to policy when they are consulted

Not adequately consulted and there is cynicism when they are e.g. 2002/03's budget consultation exercise – "you're the elected Member, it's your job to make the decisions".

Focus on quality consultation – be selective

Ensure results are fed back so people understand that their comments have been noted, even if a decision goes the other way – explain

Some constituents complain they're not consulted but when they are, like the budget consultation, they say 'you're elected to make these decisions'

5. Interaction

Need better information flow from officers to members – it should be a pre-requisite that any information about a ward is passed to Ward Councillors, e.g. road works so Members are not made to look stupid in front of constituents - the responsibility of the Business Unit Head

Members Bulletin of information, National/ local and ward – what's coming up in next two weeks

More information about meetings on the website

Dedicated officer for Backbench support

Local Forum every six months (individual Member)

Current referral system is good

Induction/ learning is informal

Greater co-operation with County/ Police – Area Working – properly joined up with County

Induction Pack

Basic IT training

There's a difference between rural and urban Councillors and the challenges they face

Need to be better informed by officers one comment .."we're made to feel stupid about these things when we don't know".....(when Councillors are approached by constituents)

People don't understand the difference between Parish, City and County councils

People don't know where to go for money for grants – should be coming to the City Council

Member packs should contain referral forms

Websites for individual Councillors – Members divided – one definitely yes another definitely no

6. Electoral aspects

Methods of voting – support for modern (remote) mechanisms

- unattractive polling booths
- familiarity with voting process

Day of voting – may be possible to change.

People question the point of voting – credibility of all politicians is low, mainly because of national politicians and their reputations.

Councillors would support other mechanisms for voting

Standard of polling stations is very poor – no lighting/ toilets

Appendix 4: Responses from Parish Councils

The text below is the responses received from Parish Councils. In total, 9 Parish councils responded to the consultation. The councils were sent a copy of the scoping document and asked to comment.

Brampton Parish Council

It would be more helpful to Brampton Parish Council if the City Council assist in our undertaking a Best Value Review in the foreseeable future.

We are very concerned about provision for young people in Brampton and their engagement in the democratic process. We wondered if the City Council could help us coordinate a joint approach with various City and County services, William Howard School, local institutions such as the churches and agencies such as Connexions. If we could develop these areas in partnership, this would allow us to address your Key Areas and Questions in a meaningful way.

Castle Carrock Parish Council

Former parish clerk, Hugh Nicholson-Walker relinquished his duties at the end of July but passed on the information to his successor and anticipated it being discussed at a meeting of the Parish Council "shortly" (response dated 8 September).

Dalston Parish Council

Unsure how to comment on the document. It looks fine and could stimulate debate but perhaps it is, to a certain extent, contrived with too much emphasis on the image of the Council rather than the needs of the electorate.

If the population is reasonably content with the services provided, then it is difficult to raise turnout for elections or obtain greater public involvement – only contentious issues arouse public interest.

Carlisle City Council is already proactive in trying to encourage people to be involved. In reality, not many people are interested, especially young people. By local government being political, the public are even more disillusioned. If politics could be removed, then there might be greater involvement and participation.

Defining what matters should be policy led at Parish, Ward, District, County or Constituency levels might help to increase voter interest on relevant issues.

The review does not include the need for Carlisle City Council to work in partnership with other organisations. Democratic engagement by Local Strategic Partnerships could be the key to giving the voters the view that policy is 'joined up' and able to generate real change.

Farlam Parish Council

Further to your letter of 17 July, the issue was discussed at a meeting of the parish council on 3 September.

Q1 How can the City Council engage better with its citizens? By ensuring that brief details of meetings are given in the local weekly paper.

Q2 How do we improve voter turnout at elections? By using other methods of voting, such as postal or internet services.

Q3 What can be done to encourage young people? By the formation of Youth Forums and similar bodies.

Q4 How can Council meetings be made more interesting? By keeping them short, to the point and respecting the opinions of others.

Q5 How can we consult more effectively? By getting more actively involved in the views of Parish Councils and other community groups.

Kirklington Parish Council

The Democratic Engagement Best Value Review was discussed at a meeting of the Parish Council on 16 September.

There was clear support for the Scope of the review.

