



Overview Board **Community Involvement in Local Democracy** DRAFT REPORT 0.5

APRIL 2010
OVERVIEW BOARD
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Report of the Overview Board.

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FOREWORD

Local councils are at the forefront of the drive to reconnect people with democratic decision-making. This democratic renewal is about restoring trust and confidence in government and the democratic process and its starting point is the citizen. The district council elections will take place on 5th May 2011 and we need to engage local people in the democratic life of the community, listening to people and asking them to get involved, including taking on their responsibility as citizens to turn out and vote.

It is at the local level that people can most easily get involved and where they can have a personal stake in civic life. It is at the local level where democracy has the potential to be the most tangible and where local citizens can make a difference to the community in which they live. The relationship between local citizens and local governance is a key part of the well being of local communities, where local people can get involved and take personal responsibility for making communities work.

From the city states of ancient Greece to 21st century Britain democracy is a powerful concept and has the potential to unlock the forces of combined endeavour. Democracy is about rights but it is also about responsibilities and citizens playing an active role in their community.

“Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think there is an incompatibility between words and deeds”.

*Pericles' Funeral Oration*¹.

Democracy is not passive but requires active engagement by citizens and this was as true in the polis of ancient Greece as it is now and I believe that we can strive to emulate those virtues in the conduct of the civic life here in the district of Bromsgrove today.

Councillor Les Turner
Chairman of the Community Involvement in Local Democracy Task Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bromsgrove District Council's Overview Board set up a Task Group to investigate ways to promote public engagement in the democratic process. It has considered the legal and constitutional framework through which people can participate in democracy through elections and the ways in which people can participate as citizens both by voting in elections and by getting involved in the local decision making process.

It has considered the new duty to promote democracy and the ways in which the council might enhance the promotion of the democratic process. This includes proposals to run events stalls to promote democracy in public forums in town centres, in supermarkets and at community events and improving the publication of statutory public meetings.

Recommendation One

An Invitation to Attend

That the publication of meeting times and venues of the council, the cabinet, overview and scrutiny and other statutory public meetings be enhanced, with an invitation for the public to attend, including a regular slot publicising meetings in the Together Bromsgrove magazine.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

It has considered the statutory requirements for Councillor Calls for Action and put forward proposals for how this might be able to work as something that might actually be a useful tool for elected councillors in raising issues on behalf of their constituents.

Recommendation Two

Councillor Calls for Action

That the Council adopt a procedure for dealing with Councillor Calls for Action to work in concert with the procedures for Councillor Casework Enquiries and providing recourse to Overview and Scrutiny.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

The Task Group considered the ways in which the council promotes democracy and recommended taking the message to vote and get involved out to people in the community.

<p><u>Recommendation Three</u> <i>Promoting Democracy</i> That events stalls be more widely used to promote democracy, to get registered to vote and get involved, including a stall to be set up in the Bromsgrove high street market, in supermarkets and community events.</p>
<p><u>Financial Implications</u> No financial implications are envisaged.</p>
<p><u>Resource Implications</u> There may be resource implications arising if staff are required to spend extra time manning events stalls, especially if at weekends.</p>

The Task Group has looked at the profile of local democracy on the council's website and considered how the content might be enhanced to make it more informative and engaging. Recommendations include a review of the Council's democracy web pages, the use of consultation portals to engage the public in decision making and the inclusion of a web page aimed specifically at young people.

<p><u>Recommendation Four</u> <i>Cyber Democracy</i> That the local democracy pages of the Council website be reviewed to improve the content and to add summary information on how local democracy works in Bromsgrove and how people can get involved, with a special webpage site for the Democracy Year Campaign.</p>
<p><u>Financial Implications</u> No financial implications are envisaged.</p>
<p><u>Resource Implications</u> No significant resource implications are envisaged.</p>

Recommendation Five

Consultation Portals

That the Council's website use consultation portals to gauge opinion on topics of local interest and local decisions and a means to engage and consult the public in the local democratic decision making process.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation Six

Young Citizens Webpage

That a Young Citizen page be included on the Council internet site specifically aimed at young people, with fun and exciting content, explaining the democratic process and how to get involved.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to draft the content.

The Task Group has considered how the council handles public petitions, based on both the experience of petitions presented to Bromsgrove in the last year and the new Government Guidance and statutory requirements now coming into force. In addition to the petitions scheme, the Task Group is recommending that the council publish guidance for the public so that people will know the process and what to expect when they present a petition to the Council.

Recommendation Seven

Public Petitions

That the Council adopt a petitions scheme, procedure and guidance to set out how petitions and e petitions will be dealt with and the arrangements for receiving petitions.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

The Task Group has considered ways in which the council might be able to support local schools in delivering the objectives of the national curriculum for Citizenship.

Recommendation Eight

Citizenship

That the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services be asked to liaise with Bromsgrove secondary schools to co-ordinate with the Citizenship curriculum being followed in the respective schools to find ways in which the district Council can support the curriculum.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

There will be some resource implications required to liaise with Bromsgrove secondary schools and to support undertaken as agreed by the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services.

It considered ways in which the Council might be able to support the development of the school councils in Bromsgrove secondary schools and to improve students understanding of how democratic processes work and in particular, how local councils operate.

Recommendation Nine

Schools Councils

That the Council work in partnership with Bromsgrove secondary schools to facilitate the Schools Councils' constitutional arrangements and arrangements for making recommendations to the appropriate local decision making bodies.

Financial Implications

Optional extra additional funding required is estimated at £5,000: £2,000 working budget p.a. to support training (annual residential) and £2,000 p.a. for the events. This is *extra* – additional budget, not core or vital to the administration of Schools Council's themselves.

Resource Implications

A small amount of resources in officer time is anticipated, depending on the level of support officered.

These suggested resource allocations are *extra*, not core to the basic implementation of the recommendation or vital to the administration of Schools Council's themselves.

The Task Group heard about the U Decide participatory budgeting project which has successfully engaged with young people in making decisions about locally funded projects and is recommending running further events of this kind.

Draft Recommendation Ten

U Decide

That the Council investigate the possibility of running a further U Decide or similar event in 2011 to involve young people in making decisions on local projects.

Financial Implications

The U Decide scheme 2010 required £50,000 grants from Worcestershire County Council's FLOSS. A further event would require a similar successful bid.

Resource Implications

There would be significant resource implications required to support any future event, comparable to the resources dedicated to the 2010 events.

Task Group is commending a "Democracy Year Campaign" to spearhead the promotion of democracy and link together all the events and activities under a banner that the public can easily identify with and identify the council with. If successful, it is hoped that this will galvanise a positive interest from all sections of the local community and involve a range of community partners, including the college, secondary schools, local arts organisations and the parish councils.

Recommendation Eleven

A Democracy Year Campaign

That there be a Democracy Year Campaign to link together all the events for democracy year under the banner of promoting and involving people in local democracy.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time and commitment will be required to co-ordinate and participate in the Democracy Year Campaign.

To lead this campaign, the Task Group is recommending a Democracy Champion.

Recommendation Twelve

A Democracy Champion

That a Member of the Council be nominated Democracy Champion for one year to champion local democracy.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

To visibly link together the Democracy Year Campaign events under a common banner the Task Group is recommending a Democracy Year emblem to be used in all campaign publicity.

Recommendation Thirteen

Democracy Campaign Emblem

That there be an emblem designed for the Democracy Year Campaign to be used as a part of a democracy year campaign and used on all communications for Democracy Year.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to design the emblem.

To co-ordinate the Democracy Year Campaign the Task Group is recommending a Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group. This should include the key council and community partners necessary to co-ordinate the events and make sure that all of the events fit together as a single campaign and are programmed appropriately throughout the year.

Recommendation Fourteen

Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group

That there be convened a Democracy Year Campaign steering group, to meet at least 4 times a year during 2010-2011, to co-ordinate the Democracy Year Campaign events and activities.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to convene and attend the steering group meetings.

The Task Group has proposed that the Democracy Year Campaign include a programmed series of events organised in co-operation with local community organisations and partners. It is envisaged that this will include incorporating the Democracy Year Campaign into events already within the Council and community events programmes, as well events to promote democracy and local democracy through the arts, films, street theatre, music etc.

Recommendation Fifteen

Celebrating Democracy

That Democracy Year include programmed events to concord with other relevant events in the Council events programme, including International Women's Day 2011, including a celebration of women's suffrage and the history of women's suffrage and Black History Month 2010 celebrating the history and achievements of the black civil rights movement in the USA, South Africa, the British Commonwealth and other parts of the world.

Financial Implications

On advice from Head of Leisure and Cultural Services, an extra £3000 will be required.

Resource Implications

Officer time may be required to co-ordinate and participate in the events.

The Task Group is recommending that the parishes are all formally invited to get involved in the Democracy Year Campaign and that local democratic arrangements are promoted at community events in the parishes not just in the town centres and it is hoped that the parish councils will play an enthusiastic and key role in the Democracy Year Campaign.

Recommendation Sixteen

The Parish Perspective

That the Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Engagement write to the Parish Councils to invite them to join in the Democracy Year Campaign in partnership with the district Council.

Financial Implications

No financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

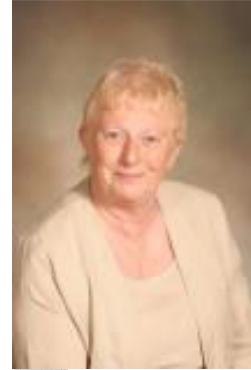
The council is being urged to take up the mantle of community leader to champion democracy and civic engagement and people and organisations throughout the community are asked to be active participants in this democratic and civic renewal.

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP



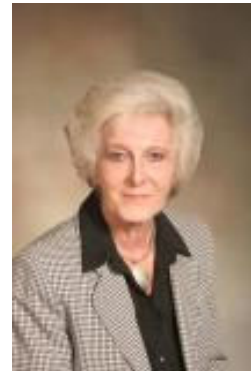
Cllr Les Turner (Chairman)



Cllr Mrs June Griffiths



Cllr Mrs Jean Luck



Cllr Mrs Caroline Spencer



Cllr David McGrath

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK GROUP

Aim

To consider ways to improve community involvement in the democratic process and preparations for Democracy Year 2010 – 2011.

