Innovation in Democracy Programme Evaluation

RENAISI

Contents

Introduction

This report brings together the findings of an evaluation of the Innovation in Democracy Programme that took place from November 2018 to March 2020. This national programme involved the delivery of Citizens' Assemblies in Greater Cambridge, Dudley and Test Valley, alongside broader support for the participating local authorities.

All three Citizens' Assemblies took place in the second half of 2019, at a time of significant political change in the UK. Brexit talks were ongoing, and during the programme, the 2019 General Election was announced, meaning that the assemblies had to navigate purdah.

While Citizens' Assemblies were still a relatively new phenomenon in the UK context, throughout the programme, several new Citizens' Assemblies were also being implemented, including the Climate Assembly UK and the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland. At a local authority level, at least 8 Citizens' Assemblies were organised for 2019, four of which were devoted to the topic of climate change.

The context creates a new, evolving field of practice; some precedents to build from; and a sense that the participating authorities were pioneers with peers to learn from.

Innovation in Democracy Programme

The Innovation in Democracy Programme (IiDP) was commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG).

The programme offered expert support plus £60,000 to cover costs to the selected Local Authorities to design and hold a Citizens' Assembly on an issue of local importance. Citizens' Assemblies are defined by Involve as:

> *A Citizens' Assembly is a body of randomly chosen citizens who are representative of the local demographics (e.g., in terms of age, gender, ethnicity). They are brought together to hear from experts from all sides of the debate and deliberate on an issue/issues over a series of events. The aim of the discussions is for participants to reach a consensus on the best way forward on the issue; this will be presented back to the commissioning body (in this case, the local authority) as a series of recommendations. Citizens' Assemblies can take place at a neighbourhood, regional, national or international scale.*

The programme's aims were:

- To increase the capability of local people to have a greater say over decisions that affect their communities and their everyday lives.

- To encourage new relationships and build trust between citizens and local authorities.

- To strengthen local civil society by encouraging participation in local institutions.

Programme Support Contractors

The consultancy support of four delivery contractors was commissioned as part of the programme. These were:

Involve: The Involve Foundation is a UK-wide public participation charity. Involve ran the Citizens' Assembly in Greater Cambridge, facilitating and designing the process by which the assembly members learn, consider and come to recommendations about the topic. Involve was also the Lead Partner overseeing the overall delivery of the Programme and supporting the design and delivery of the Assemblies in Test Valley and Dudley.

The Democratic Society (Demsoc): Demsoc works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together. Demsoc facilitated the Assemblies in Test Valley and Dudley and supported the delivery of the Assembly in Greater Cambridge.

MySociety: MySociety is a not-for-profit group pioneering the use of online technologies to empower citizens to take their first steps towards greater civic participation. MySociety gave strategic and practical support to each participating local authority regarding their Citizens' Assemblies and the use of digital tools. Throughout the programme, MySociety also produced several research reports to support wider learning about digital tools and Citizens' Assemblies.

The RSA: The RSA carries out cutting-edge research and builds networks for people to collaborate, influence and demonstrate practical solutions to realise change. The RSA acted as a learning partner to the Innovation in Democracy programme. Their role included the facilitation of a peer learning network throughout the pilot – peer learning sessions enabled local authorities (both those participating in the programme and those that were external to the process) to connect in-person and share learning about the programme. The final learning report by the RSA contains much insight which complements this study.

Additional programme partners

The Sortition Foundation: The Sortition Foundation promotes the use of sortition (random selection) in decision-making. Involve contracted the Sortition Foundation to work with the Local Authorities to recruit people to take part in each IiDP Citizens' Assembly. They aimed to ensure that the Citizens' Assembly was broadly representative.

Renaisi is a social enterprise that is interested in the role of place in social change. It delivers, supports and convenes practice to understand how change comes about in places and communities. Renaisi was commissioned separately from the other contractors to undertake an evaluation of the overall impact of the programme.

Participating Local Authorities

Local Authority	Citizens' Assembly Dates	Citizens' Assembly Question
Greater Cambridge Partnership	7th and 8th September 2019 5th and 6th October 2019	How do we reduce congestion, improve air quality and provide better public transport in Greater Cambridge?
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	2nd and 3rd November 2019 30th November and 1st December 2019	What can communities and the Council do together to make Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres places that are vibrant, welcoming and somewhere that we are proud of? How will we know we are making a difference in: 12 months; 3 years; by 2030?
Test Valley Borough Council	9th and 10th November 2019 23rd and 24th November 2019	Building a vision for Romsey: How do we improve the area around Crosfield Hall and the Bus Station to deliver the maximum benefit to Romsey?

More information about each of the local authorities, their motivations to be part of the programme and their chosen Citizens' Assembly topic can be found in the Local Context section of this report.

Evaluation framework

The framework for this study is shaped by an interest in two distinct stakeholder groups and two types of questions (a process study and an impact study).