However, there was much concern that it was unlikely to bring about major changes to existing policies and practices. Consequently, they questioned whether their views, or those of individual members of the public, would in fact be taken into account.

The experience of many of our Members is that final documents do not differ significantly from draft versions issued as part of a consultation process. This leads them to believe that 'minds have already been made up' irrespective of what any consultation process might produce.

Any final document which sets out the Council's proposed policies and procedures clearly needs to demonstrate that the views of everyone who contributed to the review have been taken on board. Equally, if views and opinions have not been accepted, the City Council must at least acknowledge them and explain why they have not been taken up. Only in this way will people start to believe that they can contribute to decision making and that so called consultation is not just a meaningless paper exercise.

Orton Parish Council

The full council has not given these comments nor does every question have a response.

Access

Are the general public aware that they can attend City Council meetings?
Or if they are aware, they will only find it necessary to attend when the matter being discussed is contentious or of some interest to them.

Perhaps the electorate have the attitude that they elect councillors to act on their behalf.

Policy

Parish Councils, especially clerks are overloaded with consultation documents. We do however understand the necessity for this, but are reaching the stage where we need help to simplify this.

Interaction

Not sure what the public think about access to their councillors, but in our parish they have good access if they wish to use it. At parish level, we consult with the public regularly via monthly parish magazine, newsletters and letters re. specific matters when necessary. There is a Public Participation slot at the beginning of each meeting. Most parish council meetings are attended by our District/County Councillor. We believe that our members of the public have good access. Don't know how we can improve on this at the moment. Good councillors will always ensure that the public can reach them.

Youth

Youth committees, perhaps via Youth Parish Councils(Long town)
Access to schools, from Primary to 6th form, youth clubs etc.

Elections

More postal votes. Not sure whether there are barriers, or just plain apathy! Should voting be compulsory?

St Cuthbert Without

Your letter of 11 July was considered at the meeting of the Parish Council on 25 July and there were no comments to forward. (By email.)

Stanwix Rural Parish Council

Access

- 1) Why do people not attend City Council meetings and what can be done to encourage them to attend?

The absence of the general public, at council meetings, surely reflects the general apathy which exists among the population at large, in respect of any matter connected with politics; that is of course unless sufficient interest is engendered, by the media, in respect of a specific issue. Encouraging people to routinely attend Council meetings may prove very difficult when such meetings must compete with the seductive appeal of soaps, reality/ fly on the wall TV, computer games, sport, clubs, pubs and the vast multiplicity of other recreational activities now available.

High impact broad spectrum advertising may be a suitable jump off point, each advertisement illustrating or trailing, forthcoming meetings by splashing carefully selected agenda items. Such advertising would, of course, need to be high gloss and would, therefore, be commensurately expensive. In view of the nature of competing attractions, however, this may be a necessary expense if genuine efforts are to be made to persuade larger numbers of people to attend council meetings. Alternatively, the council could take

cognisance of the criticisms raised in answer to question 2 below and endeavour to keep meetings both relevant and accessible.

2) What do those people who attend think of them?

Most people, who have attended council meetings, report being first astounded then shocked by the following impressions:

- a) The way in which many decisions seem to be "rubber stamped", without significant debate by members, although some of the issues seem to warrant discussion.
- b) The petty attempts to score political points, with their colleagues, through a sustained barracking and heckling of opposing speakers.
- c) The way in which group members "toe the party line", even though their opponents may have a more valid case.
- d) The way in which procedural points are used to re-enforce filibustering, during debates
- e) The way in which some members attempt to humiliate or belittle speakers who are attempting to make public representations to the council
- f) The way these modes of behaviour reflect a level of hubris on the part of members which is indicative of absolute contempt for an electorate which expects its' council to set the wellbeing of the community above small time politics.
- g) "I didn't understand a lot of it". Is often heard from those who have attended council meetings, especially for the first time.

3) How can meetings be made more relevant to the public?