Objectives

1. To review the information provided to the local community on how local governance works and what councils and councillors do,
2. To review the ways in which the Council and its community partners facilitate more active civic participation and community involvement in the democratic process,
3. To review the ways in which the Council promotes local democracy, the role of councillor, how to become a councillor and the activities of elected members to the general public,
4. To review the arrangements for Democracy Year 2010-2011.

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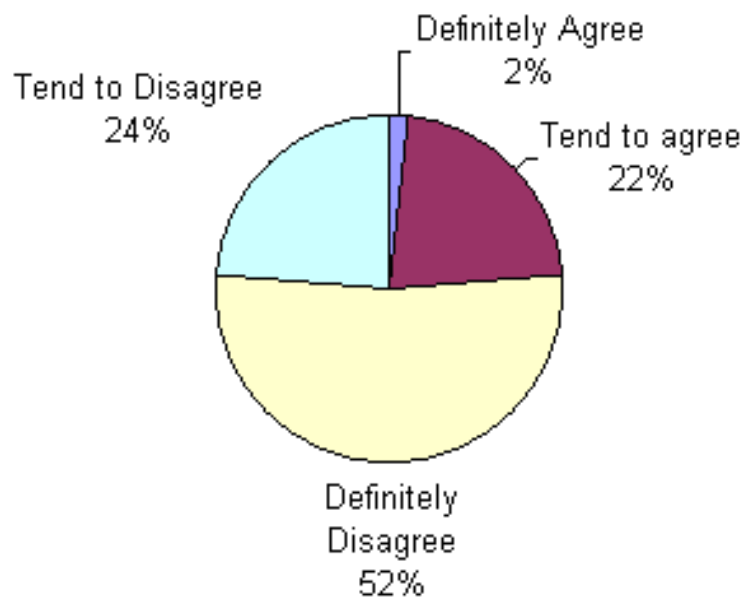
INTRODUCTION

As from April 2009 councils have a 'duty to inform, consult and involve' citizens in decision making. This means providing greater opportunities for local people to get involved and influence the decisions that affect them and it is an opportunity for the council to reinvigorate local democracy and improve the ways in which we involve local citizens.

Most people in Bromsgrove do not feel that they can influence decisions locally and the trend in both national and local elections is for voter turnout to fall. We believe that the council needs to challenge this perception and reverse the apathy and disengagement with the democratic system and we have put forward some proposals for how we can start.

Bromsgrove's Performance

The Place Survey* asked the residents of Bromsgrove "Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?". 76% disagree that they can influence decisions and only 24% agreed that they can have influence².



Compared to other local authority areas in England, Bromsgrove performs just below the average for the West Midlands (28% "agree") and is about average for its nearest statistical neighbours (other demographically similar local authorities).

Bromsgrove's performance against this national indicator has fallen since the 2006-7 survey, when 31% of residents agreed that they could influence local decisions.

* The Place Survey is the new biennial statutory survey that all lower and upper tier local authorities in England are required to carry out.

Despite this, 27% of local residents said that they want greater involvement in local decision making and 65% said that they want more involvement on certain issues.

Turnout in local elections is low. The last elections to Bromsgrove District Council were on 3rd May 2007; the overall turnout was 37.36%. The overall turnout for the Bromsgrove District in the County Council elections on 4th June 2009 was 37.82%³.

It is difficult to pinpoint who is most likely to vote and which groups are least engaged in the democratic process as there is a lack of data for local elections, since voting is strictly confidential.

We have looked what the Council is doing to engage local citizens in the democratic process and has put forward proposals to drive forward a campaign to enthuse and involve people. We particularly want the council to engage with young people and to make sure that the process is accessible and inclusive, but we have highlighted the council's role as community leader to reach out and engage the whole community in local democracy.

How We Involved the Public

Overview and scrutiny is itself part of the democratic process, so we wanted to make sure that the public were given an opportunity to contribute to our investigation. We publicised a questionnaire to allow citizens of Bromsgrove the chance to feed back their views. This was publicised in a press release published in the local newspapers and on the council's website. We sent out posters, flyers and questionnaires in public spaces including the customer service centre and Council House and have reviewed the responses.

A Stakeholder Forum was also held on 2nd March 2010 to allow key community partners and stakeholders to participate and this was attended by a range of different community organisations and local citizens.

We have received evidence from a wide range of different stakeholders, including elected councillors, council officers, parish councillors, and members of the public. We interviewed Cllr Geoff Denaro, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Resources and Cllr Roger Smith, Portfolio Holder for One Community (including Community Engagement) and ask for their views.

A full list of witnesses to the Task Group investigation is given at Appendix 1.

This report sets out 16 recommendations, as well as a series of ***suggestions highlighted in italics***, which it is hoped will be taken up by the people and organisations we have spoken to in the spirit of a positive campaign to promote civic pride and participation throughout the Bromsgrove district.

1 The Democratic Process

- 1.1. Democracy is a big concept and is open to many different interpretations; but we have focused on the democratic process as it relates to voting and participation and representation in the local council decisions making process. This includes electing Members of Parliament (MPs) and local councillors, representation through elected councillors and public involvement with the local democratic decision making process.

Local Government Modernisation

- 1.2. The Local Government Act 2000 changed the way in which local councils in England and Wales are governed by introducing new constitutional models for political decision making, requiring local councils to have an executive to make the key decisions and Council meetings to approve the policy and budgetary framework. Bromsgrove District Council has the Leader and Cabinet model, which broadly mirrors the same arrangements as the UK Parliament and Cabinet. Council constitutions are also required to provide for overview and scrutiny committees to review policy and to hold the executive to account, which are broadly similar in function to House of Commons select committees and standing committees.

Bromsgrove District Council

- 1.3. In Bromsgrove there are 39 councillors, between 1 and 3 elected to each of 23 constituencies throughout the district. The full Council meets to decide the policy and budgetary framework and make appointments to committees. It elects a Leader and Cabinet to make executive decisions and a variety of advisory, regulatory and scrutiny committees.
- 1.4. We believe that local democracy in Bromsgrove is underpinned by clear and effective processes and a high calibre cadre of professional officers consistently applying core values of objectivity, integrity and impartiality in supporting both elected Members of the Council and the general public in the democratic process.
- 1.5. We have reviewed some of the ways in which local democracy is supported at the democratic interface and interviewed democratic services officers involved in administering the democratic process. We have considered the experiences of engaging with local democratic processes both from the perspective of elected councillors and also from the perspective of members of the public.
- 1.6. We have considered the ways in which the public can access information about the local democratic process; who their elected representatives are, where and when meetings are held, what the Council and the various committees are responsible for, how it relates to them and how they can get involved. We have interviewed the Electoral Services Manager to consider the ways in which local

residents are informed about how to register to vote, how and when to vote and how accessible the process is to all sections of the community.

The Electoral Service

- 1.7. We interviewed Mrs Sue Mould, Electoral Services Manager who told us about the Electoral Service and some of the projects that are currently being delivered*. The Electoral Service is responsible for organising all elections in Bromsgrove (European, national, County, District and parish levels). It compiles and publishes the Register of Electors and deals with related matters such as monthly applications to be included on the register or to vote by post. It also deals with boundary and community governance reviews and electoral arrangements and promotes participation in the democratic processes[♥].
- 1.8. There are 4 full time staff in the Electoral Services team and the council employs 25 people within Bromsgrove as canvassers to contact households to encourage them to register to vote. A Worcester Electoral Administrator Group joint working partnership meets once a month to plan a co-ordinated approach and pick up on best practice.

Councillors and Committees

- 1.9. Once elected, councillors represent their constituents at full Council and on a variety of council committees. They also act as an advocate for local citizens in dealing with local issues in their ward. It is important to ensure that councillors can fulfil their role as democratic representatives and that the process is transparent and accountable to local citizens.
- 1.10. For the most part, local citizens views are represented through elected councillors. There are also some opportunities for direct public participation. People can submit petitions, submit proposals to overview and scrutiny Boards, speak at Planning Committee and Licensing Committee meetings or get involved in one of the councils public consultation forums.

The Public Are Welcome to Attend

- 1.11. The democratic process should be open and transparent and committees where elected councillors deliberate are open to the public to attend. We have considered the conduct of committee meetings from the perspective of members of the public attending and have noted the improvements currently being rolled out by committee services to make committee meetings more accessible.

*Performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) were introduced following the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers are assessed against these standards. REF The Electoral Commission, Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain July 2008 and Performance Standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

[♥] From Summer 2009 Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council electoral services departments joined forces to create a combined team which now delivers these services across both authorities.

- 1.12. To people outside the council, the Council House can seem like a private members club rather than a democratic forum. Hitherto, a member of the public attending uninvited to a statutory committee meeting could be forgiven for thinking that the meetings were private and not open to the public.
- 1.13. We note the improvements being made to the signage to meetings during our investigation; this will make it easier for the general public to find a meeting and feel confident that they are allowed to attend uninvited. **We suggest that all statutory public meetings should have a sign on the door of the committee with the committee name on it and the sub-text “the public are welcome to attend”.**
- 1.14. Given the typically low turnout at many of the meetings of the council, **we suggest that committee services make a record of the number of people attending in the public gallery of meetings and set targets for steadily improving attendance.** We are recommending that the meeting times and venues for statutory public meetings be much more widely advertised including a regular slot publicising meetings in the council’s Together Bromsgrove magazine.

<p><u>Recommendation One</u> <i>An Invitation to Attend</i> That the publication of meeting times and venues of the council, the cabinet, overview and scrutiny and other statutory public meetings be enhanced, with an invitation for the public to attend, including a regular slot publicising meetings in the Together Bromsgrove magazine.</p>
<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>No financial implications are envisaged.</p>
<p><u>Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No significant resource implications are envisaged.</p>

- 1.15. In case there are occasional changes to the expected meeting schedule, it may be a good idea to include a brief statement advising people to check the council web pages or telephone to confirm.

Modern Government

- 1.16. We interviewed Mr Andy Stephens, Committee Services Officer at Bromsgrove District Council and reviewed the systems used to administer the publication of reports and decision making. Bromsgrove District Council uses a software application called Modern.Gov to publicise all of the statutory public meetings on the council’s website and to publish all of the associated reports, minutes and decisions of councillors committees. Modern.Gov also facilitates the publication Calendar of Council meetings online. This ensures that members of the public

have access to information for the political decision making process; when and where the meetings are and the information being considered at the meeting.