The two stakeholder groups were:

i) Residents and stakeholders in the issue
ii) Local government and decision-makers about the issue

In relation to each of these groups, we were assessing:

- The quality and implementation of the **process**
- The **impact** and learning from the Assembly

That simple framework sets up the thinking for the areas to explore within the study. It means that there is a lesser focus on the specific content of the Assembly in relation to the topics being addressed, and instead a stronger focus on how the process was delivered and what came from it. A set of six questions or evaluative areas are explored from perspectives across the framework above.

Evaluation area	Evaluation questions explored
Topic	Was the question sufficiently challenging, carrying enough viable options to foster debate and deliberation in the Assembly?
Reach and representation	To what extent was the purpose, activities and outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly communicated and made transparent to a wider public? Was the Citizens' Assembly membership representative of the local authority's area?
Deliberative process	To what extent did participants feel they engaged in well-informed, open-minded, well-facilitated deliberation?
Independence and impartiality	Do participants agree the available experts, evidence and information was balanced?
Relationships and impact on participants	To what extent has this programme increased feelings that participants can influence decisions in their local area?
Outcomes	How helpful is what was produced? To what extent have the recommendations from the Citizens Assembly been implemented?

Alongside the above, the evaluation sought to capture learning from across the breadth of the programme related to the challenges and solutions to holding a Citizens' Assembly in local government.

Limitations to our evaluation

There are two obvious limitations to this evaluation and a further limitation that emerged due to the national lockdown measures which were put in place to tackle Covid-19.

Each Citizens' Assembly produced a set of recommendations, the implementation of which will be seen over the longer term. As the evaluation took place during the delivery phase of the assemblies and support, our fieldwork was completed in February 2020. This allowed for some distance between assemblies and the latest fieldwork, but nothing genuinely long-term.

This has significant limitations on our ability to ask and answer some impact questions for both participant and facilitator audiences.

This evaluation sought to gauge the receptiveness of each local authority and its elected members to the Citizens' Assemblies. However, the timing of the UK General Election around the time of the Assemblies posed significant challenges for engagement with elected members. The Assemblies were able to take place, but members were either directly affected by purdah, or indirectly affected by their party-political campaigning in that period. Their perspective was, as a result, under-explored in the early stages of the study.

Following the Citizens' Assemblies, changes in working conditions due to Covid-19 led to a dispersed and remote researcher team. This, in turn, created challenges and delayed the analysis of the data gathered throughout the programme.

Our methodology

The study used three key methods: a participant survey during the weekends (with almost 100% completion for participants who completed each day); observational methods during assemblies and peer learning session; and a range of in-depth interviews across different stakeholders, at different points in the delivery - with some interviews being follow-up interviews. The interviews were analysed through a qualitative framework, and the surveys through simple quantitative tools (the number of participants is too low for any true data analysis). Observational data, and the presentation of early findings at meetings, was used to test and validate findings that we developed through the analysis.

The full list of methods includes:

- Semi-structured interviews with local authority stakeholders that were involved in designing and running the Citizens' Assembly in their area. These were pre-and post Citizens' Assembly interviews.

- Surveys of members of the Assembly on Day 1, Day 2 (weekend one) and Day 4 (weekend two) of each Assembly, asking a mixture of quantitative and open-box questions.

- An evaluation researcher was in attendance and made notes on each day of each Citizens' Assembly, providing researcher observation data.

- Surveys were undertaken of members of the public that joined each of the Citizens' Assemblies to observe. These individuals were surveyed on their motivations for coming along, their experience of witnessing the process, their impressions of how it was going and their expectations for the results that the Citizens' Assembly would yield.

- Semi-structured interviews with a number of the participants following the Citizens' Assembly.

- Semi-structured interviews with two Lead and two Table facilitators (between them, this group represented facilitation from across the three Assemblies) following the Citizens' Assembly. The lead facilitators were involved in the overall coordination of the Citizens' Assembly on the day, while the table facilitators were responsible for facilitating discussions with a table of Assembly participants. There is more information about the role of facilitators in the Citizen Assembly Experience section of this report.

- Semi-structured interviews with two of the support contractors, Involve and MySociety, about their involvement with the programme and learning.

- Attendance at three of the peer learning network sessions for the participating Local Authorities, including the delivery of a workshop to understand more about what changes had occurred for LA staff.

Introducing Citizens' Assemblies

The key elements of the Citizens' Assembly definition (as given in the introduction to this report) are the active bringing together of people, the representative nature of that group in relation to the wider population, the process of discussion, the specificity of an issue and the arrival of a consensus by the group in relation to that issue. This study will explore how the different elements are made manifest and shape the experience and impact of the Assembly.

It is important to briefly contextualise this approach, as it has relevance for understanding what to do with the learning from this programme.

Citizens' Assemblies within models of democratic practice

There are elements of democracy in the UK which are representative (elections), and elements which are direct (referenda). Representative and direct democracy are considered as two models of democracy. Between these two poles fall a range of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy practices and tools, which are designed to engage citizens to consider and actively contribute to the development of policy.