It may be possible to initiate progress toward greater public relevance by:

- a) Focusing the council's attention upon matters of direct relevance to the vast majority of local people, rather than upon high profile "prestige projects" and corporate visions. The things which matter to people are the nuts and bolts of day to day life. Getting to work and the children to school easily, quickly and cheaply. Feeling safe and secure in their homes, or anywhere else in the city, at any time of the day or night. Quality public services which are both efficient and economic. These are the sort of things which are relevant to the public, rather than how well the council complies with government imposed exercises in communal navel gazing, or the ceaseless generation of studies, strategies and reports which, in truth, contribute little to the general wellbeing of the area or its people.
- b) Confronting the growing sense of irritated alienation engendered by the burgeoning use of jargon, buzz words and "bureaucraspeak" in council documents and among members and officers. The title of this document is a prime example of language which has become so abstruse as to be meaningless to all but self appointed cognoscenti, or those with the time and inclination to decrypt it. When such language is used, during meetings, or in council communiqués, the uninitiated observer will be at a loss to understand and will, therefore, inevitably lose interest.
- c) Notes explaining any technical and/or procedural intricacies, relating to the agenda and including a glossary of terms etc. could be issued to

observers, attending meetings. These could be supported by a short briefing from officers and a few minutes of question and answer session, immediately prior to the meeting. Such briefing notes could be made available on the council's website, the Q&A session being replaced with a page of frequently asked questions. The website should employ the most flexible and user friendly technology to avoid glitches, unavailable pages and slow download/search times.

- d) Advances in IT now make it possible for most meetings to be transmitted live on the internet. Feedback from the public could be almost instantaneous. Indeed a citizens' internet forum could be constituted to work in conjunction with similar groups e.g. Citizens Panel.
- e) When conducting any sort of genuine consultation exercise it may be of benefit to provide "road shows" at local supermarkets, village halls, etc. rather than confining them to the Civic Centre, public library, or the Old Town Hall, all of which are city centre locations. More than two or three weeks of response time (sometimes considerably less is allowed) would be distinctly advantageous, in encouraging rational and considered reaction.

4) What have other authorities done to increase interaction with the public?

The solutions employed by "Anytown" Council will seldom be applicable to the demographic profile of "Othertown". Other authorities and their whims and fancies do not concern and have no relevance to local people. It is for the local authority to determine relations with its electorate using as a guide any local knowledge it may allegedly possess, or care to recognise, in order to effectively model any strategy of engagement it may seek to pursue.

Policy

1) Are we fulfilling our responsibility to consult?

The answer to the question as phrased is, yes. However, this question should be: "Are we *effectively and meaningfully* fulfilling our responsibility to consult?" To which the answer would be, No. Effective and meaningful consultation extends beyond the realm of brief City Centre information displays and Citizens Panel questionnaires and should commence as part of the origination of policy, rather than as a sometimes costly afterthought – e.g. the Millennium debacle.

2) Are we being sufficiently imaginative in the methods of consultation we use?

No, is the simple answer. Rather than expecting the public to attend low profile City Centre displays, write letters, or fill in forms, etc. the local authority should take consultation to the people. In-store consultation/access points, staffed by helpful well informed personnel, similar exercises in community centres/village halls, the use of a "consultation bus" to reach the more remote population, heavily promoted interactive online consultation. These, alongside existing methods, would be indicative of a council keen to work with and for, the people.

- 3) Do other authorities use referenda and is this method appropriate in Carlisle?

Whether or not other authorities use referenda is of no consequence whatsoever. The only consideration is, are referenda appropriate to Carlisle? The answer to this question is that referenda do have an important role, but must be used carefully. The importance of the issue must be made plain without any bias. The wording of a referendum must be clear and concise with no margin for bias, interpretation, or misunderstanding. The referendum must be confined to a specific issue rather than covering several points or options. The baseline majority for deciding the outcome must be stated prior to the referendum (51% of a 15% turnout/response cannot be taken as a legitimate mandate) as this may affect turnout/response. Ideally this criterion should apply to all public consultation. The voters in referenda must be those directly affected by the result, e.g. the installation of traffic calming in Currock should be decided only by residents of Currock - City Centre pedestrianisation by the whole of Carlisle district.

- 4) Do those people currently consulted feel their views help to shape policy?