- 1.17. It is also possible for people to subscribe to updates for agendas and minutes published, through registration over the internet on the Democracy pages of the website. We observed, however, that this facility is not immediately obvious to anyone who was not aware that they could do this or how to register, as the website does not explain this.

The Forward Plan

- 1.18. The Local Government Act 2000 regulations require local authorities in England and Wales to publish a Forward Plan of all the Key Decisions* that are proposed to be taken by the local authority in advance. It is published on a monthly basis covering a four month period.
- 1.19. The purpose of the Forward Plan is to make sure that that members of the public and Members of the Council can find out about Key Decisions being taken. We think that it is important that the existence of the Forward Plan is made more widely known so that people will know where to find out about decisions being made.

Councillor Casework Enquiries

- 1.20. The ward councillor represents the interests of all of his constituents and can flag up issues of local concern in their constituency. Ward councillors can do this by contacting the relevant council departments, by raising the issue with the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder, by raising the issue with the relevant council committee, by submitting a motion to full Council or by submitting a proposal to one of the overview and scrutiny boards. In most cases, issues are raised in first instance with the relevant department as a Councillor Casework Enquiry to get a local neighbourhood issue resolved or to find out information on behalf of residents.
- 1.21. We have noted that Councillor Casework Enquiries are usually dealt with efficiently and effectively. However, we believe that they should be dealt with according to the same high standards of traceability and responsiveness that have been demonstrated through the Customer First process. This would mean that Councillor Casework Enquiries would deliver reliable feedback timescales through elected Councillors and ensure that ongoing enquiries do not get lost in the system. It would also help to ensure that ongoing Councillor Casework Enquiries retain their casework history, which may be useful in uncovering underlying issues and persistent problems.
- 1.22. In fact the Council's Customer First Manual suggests that enquiries from elected Members should already be dealt with through the Customer First procedures.

*Key Decisions are executive decisions which are significant either in terms of expenditure or their impact on the community.

On page 8 it asks “Who are our Customers?” and answers “Everyone we come into contact with – e.g. public, staff, Members, contractors”. On page 9 under “Roles and responsibilities within the Customer Feedback System” it states that one of the roles of Customer Champions is to “assign an officer to investigate a complaint/comment/suggestion/Member/MP enquiry” and “ensure that complaints/compliments/comments and Member/MP enquiries are acknowledged by the relevant service area within 3 working days”⁴.

Councillor Calls for Action

- 1.23. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 together brought in new powers for ward councillors to help them tackle local problems on behalf of their constituents through “Councillor Calls for Action”.
- 1.24. Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) are intended to provide elected ward Councillors with the enhanced ability to call for debate and discussion a topic of neighbourhood concern. The CCfA powers are designed to sit alongside existing mechanisms already at councillors’ disposal to resolve local issues.
- 1.25. Generally speaking, CCfA becomes relevant when a councillor has exhausted all other steps to resolve an issue in his or her ward. Ultimately unresolved pressing neighbourhood issues are referred to a meeting of a council’s overview and scrutiny committee to investigate.
- 1.26. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Guidance on Councillor Call for Action⁵ gives examples of why a ward Councillor might use CCfA including:
 - sustained poor performance at a local school
 - poor maintenance of a park, leading to increased anti-social behaviour
 - a series of complaints about refuse collection services.
- 1.27. It is up to local councils to specify how CCfA will work in their authority and we have considered the approaches taken by a variety of different councils including Redditch Borough Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council and Bournemouth Borough Council. Members also received training on Councillor Calls for Action provided in association with the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham.
- 1.28. The CCfA process must allow for local ward issues to be investigated, but according to the guidance, only arrive at an overview and scrutiny committee when all other attempts at resolution have been tried. For this reason, we envisage that all CCfAs will begin as a Councillor Casework Enquiry and that casework enquiries are the beginning of the CCfA process.
- 1.29. At the moment there is no published procedure or guidance for how a CCfA would be handled in Bromsgrove, or how one might be submitted. We recommend that the council adopt a procedure that will empower ward councillors and be a useful tool in responding to issues in their neighbourhoods.

- 1.30. ***In order to make sure that the CCfA process is both workable and efficient, we suggest that the process should link up the process for Councillor Casework Enquiries with the ability to refer issues to overview and scrutiny as an enhanced tool for elected Members to champion issues of local concern within their ward.***

Recommendation Two

Councillor Calls for Action

That the Council adopt a procedure for dealing with Councillor Calls for Action to work in concert with the procedures for Councillor Casework Enquiries and providing recourse to Overview and Scrutiny.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

- 1.31. CCfA needs to be integrated in to the council's Modern Councillor training programme. ***We suggest that, in addition, the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services be asked to publish guidance for elected Members, officers and the public to make sure that everyone is aware of how the scheme works and that issues can be dealt with under CCfA quickly and effectively. The Councils website should also be updated.***

2 One Community

- 2.1. We believe that local democracy should be open to all sections of the community and create a strong sense of civic participation and engagement. We have considered how the council reaches out to engage the whole community and removes barriers to participation.

Democracy and Equalities

- 2.2. We have considered various dimensions of equalities and accessibility of the democratic process in Bromsgrove. We have spoken to members of the Bromsgrove District Council Equality and Diversity Forum and we have interviewed Fiona Scott, Equalities Officer at Bromsgrove District Council, to ask about ways in which the Council might improve accessibility of democracy to all sections of the community.
- 2.3. We would like to acknowledge the work already being undertaken to outreach into the community. We heard that the Electoral Services Manager has attended the Bromsgrove Equalities Forum to speak about encouraging people to register to vote and that member organisations have also been contacted individually. Electoral Services provide information on voting and registering to vote in all main alternative formats.
- 2.4. The Equalities Officer told us that there are different levels of awareness in different sections of the community. It may be useful to conduct some further research to find out more information on what groups are more and less engaged. Packs of information and registration forms are taken to residential homes, along with information on postal voting. Visits are made if there are requests by particular groups and venues such as polish clubs and other social centres are targeted to let them know when elections are happening.
- 2.5. We considered how the council might be able to improve accessibility to the democratic process to all sections of the community, including those who are least engaged or suffer barriers to participation. We have made suggestions, where possible, to improve accessibility to the process, although we recognise that there are limitations on local innovations due to the fact that the entire electoral process is prescribed by statute⁶.

Access to Polling Stations

- 2.6. We considered the accessibility of polling stations in the district. All polling stations in Bromsgrove meet the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) standards. We heard that Electoral Services carry out an annual survey of polling stations. An access audit was carried out by SCOPE in 2007 and recommendations from this have been mainly implemented where it was possible to do so⁷. Anyone can also choose to vote through a postal vote or by proxy.

- 2.7. Polling stations are well signposted and car parking spaces for disabled people are provided at every station. Maps showing the polling station location are now printed in 12 point size font on the polling card. In exceptional circumstances the presiding officer at polling stations provides assistance in an appropriate manner in order to allow someone to vote while retaining the principle of the secret ballot.
- 2.8. We asked the Equalities Officer at Bromsgrove District Council her views on the accessibility at polling stations. She said that there are sensory (visually impaired, hearing impaired) barriers and mobility (e.g. wheelchair users) which need to be considered. We discussed the possibility of introducing simple picture signs at polling stations and suggest that this would be worth considering, after it has been tested out on focus groups to make sure that it is useful and effective. We heard that, where English is not a voters first language, language barriers are being tackled by providing a list of languages and asking voters to indicate which one and then taking their phone number and getting a translator to call them later, but there is currently no way of explaining this process to them.

Access to Committees

- 2.9. Council committee meetings are open to anyone to attend at any time* but can be a bit confusing to people who are not used to attending. This is especially the case when people suffer from severe visual impairment, or other disabilities which prevent people from understanding written material.
- 2.10. We believe that more could be done to encourage members of the public in general to feel welcome to attend statutory public meetings and we noted the improvements that are currently being made through the Customer First improvement programme and action plan. These will help all sections of the community to feel more able and more welcome to participate.
- 2.11. ***We suggest that a short review be carried out as part of the Customer First improvement programme, to consider the format and conduct of meetings to introduce a standard to ensure it is easily accessible to visually impaired members of the public and anyone attending who is not familiar with the proceedings. The standard should include the chairman of the committee audibly introducing all members of the committee and other participants and providing extra feedback to explain what's happening.***
- 2.12. To improve accessibility to the general democratic process, the council offers, on request, all committee papers in the main accessible formats, specifically large print, Braille, audio tape or CD. It may also provide foreign language interpretation or British Sign Language interpretation if needed, upon request. This should be clearly stated on agenda papers and on the Democracy pages of the council website.

*Except when certain exempt items are being discussed.

- 2.13. In exceptional cases, where there is a need, we believe the council should consider introducing a policy of providing transport to meetings, where people have severe mobility problems. This should be by application to and at the discretion of the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services.

Different But Equal

- 2.14. Everyone in the community has a right to participate equally in the democratic process, but some people find it harder to participate than others. We believe the council needs to consider, wherever feasible, to do what it can to remove obstacles to participation.
- 2.15. We have consulted the Bromsgrove Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) for their views on our draft recommendations and to investigate the variety of engagement of accessibility issues that exist from different sections of the community. **We suggest that all of the organisations affiliated to the EDF are invited to get involved in the Democracy Year Campaign.**
- 2.16. We have considered the variety of different possible impediments to participation in the democratic process. In particular we have considered:
- Mobility impairment
 - Visual impairment
 - Hearing impairment
 - Dual sensory impairment
 - Mental health issues and mental impairment
 - Language barriers and literacy

Mobility impairment

- 2.17. Polling stations meet DDA (The Disability Discrimination Act) standards. Porta cabins, where used as polling stations, are now at a lower height than they used to be, which provides much better access for those with mobility impairments. Sometimes the doorway of the portable building is not wide enough for users of mobility scooters or electric wheelchairs to get in.

Visual Impairment

- 2.18. The term 'visual impairment' refers to people with irretrievable sight loss and this simple definition covers a wide spectrum of different impairments. It includes "blind" people and people with complete loss of eyesight, but it does not include those whose sight problems can be corrected by spectacles or contact lenses. There are between one and a half and two million visually impaired people in the UK⁸.
- 2.19. At the moment, an application to register to vote can be produced in large print or Braille on demand and the voter's packs at the Customer Service Centre have all the forms in a number of languages, in large print and in Braille. A template with tactile features numbered 1 – 15 to line up against the ballot paper is part of the

presiding officer's pack at polling stations to assist visually impaired people upon request. **We suggest that prospective candidates and elected MPs and councillors also need to consider how to provide their own information in accessible formats.**

- 2.20. Committee documents can be provided in alternative formats upon request and we heard that the Equalities team are currently looking into ways of improving the format of documents so that they can be accessed on computer through the use of specialist computer software (Browsealoud, Screenreader and Thunder) which read the contents of a document out loud.
- 2.21. Best practice includes avoiding the use of bullet points and automatic paragraph numbering and avoiding the use of block capitals, italics, under-lining, flashing text, moving borders or images and tables to present information, as these formats create difficulties for some visually impaired people.
- 2.22. **We have observed that some committee papers, e mail and web based communications do use small fonts, which can be an unnecessary barrier to a large number of visually impaired people and we suggest that the use of 12 font or above be considered as a standard on all council communications.**
- 2.23. We explored the possibility of introducing extra tactile information such as embossed logos on the postal vote, polling card or on the ballot paper but found this was not possible as electoral documentation formats are prescribed by law⁹.
- 2.24. We have heard from Ms Stephanie Sergeant, a blind service user. She was asked what, if any, impediments she is aware of for visually impaired people. She told us that the electoral registration form can be difficult to complete as she is only aware of being able to do this through a hard copy format in print. She said that peoples' awareness of the need to register could be improved by putting out an advert in the Talking Newspaper¹⁰.
- 2.25. She said that voting can be challenging as this is in print and there is a need to provide embossed writing or a tactile way to identify what is written. She said that she usually votes by postal ballot but that she still needs someone to read this out to her. It would be ideal to have this available in audio.
- 2.26. We have considered the idea of audio links available on the website. Stephanie Sergeant said that this would be "very accessible to blind people". Sight Concern in Worcester can provide more information on how the council can improve and test out improvements for blind people. **We suggest that the Democracy pages of the council website be updated with audio and video links to explain particular processes. This should improve accessibility and make the site more interesting for everybody.**

Hearing Impairment

- 2.27. In Bromsgrove there are approximately 200 people with significant hearing impairment, including people with sight impairment as well. General population figures for Bromsgrove from the 2001 Census show over 12,000 as having some degree of hearing loss.
- 2.28. There is an easy to read pictorial voting booklet which is provided in the presiding officer's pack at polling stations which can be used to guide voters if necessary. People can also contact the Electoral Services team through the use of a text phone. The publication of reports and information over the internet also goes a long way to removing barriers to information for people with hearing impediments.
- 2.29. We have heard that the public attending committee meetings in the council chamber have sometimes complained that they cannot hear the proceedings properly. There is an induction hearing loop system installed in the council chamber to provide hearing assistance to hearing aid users, although people have sometimes complained that this "isn't working properly".

Mental Health

- 2.30. A new national campaign has been launched under the umbrella term of "Rethink" which includes "Rethink Politics" which is designed to increase the engagement of people with mental illness in the political process¹¹. The Bromsgrove Partnership has set up a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Theme Group to look at the rethink campaign and it is proposed that one local event will be organised in Bromsgrove this year.
- 2.31. "Mental impairment" includes a very wide range of issues, each of which has a wide spectrum from very mild to very severe, including dementia, autism and learning disability. Further detailed research would be needed to identify issues that affect such a wide range of impairments and propose possible improvements.
- 2.32. ***We have heard that evidence has been considered by the Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services department of the council relating to learning difficulties, including dyslexia and the possibilities of introducing simple aids such as the provision of pastel coloured plastic transparencies to place over a ballot paper to assist with reading the names printed. If this is cost effective and feasible, we suggest that this be introduced as soon as possible.***
- 2.33. There is also an easy to read pictorial voting booklet provided in the presiding officer's pack at polling stations, which can be used to assist voters in what to do and should be very useful for a range of people (with and without impairments) to help convey the information about voting in a simple, friendly, easy to understand way.

Migrant Workers

- 2.34. Many people come to live and work in the UK from other countries and some are entitled to vote in different elections in the UK, depending on their nationality. Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland are entitled to vote in UK General Elections and local elections*. European Union citizens are eligible to vote in European Union parliamentary elections and local elections but not General Elections¹².
- 2.35. There are no reliable figures as to how many migrant workers are living in the district, but the number of National Insurance numbers issued provides an indication. More than 41% of the National Insurance number allocations in 2008/09 were to people from Poland¹³. The Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2009/2010 provides data for Bromsgrove over the years 2002/03 to 2008/09 and level peaked at just 200 people in Bromsgrove in 2006/07.

Language Barriers

- 2.36. There is new Interpreting Service, due to open on 1st April 2010 and this will be available to polling stations for emergency immediate foreign language interpretation. All presiding officers are required to have a mobile phone with them at polling stations and so they will be able to access this service as and when required. **We suggest that this service be extended to assistance for residents to access their Councillors for non political meetings or discussions.**

Democracy for All

- 2.37. We believe that the council needs to actively engage the whole community, reaching out to people who don't participate and involving those who alienated from civic life. Local democracy needs to feel open and transparent and we need to build the relationship with the community through elected councillors and democratic engagement.
- 2.38. This includes all sections of the community; young people and older people, parish communities, ethnic minorities: The council is the community leader in bringing everyone together in constructive democratic participation and dialogue, building civic pride and a sense of One Community. We believe that local democracy and the elected councillor are the foundation for building that relationship.

*Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK who are entitled to register to vote provided that they also fulfil the age requirement for registration and are not subject to any other legal incapacity.

3 The Duty to Promote Democracy

- 3.1. Councils need to actively promote a better understanding of how local democracy works. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 places a duty on local authorities to promote understanding among local people of the opportunities that exist for members of the public to get involved in and influence the decisions made by local councils and other local public bodies. Section 1 of the Act places a duty on principal local authorities* (including district councils) to promote understanding of their functions and their democratic arrangements. This includes opportunities for people to participate by:
- standing and serving as a councillor;
 - voting to elect representatives;
 - making representations to councillors and other directly elected representatives, including by submitting petitions;
 - taking part in consultations, formal forums, panels and public meetings, including attending the public parts of council meetings;
 - taking on a civic role such as school governor or independent custody visitor¹⁴.
- 3.2. The Act also places a duty on principal local authorities to promote understanding among local people of other public bodies that relate to the authority's area; what these bodies do and their democratic arrangements. These are public bodies or persons that have a strong local presence, making decisions that are directly relevant to local people in the local authority's area and including the county council, parish councils and parish council meetings, police authorities, health bodies, schools and further education colleges and transport authorities[♥].
- 3.3. We have put forward recommendations to improve the promotion of democracy and local democracy in Bromsgrove. These include a Democracy Year Campaign starting in June 2010 to lead up to next district elections in 2011 and beyond and proposals to improve peoples knowledge on how to get involved to increase voter turn out, developing the ward councillor role, raising the profile of elected councillors to the public, promoting a better understanding of what councillors do to help people find out more about becoming a councillor.

Be a Councillor

- 3.4. In the United Kingdom, all local authorities are governed by elected councillors[▲]. Councillors may or may not be affiliated to a political party, but once elected are meant to represent all their constituents and not just those who voted for them.

*"Principal local authority" means; (a) a county or district council in England; (b) a London borough council; (c) the Common Council of the City of London in its capacity as a local authority; (d) a county or county borough council in Wales.

♥ The Act places a duty on principal local authorities to promote understanding of "connected authorities" including health bodies; police bodies; fire and rescue authorities; waste bodies; schools and FE colleges; national park and broads authorities; transport authorities; economic prosperity boards and combined authorities; probation services; parish councils and meetings; for a county council in a two-tier area, a district council; for a district council in a two-tier area, a county council (ref The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, Part 1: Democracy and Involvement).

▲ This includes: Unitary authorities, County councils, District councils Parish Councils, town and community councils.

- 3.5. Councillors can come from many different walks of life and may have many different skills and aptitudes. Whilst we recognise that a good councillor can represent constituents from any background, we think it is generally desirable that there should be a mix of different people, which helps to represent the different people in the local community. Some types of people, such as young people, may be less likely to come forward and be elected councillors and there can be barriers that make it more difficult for some people to become councillors.
- 3.6. ***We believe that we need to let everyone in the community know that they could consider standing as a local councillor and we suggest that a special “open day” event be held during the Democracy Year Campaign to enable people to come and find out more about it. We also suggest the provision of more information on the council website to explain what a councillor does and how to seek election.***
- 3.7. The 2007 Local Elections in the UK saw the age limit for councillors fall to 18, and we suggest that that younger people from age 18 should now be encouraged to stand to encourage a younger generation of councillors to come forward.
- 3.8. ***For more information on becoming a local councillor see www.beacouncillor.org.uk***

Promoting Voting

- 3.9. The council needs to encourage more people to turn out and vote. The council already uses events stalls occasionally in the run up to elections, to provide information to people on registering to vote. We have heard from Redditch Borough Council about their experiments in setting up stalls in supermarkets, in order to catch the attention of as many people as possible. We are recommending that the council roll out more events stalls to promote the democratic process, including voter registration, in conjunction with the Democracy Year Campaign. These should be held in civic spaces and forums where there are lot of people, including in the town centre market place, in supermarkets and at parish fairs and events.



Recommendation Three

Promoting Democracy

That events stalls be more widely used to promote democracy, to get registered to vote and get involved, including a stall to be set up in the Bromsgrove high street market, in supermarkets and community events.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

There may be resource implications arising if staff are required to spend extra time manning events stalls, especially if at weekends.