In a word, no. "It doesn't matter who you vote for, the government always gets in!" This much heard quotation is frequently applied to local authorities, along with "It doesn't matter what we say; they'll just do what they want". Both quotes indicate a frustrating sense of impotence among a population distanced from all forms of democratic engagement. This feeling of disenfranchisement can only be overcome through a concerted effort, in this case on the part of the local authority, to respond quickly and positively to the results of public consultation and to begin treating the public as an equal partner, rather than as a meddlesome nuisance.

Interaction

- 1) Do the public believe they have good access to their councillors and how can it be improved?

"The only time you see them is when they want your vote." In general the public do not seem to believe that they have good access to their councillors. This may be remedied by councillors making greater efforts to interact directly with the public by increasing the frequency and duration of their "surgeries". Accessibility would also be greatly enhanced if councillors actually lived in the wards which they were elected to represent. Councillors should make greater efforts to visit clubs, pubs, schools, residents associations etc. in their wards - the school gate at home time, the kids football match on Sunday morning are, among others, ideal places to stay in touch with the community. Broadly speaking, councillors must actively approach their electorate on more equal terms between elections.

- 2) Is area working of relevance?

Area working may prove to be a significant factor in improving relations between the council and the people it serves; decentralisation of committee meetings may be the key. Rather than hold committee meetings based upon subject, e.g. planning, hold committee meetings based upon area, thus: Every X number of weeks the 'Morton Area Committee' would meet, in Morton

Community Centre, to resolve all aspects of current issues concerning that area, be they planning, traffic management, finance etc. Full council would meet to ratify Area Committee decisions and/or when an issue would impact upon the district as a whole, e.g. strategic development. Such council meetings would then have the benefit of intelligence garnered via the Area Committees, along with a commensurate credibility in the eyes of the electorate.

- 3) Which are the most effective ways Councillors communicate with people?

Up close and personal, using a comprehensible vocabulary and listening properly to the response, before giving an honest and politically non-partisan reply.

- 4) Is there a suitable mechanism to enhance the role back-benchers fulfill?

This fatuous question illustrates the level of arrogant "ivory tower" mentality which is perceived, by much of the population to be endemic among local authorities. Although use of the term "back-benchers" is not the prerogative of Parliament only, it is most customarily associated in the public consciousness with The Palace of Westminster, rather than the Civic Centre, Carlisle. It is assumed, however, that the question refers to Councillors who may lack any special, or extra, responsibility.

It is the duty of each individual member to hold to account officers and other members, of the local authority, and to ensure in the name of the people whose interests are entrusted to them, that the local authority strives to achieve the highest possible standards of service and probity. Members performing this duty effectively and honestly, regardless of political expedient and heedless of the group whip, already have the most significant and valuable role in council. It is therefore quite unnecessary to construct artificial enhancement mechanisms, of potentially dubious worth, when the objectives of such mechanisms may be attained through members own endeavours.

Youth

- 1) How can the workings of the City Council be made more relevant to young people?

The answer to this question is dependent upon the selected definition of the term "young". In this case the assumption is that this refers to older teenagers, who are about to become eligible to vote. A very high percentage of those who comprise this social group will, understandably, have a greater interest in their peer group and the opposite or indeed similar sex, than in anything as mundane as the workings of the City Council.

To fully engage elements of this generation, or indeed any other demographic sector, the workings of the City Council must not only be made relevant but also physically and intellectually accessible. In this instance it may be desirable for local councillors to frequently visit schools, colleges etc. in order to engage the target group head on and ascertain their needs, views and aspirations.

Although it has yet to withstand the test of time the Youth Council, recently launched by Longtown Parish Council, provides an example of what may be achieved. Members who initiated and developed this project have obviously avoided the cardinal errors of being patronising and or condescending, either of which would have ensured certain failure.

2) How can the views of young people be used to help shape policy?

Any democratically constituted form of authority survives only by the consent of the majority of the people it serves. Therefore, in respect of shaping policy, the views of any specific sector of society should not, generally, be considered in isolation but rather as part of the ongoing tacit compromise which allows society to function. The exception to this generality occurs when a decision being taken by an authority will impact directly and solely upon a specific sector of society. In such cases the views of the social sector affected should be pro-actively sought, and given the greatest possible consideration.

3) What role can we play in the teaching of citizenship in schools?