- 3.10. ***We noted that councillors are also able to give out electoral registration forms and postal vote applications forms and we suggest that all councillors receive training on all aspects of voting and registration, including proxy voting, postal voting.***

Communicating Democracy

- 3.11. The way that citizens see the council and their local representatives is often shaped by the local media. Informing residents about how local democracy works can be a matter of getting the right messages across through the local newspapers, newsletters and community internet sites. We need to make sure that the media is a place where people can be properly informed with positive messages about how local democracy works.
- 3.12. A lot of the coverage that local councils get in local news media is corporately orientated and excludes the political/democratic face of elected representatives, especially when compared to national government, which is almost exclusively politically led in the media. Very often council services are “fronted” by officers not elected community leaders. So residents might be forgiven for not knowing who their elected representatives in office are and ultimately, who to hold to account for the services they provide. This poses a problem for democratic accountability.

Together Bromsgrove

- 3.13. The council has its own publication; the Together Bromsgrove magazine that delivers news and original features to residents, direct from Bromsgrove District Council. Every household in the Bromsgrove district is



sent the magazine up to three times a year and it covers the council's key priorities, activities and messages for residents. We have looked at editions of Together Bromsgrove to see how local democracy and democratic representatives are profiled in the magazine. We have also looked at other council's magazines to see how it compares.

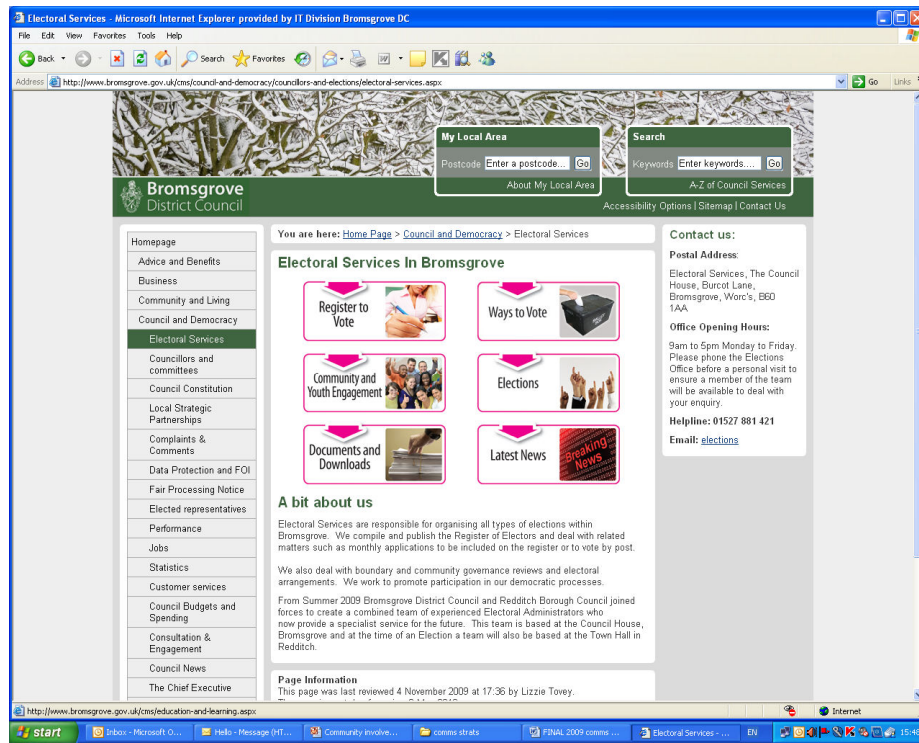
- 3.14. Redditch Borough Council has a magazine called Redditch Matters, similar to the Together Bromsgrove publication. We noticed that compared to most other council magazines Together Bromsgrove does not feature elected Members or say much about the democratic process. Where the magazine features council services it is usually fronted by a council officer. In other council's magazines we noticed that there will be profiles of elected Members, including typically a Leaders column and comments from portfolio holders responsible for the services being profiled. We believe this helps people connect with the councillors representing them and who are responsible for the services the council provides.
- 3.15. Parish councils usually also have their own local newsletters, which they publish and distribute themselves. We suggest that the possibility of including parish council newsletters with the distribution of the Together Bromsgrove be investigated, provided that this can be achieved with minimal extra cost.

Read All About It

- 3.16. We have interviewed Mr Peter John, Publisher at the Stourbridge division of the Newsquest publishing group, which includes the Bromsgrove Advertiser. Mr John said that the philosophy of Newsquest is no longer that of a "newspaper company" but a "media company" and that newspaper distribution is falling whilst alternative media on the web is growing. Channels for news messages are no longer just what is being published in the newspaper but also what is published on the web.
- 3.17. We commend the council's communications team for the work they have done to improve the image of Bromsgrove District Council in the public media. We believe that the roles and responsibilities of elected portfolio holders and other representatives needs to be given a higher profile in the local media and through the communications strategy, so that people know who is responsible for the services the council provides.
- 3.18. We also need to make sure we are getting the message across to the whole community. Traditional print media remains very important and certain sections of the population are likely to read it, but 16-25 year olds often do not read newspapers. This age group do however explore internet and social networking sites and we need to improve the profile of our local democracy over the web and other media.

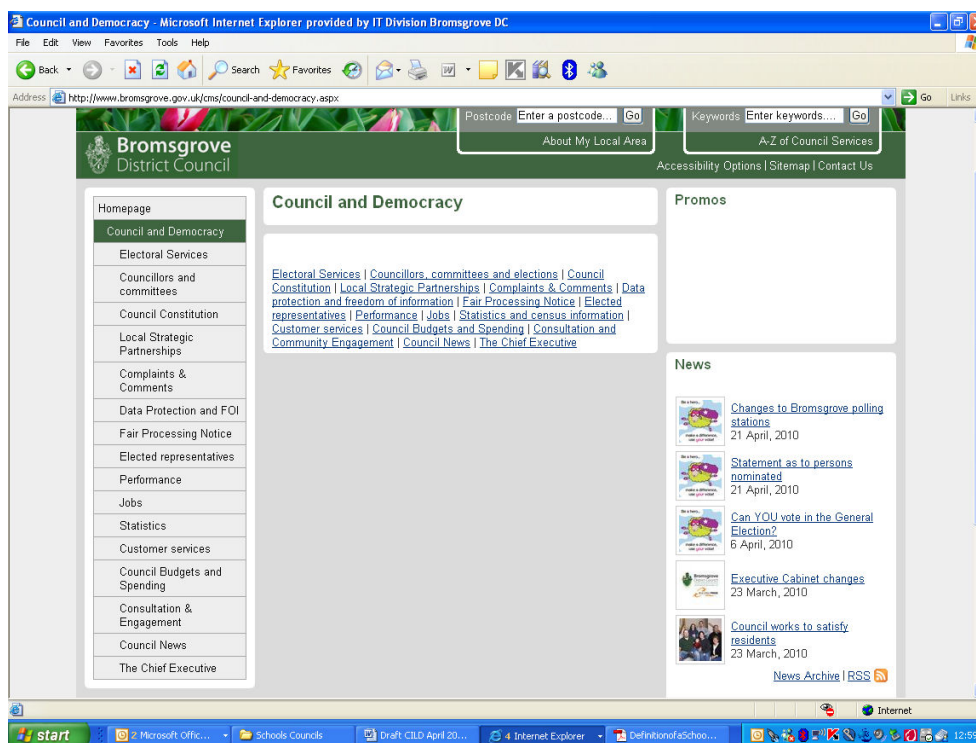
Cyber Democracy

- 3.19. One of the main media for communications is now the internet and we have reviewed the council's democracy pages of the website to see how democracy is presented and how accessible and interesting it is. In addition to the expanding home internet usage, there is public access to the internet in libraries and some village halls, which makes the internet a powerful tool for reaching a wide cross section of people and especially younger people.



www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/electoral-services.aspx

- 3.20. We have looked at the profile of local democracy on the council's website in comparison with other councils and considered how the content might be enhanced to make it more informative and attractive. We have noted the new Electoral Services pages of the website which feature clear visual messages and development with easy access buttons and more visual information.
- 3.21. We believe that the local democracy pages could be improved with images and a brief description of what local democracy in Bromsgrove is. Some of the links may not be intelligible to someone unfamiliar with the council operations and may include links that are seemingly irrelevant to local democracy such as "Fair Processing Notice", "Complaints and Comments" and "Jobs".



www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy.aspx

- 3.22. We are recommending that a review of the Council's democracy web pages be carried out to improve the content on how local democracy works, make it easier to navigate and use some exciting images, audio and video content rather than just text. We suggest that there should be a high profile link to the Democracy Year Campaign on the home page and the democracy pages. **We also suggest that the web address www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/democracy be used to link directly to the democracy web page.**

Recommendation Four
Cyber Democracy

That the local democracy pages of the Council website be reviewed to improve the content and to add summary information on how local democracy works in Bromsgrove and how people can get involved, with a special webpage site for the Democracy Year Campaign.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

- 3.22. We believe the council web pages on democracy could be enhanced to make them more attractive and engaging. Content should be upgraded to include a description of the political decision making arrangements, to encourage the public to attend Council and committee meetings, explain how to present a petition, information on Councillor Calls for Action, Councillor Casework Enquiries and how to make proposals to overview and scrutiny committees. We are also recommending the use of the website to engage and consult on particular issues using consultation portals.

Recommendation Five

Consultation Portals

That the Council's website use consultation portals to gauge opinion on topics of local interest and local decisions and a means to engage and consult the public in the local democratic decision making process.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

- 3.23. ***We suggest that short "You Tube" style video links be included on the council website to make it more fun and interactive. These could include elected councillors talking about their roles, young people and other local citizens talking about community issues.***

- 3.24. In addition, we suggest that the Democracy pages on the council website should be given a higher profile and advertised more widely, including through the Together Bromsgrove magazine and on the front sheet of published agendas. This will help people to link to the information on the website and find out more about how local Democracy in Bromsgrove works.

Young Citizens Webpage

- 3.25. To reach young people we need to get the message across in different ways, such as via the internet (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Bebo social networking internet sites), or through subscribed text phone messages. It also needs to be managed by someone who can "speak their language" and run in a way that engages and interests young people. Bromsgrove District Council already uses Facebook and Twitter internet based social networking sites, although this needs to be further developed.
- 3.26. We also recommend that the Democracy pages of the council's web site include a page specifically aimed at young people. This should include lots of interesting and exciting content on issues that are relevant to young people and

communicating with young people in a way that they respond to. It should include links to the school councils, the Youth Cabinet and the UK Youth Parliament, as well as consultation with young people on particular topics using internet consultation portals. The success of such a page will depend upon how interesting and relevant it is to young people and if possible, it would be good to involve young people in the design and content of these pages.