Any local authority, or central government, which attempts to involve itself directly in teaching, treads upon very dangerous ground. Thus, it is hoped that the question means to ask, "How may the Council help to facilitate the teaching of citizenship in schools?"

The answers are (excluding the perennial request to press for increased funding): to enable officers to visit schools in order to explain the organisation, and departmental functions of the council; and to encourage elected members to likewise visit; in order to explain their democratic function. It must be remembered however that the promulgation or dissemination of any party political material or propaganda whatsoever, must incur the most severe penalty.

Engagement

1) Which other groups are we failing to engage with?

A search of the City Council website reveals the following example results:

<u>Search term</u>	<u>Result</u>
Senior Citizens.	1 page 1 result
Single Parents.	Did not match any files.
Disabled People.	3 pages containing 24 results.
Minority Groups.	Did not match any files.
Ethnic Minority Groups.	Did not match any files.
Gypsies.	Did not match any files.
Youth.	4 pages containing 40 results

It appears to be self evident that the City Council has signally failed to engage, in any meaningful way, with a wide array of social groups; with the exception of the City's Youth.

The answer to the above question seems, therefore, to suggest itself, i.e. that the City Council must divert a greater proportion of its efforts and resources to engage a wider social spectrum, rather than its present narrow target sector, of the City's population

Elections

1) How can we remove barriers to voting?

In a democracy there are no barriers to voting, save those constructed in people's minds. These mental obstacles usually exist as conditioned responses, resulting from negative experiences associated with the electoral process, and/or, its outcomes; e.g. a sense of disillusionment and/or, disaffection. Other causal factors may include feelings of alienation and/or isolation from mainstream society, possibly occasioned by reason of poverty, age, disability, or substance abuse etc.

Attainment of the three objectives, given at the outset, by implementation of the above recommendations, should engender a return of interest among those who presently reject democratic engagement.

2) What have other authorities done to raise registration and turnout?

The City Council's interest in the actions of other authorities has been made evident several times, above, as has the answer to this question.

The mechanisms employed by other authorities may, or may not, have any relevance to Carlisle. However, Carlisle City Council should think for itself, as the originator of ideas and concepts, rather than looking to others to provide an easy "quick fix".

Wetheral Parish Council

Discussed at the meeting in September.

Policy: Are we fulfilling our responsibility to consult – Yes
Are we being sufficiently imaginative in the methods of consultation we use – Yes

Interaction: Is area working of relevance – It could be, if set up properly

Youth: How can the workings of the City Council be made more relevant to young people – High profile Youth Council with outcomes
How can the views of young people be used to help shape policy – They have to see results.

Appendix 5: List of Documents retained but not included

- Minutes of the review team meetings held;
- Articles by the Journalism Students from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts;
- Full findings from the Citizens Panel questionnaire;

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
1. Democratic engagement should be a priority for the Council	To increase the number of people who feel they can influence decisions about their local area	1) Portfolio Holder nominated democratic engagement champion 2) Business planning process to identify how services can contribute	People feel included/involved in what happens in their community, contributing to social inclusion	The Leader Martin Daley	None To be undertaken using existing resources	By April 2005 By March 2005	Executive Business Plans through CMT and O&S
2. Members of the public should be better engaged in official meetings	To encourage more people to attend and engage in official meetings of the Council	1) Undertake a review of agendas/minutes/forward plan/reports	People understand the democratic process	Ian Dixon	To be undertaken using existing resources	By March 2005	Committee Services Team Plan

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
3. The Council needs to be more innovative in its approach to public meetings	To attract a wider audience to participate in local democracy	2) Pilot an open question session at start of Full Council	Meetings are more accessible	Ian Dixon/ Carolyn Taylor	To be undertaken using existing resources	By March 2005	Committee Services and Communications Team Plans
		3) Have name-plates for Members at all public meetings	Members are better known	Ian Dixon	To be undertaken using existing resources	By July 2004	Committee Services Team Plan
		4) Provide training for officers in report writing	Reports are more easily understood	Linda Mattinson	Training Directory	2005/06	Strategic Staff Development Group
		1) Introduce a 'Question Time' style debate at a venue away from the Civic Centre	More people will be involved in local democracy	Carolyn Taylor	To be found within existing budgets	Six months after the 'State of the City' address	Citizens' Panel

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
4. The level of communication about meetings of the Council needs to be improved		and involving other organisations.					
		2) Ensure the 'State of the City' debate takes place every year	Adherence to the Constitution	The Leader	Discussed at Strategic Financial Planning Group May 2004	Annually from July 2004	Community O&S
	To enable people to have access to democratic process and Council decisions	1) Make agendas and minutes accessible over the internet 2) Add more text to website about workings of the Council	More people will be able to access information about the Council, meetings and decisions when it suits them	Ian Dixon	Committee Management System to be installed	By December 2004	Committee Services Team Plan
				Carolyn Taylor	To be undertaken using existing resources	By September 2004	Communications Team Plan

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
5. The quality of consultation must be improved		3) Promote meetings with topical interest on website, through local media and Carlisle Focus		Carolyn Taylor	To be undertaken using existing resources	Ongoing	Annual readers' survey in Carlisle Focus
		4) Pilot the web-casting of meetings		Carolyn Taylor	£13,000	Year-long pilot starting July 2004	Annual readers' survey in Carlisle Focus
	To make consultation an effective part of the decision- making process	1) Consultation incorporated in each Business Plan	People will not suffer consultation fatigue as consultation will be better co-ordinated	Martin Daley	To be undertaken using existing resources	March 2005	Business Unit Plans through CMT and O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		2) Ensure feedback is given to those consulted		Lynne Wild	To be undertaken using existing resources	To be confirmed - lead officer on maternity leave	Citizens' Panel
		3) Ensure regular evaluation of consultation		Lynne Wild			Corporate Consultation Strategy
		4) Promote a range of consultation mechanisms		Lynne Wild			Business Unit Plans through CMT and O&S
		5) Set up a consultation data base		Lynne Wild			Business Unit Plans through CMT and O&S
		6) Create a new page on website with results of		Lynne Wild			Citizens' Panel

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
6. Members need support to enable them to carry out effectively their role as community leaders	To provide Members with information and training to help them do their 'jobs' better	previous consultations and allow people to register to take part in forth-coming exercises	The public will get a better service from well-trained and well-informed Members	Lynne Wild	£1,000	By March 2005	Review 12 months after launch of strategy
		7) Introduce Corporate Consultation Strategy, monitor effectiveness 1) Produce a Best Practice Guide for Surgeries					
				Nicola Mitchell			Survey Members and Surgery users 12 months after publication

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		2) Improve the current referral system	Improvements in service through increased use of system	Nicola Mitchell	No staffing implications. Possible costs depending on improvements required	By April 2006	Count numbers of referrals quarterly (those sent out and those returned)
		3) Provide administrative support to political groups		Nicola Mitchell	Funding for use in 2004/05 through carry forward from 2003/04. Funding beyond 200/05 to be identified through budget process	In post April 2004	Review with Members by December 2004
		4) Provide research support to Members		Nicola Mitchell	Funding for three part-time Member Support Officers in place	In post April 2004	Review performance with Group Leaders bi-monthly.

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		5) Business Unit Heads to feed information about ward issues into a central point		Maggie Mooney and Jason Gooding	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Annual survey of Members
		6) Improve Members' Briefing to include more information about forthcoming issues		Carolyn Taylor and Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By September 2004	Annual survey of Members
		7) Investigate the creation of a Members' Room in Civic Centre		David Williams	To be undertaken within existing resources	As part of the review of Civic Centre accommodation	Community O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		8) Introduce a Members' Development programme		David Williams	Funding identified in 2004/05 budget	Launched June 2004	Members Learning and Development Steering Group
		9) Organise open days for Members in each Business Unit		David Williams	Members Learning and Development Programme	2004/05	Members Learning and Development Steering Group
		10) Investigate more extensive publication of Members' email addresses in Carlisle Focus and elsewhere		Carolyn Taylor/ Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Survey of Members

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		11) Make a list of Members searchable by postcode on the website		Gareth Down	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Readers' survey in Carlisle Focus
		12) Provide more information about individual Members on the website and through the new Customer Contact Centre		Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By March 2005	Citizens' Panel and annual reader survey in Carlisle Focus