Recommendation Six

Young Citizens Webpage

That a Young Citizen page be included on the Council internet site specifically aimed at young people, with fun and exciting content, explaining the democratic process and how to get involved.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to draft the content.

Councillor Blogs

- 3.27. Many citizens do not know who their local ward representatives are. This is important because the ability of councillors to represent their constituents is dependent upon the relationship a councillor has with his constituents. ***We have considered the profile of elected representatives on the council website and we suggest that this be enhanced to provide “personalised” profiles of who councillors are and what responsibilities they have providing details of how to contact them, any special responsibilities they may have, what committees they serve on. It should also provide a short personal statement from each councillor.***
- 3.28. We discussed the idea of Members setting up their own internet blogs to communicate with residents. This seems to be a good idea, however, the council may not be able to directly host this as it may be considered too “political” and it may be difficult for the council to be held responsible for content. The council website may however be able to feature links to external sites blogged by councillors themselves and we suggest that this be investigated.

The Art of Democracy

- 3.29. Arts media can be an exciting and engaging way to promote local democracy, and especially to young people. We have considered some of the ways the council and its community partners might communicate the importance of democracy through the arts, particularly for events linked to the Democracy Year Campaign. This might include street theatre events, cinema, music and it is

envisaged that arts events could involve young people and other citizens in the events as well as promoting civic engagement in an entertaining way. The Arts present a different and powerful way through which the council can engage with residents.

- 3.30. We interviewed Mr Huw Moseley, the Arts Development and Special Events Officer at Bromsgrove District Council and Mr Andy Woods, Director of Artrix to ask them how arts and events might be linked to the promotion of democracy. The Artrix is a community arts centre which runs in partnership with the council. On occasion, particular events run by the council are hosted at the Artrix and the Artrix also has good linkages with other community groups such as the North East Worcestershire (NEW) Collage and schools, which can help the council engage with the community.
- 3.31. ***We suggest that the list of arts events for 2010-2011 be checked to identify events which might link to the Democracy Year Campaign. Young people at North East Worcestershire (NEW) Collage, schools and other young peoples groups could be involved in projects to promote democracy. One idea is to involve young people in making short films clips. The best of these could be shown before the main films showing at the Artrix and showcased on the council internet site.***
- 3.32. We also envisage that the Democracy Year Campaign will involve street theatre events, music events and engage other art forms in partnership with the Artrix, NEW College, local schools and other community groups.

DRAFT

4 Community Involvement in Local Democracy

- 4.1. Local councils have a duty to involve residents in decision making and we have considered the ways in which the council and its community partners can encourage community engagement, civic participation and community involvement in local democracy.
- 4.2. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places duties “to inform, consult and involve” local people in local decision making process. This means providing greater opportunities for local people to get involved and influence the decisions that affect them. The duty to involve is an opportunity to reinvigorate local democracy and improve the quality of both decision making and the services that local people receive.
- 4.3. According to the Act, involving people means making sure that citizens and local representatives are:
 - provided with information about the exercise of a function,
 - consulted about the exercise of the function, or
 - involved in another way¹⁵.

Opening Up Democracy

- 4.4. Engaging citizens through the local democratic process where decisions are being made is one of the ways we need to involve local people. We believe that the council needs to open up the democratic process by encouraging local people to attend meetings and where possible, to play a role as active citizens in the decision making process.
- 4.5. In Bromsgrove, citizens can already address the Planning Committee and the Licensing Committee if they wish to make their views known on particular planning and licensing applications. They can also submit a petition to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board, where the lead petitioners have been able to address members of the board. In addition, members of the public can participate (by invitation or application) in overview and scrutiny meetings to give evidence on a particular topic, or to make a topic proposal.
- 4.6. ***We believe there is scope to do more; through existing procedures, through greater efforts to engage and involve, especially at full Council, Cabinet and in overview and scrutiny committees. In particular, we suggest that the council consider introducing procedures to allow members of the public to submit questions at full Council and Cabinet to portfolio holders and to present public petitions.***

Petitions

- 4.7. Bromsgrove District Council already allows members of the public to submit petitions for consideration by elected councillors. New legislation means that this will soon become a requirement for all local authorities and for the first time councils will be required to respond to petitions and tell local people what action is going to be taken to address their concerns.
- 4.8. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 has introduced a requirement for councils to receive petitions and e-petitions. During our investigation the Government Guidance "Listening to communities: Statutory guidance on the duty to respond to petitions" was published and councils are now required to introduce a petitions scheme before 15th June 2010. Councils are also required, from 15th December 2010 to introduce an e-petitions facility.
- 4.9. We have considered the arrangements currently in place for dealing with petitions. To date 3 petitions have been received. On 19th January 2010 the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board received 2 petitions, one on the demolition of the market hall and another on the fair trade campaign. This enabled the board to try out provisional procedures for dealing with petitions. The procedure that was followed afforded the petition spokesmen the chance to present the case to the committee and reflected the function of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board as an investigatory review body independent of the Cabinet.
- 4.10. We have noted that the very act of receiving petitions seems to raise expectations on the part of some local campaigners that their cause will change council policy, but inevitably this will not always be the case. The way in which the council dealt with the petitions did however demonstrate the willingness of the council to engage with local groups in the democratic process and considered their views in an objective and fair way. We suggest that the council could help to manage expectations and improve access by publishing clear guidance and procedures.
- 4.11. We believe that the process followed on 19th January 2010 was successful in dealing with the petitions properly and fairly and that this same or similar process should be used to regulate the way petitions are dealt with in the future.

Recommendation Seven

Public Petitions

That the Council adopt a petitions scheme, procedure and guidance to set out how petitions and e petitions will be dealt with and the arrangements for receiving petitions.

Financial Implications

No financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

- 4.12. We are suggesting that the department use the Modern.Gov software system to manage the electronic petitions scheme on the council website at minimal extra cost. We suggest that the e petitions submitted online include a postcode field to ensure that “signatures” are only counted from verifiable addresses.
- 4.13. We are recommending that the council publish guidance for members of the public along with the scheme on the council website and available upon request. We noted that petitions received by the JOSB have been presented in formats that can make it difficult to verify the number of signatures and do not always provide personal signatures. We suggest that a standard petitions form be included with the petitions scheme to provide people with a standard template.
- 4.14. Local authorities are permitted to impose thresholds of up to 5% of the population to trigger a debate at full Council. We suggest that the petition scheme require somewhat less than this (eg between 1000 – 2000 signatures) to make it feasible for petitioners to get enough signatures, especially where it concerns large areas with small populations. On average, at least one petition a year might reasonably be expected. ***We suggest that the scheme is reviewed after 12 months to make sure that there are a balanced number of petitions reaching full council for debate.***

The Parish Perspective

- 4.15. A parish council is a type of local authority found in England and the most local tier of local government. They are elected bodies and have variable tax raising powers. Parish councils are responsible for areas known as civil parishes. There are approximately 8,500 councils in England and there are 20 parish councils in the Bromsgrove district, based around the local villages¹⁶.
- 4.16. We made sure that parish councils were involved our investigation and all parish councils in the district were asked for their views. We also interviewed Mr. John Cypher, Chairman of Alvechurch Parish Council and Mrs Sue Baxter, Chairman

of Wythall Parish Council. A clear message that came across was that parish councils want to be involved in promoting and engaging with citizens on local democracy. In fact, we need to consider promotion of democracy across all 3 levels of local government: county, district and parish. We also need to improve peoples understanding of the different functions and responsibilities of each of these.

- 4.17. Parish councils can be useful partners in promoting democracy as they have close links with the grass roots in local communities and with local community activists and volunteers and have a strong sense of civic participation.
- 4.18. There is a need to encourage more people to stand for election as parish councillors. Very often parish councillors stand unopposed and this can mean, effectively, that local citizens have no choice about who represents them at parish level and this could undermine the democratic legitimacy of parish councils. ***We suggest that parish councils be invited to be fully involved in programmes to promote local democracy and information about parish councils needs to be embellished on the council website.***
- 4.19. ***To find out more about parish councils see www.nalc.gov.uk. Bromsgrove district parish councils are listed on the Democracy pages of the council's website.***

5 Young People

- 5.1. We believe that the council needs to engage and involve young people in the democratic process and in decisions that affect young people and encourage them to play an active role as citizens and in the civic life of their community. Not all young people will engage in the same way or through the same social networks so it is use a wide variety of different approaches.
- 5.2. Young people are often disengaged from the mainstream political process. In a study carried out by the Electoral Commission only 56% of those aged between 17 and 24 were registered to vote¹⁷. MORI estimates that just 39% of young people (aged 18-24) registered to vote in the 2001 General Election voted and just 37% at the 2005 general election¹⁸.

Happy 18th Birthday!

- 5.3. Most young people do not view local politics as important to them. Research for the Local Government Association by Ipsos MORI shows that just a quarter of 11-16 year olds believe that their local councillor is the best person to approach in order to change something in their community and when asked who they respect most outside their family, only 1% chose politicians. The same percentage number chose their dog!¹⁹.
- 5.4. In the past becoming eligible to vote was a sign of coming of age, but in modern times it has lost this significance. **We suggest that all residents should be sent a birthday card from the council on their 18th birthday, congratulating them that they are now eligible to vote and telling them how to register.**

Sending the Councillor Back to School

- 5.5. We need to promote engagement and understanding of the mainstream democratic process and this means engaging young people where they meet and communicating in a way they relate to. We need to promote the democratic process in schools and colleges, through community groups and through social forums where young people congregate, both in the real world and online.
- 5.6. Research for the Local Government Association by Ipsos MORI shows that just one in three 11-16 year olds have ever met a councillor or MP, and states that those who have 'are more likely to express feelings of political engagement and interest²⁰. **We suggest that the council investigate the possibility of arranging presentations on local democracy to Citizenship classes from council officers and elected Members of the Council.**
- 5.7. **For more information about this, see the guides published on the LGA Local Democracy Campaign website: www.localdemocracy.lga.gov.uk**

The National Curriculum

- 5.8. We have heard from Clare Baylis, Citizenship Advisor Worcestershire County Council and considered the National Curriculum Citizenship key stages 3 and 4, specifically areas of the curriculum which support the development of local democracy projects and partnerships with schools. Education for citizenship aims to equip young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in public life. Citizenship encourages them to take an interest in topical and controversial issues and engage in discussion and debate. Pupils learn about their rights, responsibilities, duties and freedoms and about laws, justice and democracy. They learn to take part in decision making and different forms of action and they should be encouraged to play an active role in the life of their schools, neighbourhoods, communities and wider society as active local citizens.
- 5.9. The National Curriculum for Citizenship is taught through different approaches in different schools but in all cases aims to provide young people with an understanding of the key concepts and institutional processes that can underpin democratic participation. The concepts explored at KS3 and KS4 are:
- Participating actively in different kinds of decision-making and voting in order to influence public life.
 - Considering how democracy, justice, diversity, toleration, respect and freedom are valued by people with different beliefs, backgrounds and traditions within a changing democratic society.
 - Understanding and exploring the roles of citizens and parliament in holding government and those in power to account.
 - Exploring different kinds of rights and obligations and how these affect both individuals and communities.
 - Understanding that individuals, organisations and governments have responsibilities to ensure that rights are balanced, supported and protected.
 - Investigating ways in which rights can compete and conflict, and understanding that hard decisions have to be made to try to balance these²¹.
- 5.10. The National Curriculum for Citizenship explores the key features of parliamentary democracy and local government in the UK, including voting and elections and the actions citizens can take in the democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond. The curriculum should provide opportunities for pupils to participate in both school-based and community-based citizenship activities and work with a range of community partners. It is a way that we can foster a greater understanding of and participation in the democratic process, including a better understanding of local councils.
- 5.11. We have considered ways in which the promotion of local democracy might be able to support and concord with the objectives of the national curriculum for Citizenship and is recommending that the Head of Legal, Equalities and

Democratic Services be asked to liaise with Bromsgrove secondary schools to find ways in which the district council can support the Citizenship curriculum.

Recommendation Eight

Citizenship

That the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services be asked to liaise with Bromsgrove secondary schools to co-ordinate with the Citizenship curriculum being followed in the respective schools to find ways in which the district Council can support the curriculum.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

There will be some resource implications required to liaise with Bromsgrove secondary schools and to support undertaken as agreed by the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services.

School Councils

- 5.12. We have considered the role of school councils, which are run throughout the UK, including Bromsgrove schools. A school council is group of students who are elected to represent the views of all pupils and to improve their school. There is no uniform approach to how they are run and practice varies from school to school and includes all kinds of school based groups run by students, including student forums and youth parliaments.
- 5.13. Typical arrangements are that each year, every class will elect 2 representatives to be members of the school council. The school council will then meet to elect officers such as Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and other elected portfolios.
- 5.14. A typical school council will hold school council meetings, usually with a teacher present, to discuss and sort out issues and problems in their school or local neighbourhood. These may include the quality of school dinners, pupil behaviour or ideas for fundraising events. Members of the school council may be given responsibility for carrying out the ideas that have been agreed, such as planning discos, writing newspaper articles, or meeting with catering staff, or can make recommendations to the head teacher.
- 5.15. A good school council is one that represents the views of all students and gets things done. We have not attempted to review the effectiveness of school councils in Bromsgrove, but we suggest that these are some things that make a school council effective:



- Regular meetings
- A council that is not too big
- Clear constitutional arrangements
- Class/Form councils that meet regularly
- Good communication between representatives and their class
- Training for school council members
- Smaller groups (subcommittees) working on specific events or issues
- A bank account or budget
- Annual evaluations²².

5.16. **More information on school councils is available from School Councils UK at www.schoolcouncils.org**

Redditch Student Council

- 5.17. We received evidence on the Redditch Student Council from Mr Steve Skinner, Democratic Services Manager at Redditch Borough Council. Redditch Borough Council established a Student Council in 1996 and has played a supporting role to the participating schools in their area since 1996. Their arrangements for supporting the Student Council are currently under review.
- 5.18. Redditch Student Council was set up as a body independent of both the participating schools and the partner local authorities, comprising of 28 elected student councillors, from 6 local high schools. Each councillor has a 2 year term of office. The initiative has been delivered in partnership with Worcestershire County Council, who had been successful in winning substantial FLOSS (Funding Lots of Super Stuff) donations*. Within Redditch Borough Council's committee team, one designated committee person coordinated the Student Council's work and the County Council have taken over responsibility for both the elections and for student support.
- 5.19. Student councillors are elected by their peers within each school, and Student Council meetings have also been arranged to take place in the borough's Council Chamber, which introduces the young people involved to the physical setting and protocols of council meetings. Activities also took place at Youth House, assisted by the Worcestershire County Council Youth Team.
- 5.20. We believe that school councils provide a great opportunity to engage young people into the democratic process in line with the national curriculum on Citizenship. They can also help to give young people a better understanding of the mainstream democracy nationally and locally, depending on how well they mirror parliaments and councils. We suggest that Bromsgrove school councils should make sure that their constitutional and procedural arrangements teach students about how councils and parliaments work by running in a similar way.

* FLOSS is aimed at giving 13 to 19-year-olds the chance to provide their local area with activities and projects their peers will benefit from. The final decision as to where the money will be allocated will be made by the FLOSS Management Group, which comprises of 12 young people from around Worcestershire.

- 5.21. ***We suggest that Bromsgrove District Council, in partnership with the schools and the county council, work with the school councils to improve their operation and to reinforce the education of the structure and process of council institutions.*** We suggest that the council work in partnership with Bromsgrove secondary schools and Worcestershire County Council to support Bromsgrove school councils along similar lines to the support offered by Redditch Borough Council to their Student Council. There is a need to engage with schools on this and to improve planning and co-ordination. The timing of School Council elections need to be thought out carefully because of school commitments, especially for older pupils preparing for exams.

Recommendation Nine

Schools Councils

That the Council work in partnership with Bromsgrove secondary schools to facilitate the Schools Councils' constitutional arrangements and arrangements for making recommendations to the appropriate local decision making bodies.

Financial Implications

Optional extra additional funding required is estimated at £5,000: £2,000 working budget p.a. to support training (annual residential) and £2,000 p.a. for the events. This is *extra* – additional budget, not core or vital to the administration of Schools Council's themselves.

Resource Implications

A small amount of resources in officer time is anticipated, depending on the level of support officered.

These suggested resource allocations are *extra*, not core to the basic implementation of the recommendation or vital to the administration of Schools Council's themselves.

- 5.22. The council can support the schools councils to help them run in a way that is reflective of local government councils and to more effectively represent young people and help students learn about local democracy. The council could also assist in advising on constitutional processes.
- 5.23. ***If possible we suggest the council should invite school councils to meet in the council chamber, as they have done in Redditch, to introduce the young people to the formal setting of council meetings. Student representatives could also be invited to the council to meet Cabinet portfolio holders and other Members of the Council to learn about their roles. This could include meeting the Chairman, the Leader of the Council Members of the Cabinet and this could be reported back to the School Council and help to develop the roles students elected with similar responsibilities at the school councils.***

- 5.24. The council may also be able to support school councils by assisting with the provision of clear statements and school publicity to make sure all students in the school understand what a school council is, how it represents them and how they can get involved.
- 5.25. ***We suggest that it would also be a good find ways to extend the influence of school councils on projects in their local neighbourhood.*** The County, District and Parish councils in cooperation with the schools could offer school councils some tangible choices about projects in their local areas and consult them on local choices affecting young people in their neighbourhood through a democratic process. These could be projects connected to local parks or environmental projects, engaging with young people in a neighbourhood, intergenerational projects or local events. This could be through fostering community links with local community partners, including the parish councils and other local organisations. The more influence the school council can be seen to have the more credible it will be to young people.

The Worcester Youth Cabinet

- 5.26. The Worcestershire Youth Cabinet is a group of young people elected by young people to represent their views. The county is separated into 6 districts; Worcester City, Wychavon, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Wyre Forest and Malvern Hills. Each district votes for candidates to represent them. Elected representatives have access to decision makers and authorities at all levels of society and government.
- 5.27. Cabinet members attend meetings and public forums to discuss the concerns and issues of young constituents. The issues considered by the Worcester Youth Cabinet can vary greatly from the accessibility of public transport and facilities to young people's rights and opinions. The Worcester Youth Cabinet works alongside the 3 Worcestershire Members of the UK Youth Parliament, who are automatically co-opted onto the Youth Cabinet. The Worcestershire Youth Cabinet campaigning objectives are published in the Worcester Youth Manifesto²³.
- 5.28. ***For more information on the Worcestershire Youth Cabinet see www.ycworcs.org.uk***

The UK Youth Parliament

- 5.29. The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) has 600 elected Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) aged 11-18. MYPs are elected in annual youth elections throughout the UK. Any young person aged 11-18 can stand or vote. In the past two years one million young people have voted in UK Youth Parliament elections.
- 5.30. MYPs are involved in nation-wide projects to ensure that the voices of Worcestershire's Young People can be heard at the highest levels of government

and organise events and projects, run campaigns and influence decision makers on the issues which matter most to young people. All MYPs meet once a year at the UK Youth Parliament Annual Sitting.