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
7. The Council needs to engage more effectively with young people	To encourage more young people to become involved in local democracy	1) Develop, with partners, an Action Plan to create opportunities for young people to be engaged in the decision- making process	Young people feel included/ involved in what happens in their community	Rob Burns	To be undertaken within existing resources	By September 2004	Community Support Team Plan
		2) Introduce Citizenship packs into schools					
		3) Include youth-based features in Carlisle Focus				By December 2004 Ongoing	Communications Team Plan Readers' survey in Carlisle Focus and survey with Youth Panel

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		4) Develop the youth-based sector of the website		Carolyn Taylor	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Website-based survey
		5) Appoint youth champions in Business Units to ensure policies are youth-proof		Maggie Mooney/ Jason Gooding	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Business Plans through CMT and O&S
		6) Develop more formal links between the Council and the Youth Panel	Youth Issues at heart of the decision-making process	Rob Burns	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Community Support Team Plan

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		7) Youth Panel to develop Young Mayor and other Local Democracy Week initiatives		Rob Burns	Undertaken within existing staff resources. Any funding issues subject to future budget bids	By October 2004	Community Support Team Plan
		8) Pilot an Attainers Event to introduce first time voters to the authority		Carolyn Taylor	£1,000	April 2004	Feedback from attendees
		9) Incorporate 'Youth Issues' into the title of a Portfolio Holder	Encourages community involvement and improves existing links	The Leader	To be undertaken within existing resources	May 2005	Community O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
8. The Council must engage with all groups as effectively as possible	All minority groups have access to Council services and information	10) Explore how Members can be helped to forge links with schools in their wards	Reduces duplication of consultation and helps target hard to reach groups	Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By April 2005	Community O&S
		1) The Council to play an active role in the Cumbria Diversity and Equalities Group	A more representative local authority for the people of the District	Karen Hook	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Business Plan through CMT and O&S
		2) Achieve Level 1 of the CRE (Council for Racial Equality) Standard		Karen Hook	To be undertaken within existing resources	By April 2005	Business Plan through CMT and O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
9. The turnout at elections is poor		3) Community Involvement and Regener- ation Officers to develop links between Community groups and Council		Rob Burns	Within existing resources	December 2004	Community Support Team Plan
		4) Review the information flow to Parish Councils		Claire Rankin	Part of the Parish Democracy Programme	Ongoing	Review of Rural Strategy
	To increase proportion of the electorate that is registered to vote	1) Investigate piloting different voting systems	Delivery of good practice electoral services	David Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	Opportun- istic, before May 2006	Community O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		2) Promote registration and voting	More accessible information to potential electors	David Mitchell	£3,000	Annually in April and September	Through Register of Electors and Voting Returns
		3) Investigate with estate agents and house builders ways to boost rolling registration	Create partnerships between Council and outside agencies	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2005	Business Plan through CMT and O&S
		4) Adhere to outstanding aspects of ODPM good practice	Make the voting process easier/ more accessible	David Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By March 2005	Business Plan through CMT and O&S
		5) Investigate redesign of voter registration form	Better information to electorate	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources.	By September 2005	Business Plan through CMT and O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
					Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids		
		6) Investigate possibility of including more relevant information on polling cards.	Provision of alternative/ easier ways of registering to vote	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2005	Business Plan through CMT and O&S
		7) Investigate different methods of promoting elections and registration	Electoral system simplified for electors. Potential savings to be re-directed to service provision	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2005	Community O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		8) Investigate on-line registration		David Mitchell	Investigation undertaken within existing resources. If implemented, cost of £1,000 to be identified	By September 2004	Business Plan through CMT and O&S
		9) Re-consider decision to elect by thirds each year	Potential to increase turnout	John Egan	Potential savings of £140,000 over two years by reducing number of elections from three to one in each four-year period. Savings on staff time	2007 – not less than 10 years from previous Council resolution on electoral cycle (statutory provision)	Community O&S

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation
		10) Encourage candidates for local elections through information on website	Attract a wide range of potential candidates	Carolyn Taylor	To be undertaken within existing resources	By March 2006	Track nominations for candidates through applications
		11) In conjunction with political parties, offer workshops on 'being a councillor'		David Williams	Member Learning and Development Programme	Programme launched June 2004	Member Learning and Development Programme Steering Group