- 5.31. Run by young people for young people, UKYP gives young people between the age of 11 and 18 a voice, which is heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people and other agencies that have an interest in the views and needs of young people.
- 5.32. **For more information on UKYP see www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk**
- 5.33. **We suggest that, in addition to school councils, the Bromsgrove Worcestershire Youth Cabinet Members and the local UK Youth Parliament representatives also need to be involved in events for the Democracy Year Campaign. They could, along with other young people, be asked for their views on the review of the democracy pages of the council website, particularly our proposal for pages especially aimed at young people.**

U Decide

- 5.34. We interviewed Rebecca Dunne, Senior Corporate Policy and Performance Officer who told us about projects currently running to engage young people in the democratic process, including a local democracy magazine aimed at young people, which will be sent out to every 6th form in the District (16-17 year olds), young peoples focus groups and questionnaires and the U Decide project. “U Decide”, or participatory budgeting, is a way of giving local people the power to spend some public money to benefit their communities. This means they can share some of the responsibility for what happens where they live, and make some real changes.
- 5.35. U Decide provided young people in Bromsgrove District to get funding for projects for young people designed by young people, and decided how money will be spent. Young people aged 7-13 and 13-19 (or up to 25 for young people with disabilities) were able to apply and applications from schools, community and voluntary groups were also encouraged.
- 5.36. The scheme made grants from Worcestershire County Council’s FLOSS scheme available to young people across Bromsgrove District. £50,000 was made available to distribute; £10,000 for 7 to 13 year olds and £40,000 for 13 to 19 year olds. Grants of up to £5,000 were available for each individual group of 13 to 19 year olds and up to £1,250 for 7 to 13 year olds. A group of young assessors drew up a short list of project applications and these were taken forward to U Decide events at the end of March, where more young people voted on which should receive funding.



- 5.37. We believe that it is important that the council open up different routes of engagement, especially for young people. Projects like the U Decide event can engage with young people that may otherwise not engage through other mainstream projects such as schools councils.

Draft Recommendation Ten

U Decide

That the Council investigate the possibility of running a further U Decide or similar event in 2011 to involve young people in making decisions on local projects.

Financial Implications

The U Decide scheme 2010 required £50,000 grants from Worcestershire County Council's FLOSS. A further event would require a similar successful bid.

Resource Implications

There would be significant resource implications required to support any future event, comparable to the resources dedicated to the 2010 events.

- 5.38. We would like to see the council engage young people in democracy through a spectrum of different community organisations and networks, including through schools, the Trunk, the Scouts and Girl Guides and youth clubs.

The Trunk

- 5.39. "The Trunk is a community recourse centre based in Charford that delivers a wide variety of community support and recourses across neighbourhoods through the Bromsgrove District". Debbie Roberts, Managing Director, Empowering People in Communities [EPIC]
- 5.40. Activities at the Trunk are another good way of engaging with young people. Club Youth at the Trunk has a youth committee which elects young people to certain roles, for example, to represent them on the EPIC Advisory Team. We suggest that the council seek to involve young people at the Trunk in local democracy projects and the Local Democracy Year Campaign.
- 5.41. **To find out more about the Trunk and EPIC see www.epic-se.co.uk**

Scouting for Democracy

- 5.42. The Scout Association has launched a campaign to encourage young people to vote. This year around 10,000 scouts will be old enough to vote for the first time in the General Election and the association set up a website to encourage them and others to do so. The Scout Association's Active Citizen website explains why politics matters to young people, alongside advice on registering and volunteering and includes a forum for politicians to take part in online discussions

with young voters. The association is also sending information by post to 50,000 members in an attempt to boost turnout.

5.43. "In scouting we believe it is extremely important for young people to engage in democracy. Every vote counts..... We not only want our young members to see why they should vote but how politics impacts on the causes and concerns that they have." Wayne Bulpitt, The Scout Association's UK Chief Commissioner²⁴.

5.44. **To find out more see www.activecitizens.net**

5.45. ***We suggest that the Scouts and Girl Guides be invited to participate in Local Democracy Year Campaign events.***

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6 A Local Democracy Campaign

- 6.1. We would like to see an assertive campaign to promote local democracy in the run up to the local elections in 2011 and beyond, which engages the whole community and invites a spectrum of different community organisations to participate, including the college, the schools, parish councils and other community organisations. The Democracy Year Campaign should link together all the events for the promotion of democracy under a common banner that the public can identify with.

Recommendation Eleven

A Democracy Year Campaign

That there be a Democracy Year Campaign to link together all the events for democracy year under the banner of promoting and involving people in local democracy.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time and commitment will be required to co-ordinate and participate in the Democracy Year Campaign.

- 6.2. The Democracy Year Campaign should involve a range of different events and activities, including a programmed series of visits to secondary schools, Democracy Open Days for people to find out more about standing as a councillor, street theatre events, local democracy market stalls and stalls at parish events.
- 6.3. ***To find out about the Local Government Association's Local Democracy Campaign see www.localdemocracy.lga.gov.uk***

A Champion for Democracy

- 6.4. So that a Democracy Year Campaign can be taken forward both within the council and within the community we are recommending that an elected councillor be nominated a Democracy Champion for the period of the Democracy Year Campaign. This should be high profile, led from the council and yet totally non-party political. ***We suggest this role could be carried out by the Chairman of the Council. We also suggest that this role should continue in future years after the Democracy Year Campaign.***

<p><u>Recommendation Twelve</u> <i>A Democracy Champion</i> That a Member of the Council be nominated Democracy Champion for one year to champion local democracy.</p>
<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>No financial implications are envisaged.</p>
<p><u>Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No significant resource implications are envisaged.</p>

A Democracy Campaign Banner

- 6.5. The Democracy Year Campaign should visibly link together all of the events to promote democracy under a common banner that can easily be identified by the public, so we are recommending a Democracy Year Campaign emblem to be used on all banners and publicity for the Democracy Year Campaign. This could be designed by young people, or at any rate, with young people in mind.



<p><u>Recommendation Thirteen</u> <i>Democracy Campaign Emblem</i> That there be an emblem designed for the Democracy Year Campaign to be used as a part of a democracy year campaign and used on all communications for Democracy Year.</p>
<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>There are no direct financial implications arising.</p>
<p><u>Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Officer time will be required to design the emblem.</p>

Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group

- 6.6. In order to take forward the Democracy Year Campaign events to promote local democracy we are recommending a Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group. This should include the key council and community partners necessary to co-ordinate the events and make sure that all of the events fit together as a single campaign and are programmed appropriately throughout the year.

Recommendation Fourteen

Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group

That there be convened a Democracy Year Campaign steering group, to meet at least 4 times a year during 2010-2011, to co-ordinate the Democracy Year Campaign events and activities.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to convene and attend the steering group meetings.

- 6.7. It is suggested that the Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group will have cross party representation and include the relevant portfolio holders, the Democracy Champion, representatives from the relevant council departments, and external partners, including representatives from the County Council, parish councils, the Artrix and NEW College and local schools.
- 6.8. ***We suggest that the Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Engagement write to external partners including NEW College, Bromsgrove High Schools and the Artrix to invite them to nominate suitable representatives to participate in a Democracy Year Campaign Steering Group to co-ordinate events for Democracy Year 2010-2011.***

Democracy Year Events

- 6.9. We are proposing that the Democracy Year Campaign include a programmed series of events organised in co-operation with local community organisations and partners. It is envisaged that this will include incorporating the Democracy Year Campaign into events already within the Council and community events programmes, as well as a series of events to promote democracy and local democracy through the arts, films, street theatre, music etc.

Recommendation Fifteen

Celebrating Democracy

That Democracy Year include programmed events to concord with other relevant events in the Council events programme, including International Women's Day 2011, including a celebration of women's suffrage and the history of women's suffrage and Black History Month 2010 celebrating the history and achievements of the black civil rights movement in the USA, South Africa, the British Commonwealth and other parts of the world.

Financial Implications

On advice from Head of Leisure and Cultural Services, an extra £3000 will be required.

Resource Implications

Officer time may be required to co-ordinate and participate in the events.

- 6.10. It is envisaged that key note speakers be invited to speak on democracy at Democracy Year events including on International Women's Day and Black History Month.

Young Question Time

- 6.11. The Democracy Year Campaign could include a Question Time event for young people either in the schools or hosted by the District Council or other local venue, based along the same concept at the BBC TV programme. The Question Time panel could include members of the Schools Councils, elected Members of Bromsgrove District Council and the County Council, as well as other panellists of interest to young people, including young people themselves.

Parish Participation

- 6.12. We have engaged with parish councils both through the County Association of Local Councils and through speaking to parish councillors to ask for their views on how to improve community involvement in local democracy. We believe that parish councils should be key partners promote local democracy. So we are suggesting that the parishes are all formally invited to get involved in the Democracy Year Campaign and that local democratic arrangements are promoted at community events in the parishes not just in the town centres. It is hoped that the parish councils will play an enthusiastic and key role in the Democracy Year Campaign and that in turn this will help to improve the understanding of the role of the parishes and to encourage more people to stand for election at parish level.

Recommendation Sixteen

The Parish Perspective

That the Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Engagement write to the Parish Councils to invite them to join in the Democracy Year Campaign in partnership with the district Council.

Financial Implications

No financial implications arising.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Get Involved!

- 6.13. ***The council can provide the community leadership for a Democracy Year Campaign and to engage people in local democracy, but its success will depend upon people and organisations throughout the community getting involved and taking joint ownership in the civic life of their community.***
- 6.14. Democracy is not something that is done to us, it is something that we have to do and we hope that what we have started here will be able to gather momentum to galvanise people throughout the District to get involved and play their part as active citizens in the local community.

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WITNESSES

Internal Witnesses

Councillors:

Cllr Geoff Denaro, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Resources
Cllr Roger Smith Portfolio Holder for One Community (Including Community Engagement).

Officers:

Claire Felton - Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council
Ms Susan Mould – Electoral Services Manager Electoral Shared Services for Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council
Mr. Andy Stephens - Committee Services Officer, Bromsgrove District Council.

External Witnesses and Partner Agencies

Ms. Clare Baylis, Teacher Adviser for PSHE/Citizenship
Mrs Sue Baxter - Chairman of Wythall Parish Council
Mr. John Cypher - Chairman of Alvechurch Parish Council
Kim Joy Edmunds – Deafblind Services Co-ordinator, Sensory Impairment Team, Worcestershire County Council
Patricia Hacket, Chair of the Equality and Diversity Forum
Mr. Peter John - Newsquest
Huw Mosely, Arts Development and Special Events Officer
Debbie Roberts, Managing Director, Empowering People in Communities
Mr Steve Skinner, Democratic Services, Manager and Deputy Returning Officer / Deputy Electoral Registration Officer) at Redditch Borough Council.
Manager, Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils
Helen Young – Community Support Services Manager, Sense, West Midlands.
Mr Andy Woods, Director of Artrix.

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Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

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