Participatory democracy approaches[1] tend to be oriented towards developing opportunities which enable citizens to contribute views, and consequently mean that decision-making is based upon a wider representation of people's thoughts and opinions. The opportunities may be large-scale in terms of the numbers of citizens involved.

Deliberative democracy approaches[2] are characterised by their focus on a discussion between citizens, and the process by which this leads to decision-making. As these approaches are more intensive in terms of commitment, they tend to involve smaller numbers of people than participatory democracy approaches. Some democratic approaches include elements that are both participatory and deliberative – for example, Citizens' Assemblies may include or consider evidence that has been produced as a result of participatory approaches.

Models of democracy	Representative	Direct	Participatory	Deliberative
How people engage	Voting in elections	Referenda	Participatory budgeting Polls or surveys	Citizens' Assemblies Citizens' Juries Citizen Panels

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[1] OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en. P.12

[2] Ibid.

In the field of democratic practice, deliberative democracy approaches may be considered as a way of enhancing representative democracy, i.e. through providing elected representatives with the results of citizen deliberation, leading to a clear mandate and direction to act on a particular issue. In this sense, Citizens' Assemblies may be regarded as **a potential answer to a decision-making problem**, such as in situations where there is a political deadlock.

Citizens' Assemblies within a spectrum of citizen participation

As well as seeing Citizens' Assemblies within models of democratic practice, they can also be considered as being at the higher end of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation[3] (see diagram below). Each rung in this 'ladder' denotes a different level of engagement, and the overall spectrum is often used to compare different activities and the quality of engagement that they enable. **The activities categorised by this ladder are also those which might be used by institutions to understand attitudes to policies and to shape those policies.**

At the lower end of the ladder are activities which are considered by this typology to qualify as non-participation – activities which are a foil for real participation. Further up the ladder, activities that fall into 'tokenism', from rung 3 upwards, begin to find ways of including representation of voices. Activities that align with step 6 upwards are considered to move well beyond the simplistic levels of participation to a level of accountability, to engagement that comes with shared decision-making powers. As Citizens' Assemblies have a core decision-making function, they can be seen as a tool which facilitates sophisticated citizen participation of this kind.

Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)		
8	Citizen Control	Citizen Power
7	Delegated Power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	Non-participation
1	Manipulation	

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[3] Arnstein, S.(1969) 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35: 4, 216- 224 https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225

Citizens' Assemblies: a tool for both decision-making and policy formation problems

As shown in the examples of democratic practice and citizen participation above, Citizens' Assemblies may be looked to as the right tool for very different goals. A local authority that wishes to significantly increase the quality of their citizen engagement and a local authority that wishes to resolve and move forward on a politically thorny issue may both alight upon a Citizens' Assembly as a possible solution.

While this evaluation focuses on the Citizens' Assemblies approach, it is important to remember that this method is one of many different approaches (whether considered in terms of the citizen participation tradition, or deliberative or participatory democracy traditions). There are other methods within both traditions that the Assemblies can be seen to build on, connect to, complement and challenge.

Inevitably, the number of methods in existence and the fact that Citizens' Assemblies remain a relatively new approach (meaning that its specific strengths and applicability in different contexts are still being determined) raises the risk that Citizens' Assemblies might not always be the right tool for a specific problem.

This challenge shapes much of this report.

The different phases of a Citizens' Assembly

The process of a Citizens' Assembly consists of three different phases, as outlined below. Although the process must include all three phases, some may overlap (in particular the learning and deliberation of the first and second phases).

The **first phase** involves learning and absorbing information about the particular topic being addressed. This is usually done through presentations and expert speakers, where Assembly members can query information and put their questions to the experts. In some cases, additional or background materials are provided in advance of the Assembly gathering. In this phase, the whole Assembly is presented with a core amount of knowledge and information on the topic.

The **second phase** builds on the learning acquired by the Assembly and moves into deliberation. In this phase, the emphasis is on talking with other Assembly members and hearing their thoughts on what they have heard.

The **third phase** brings the Assembly to a form of decision-making or conclusions based on their learning and deliberation. What form this takes relates directly to the question and topic of the Assembly, but may involve voting on statements or options that have been proposed and discussed over the course of the event.

Citizens are brought together to consider what should be done on an issue

They listen to evidence from experts and people with lived experience of the issue

They can question evidence givers and discuss the evidence for themselves

Citizens work together to consider options & make recommendations

Towards a set of Citizens' Assembly standards

The Citizens' Assembly approach has risen in global popularity in recent decades. There have been various examples where a representative, deliberative panel is being embedded into national institutional processes, for example, in Belgium[4].

Nevertheless, the Citizens' Assembly approach is not mainstream or standardised and is still widely regarded as an innovative approach. There are a wide variety of factors that can be adapted, and there is a significant body of academic research[5] devoted to exploring the importance and effect of the following (and other) factors:

- The number of people involved, the method of recruitment and potential reimbursement/form of recognition for time contributed.

- The type of topic and question addressed.

- The facilitation format (e.g. a focus on group or pair work), the role of facilitators and the degree to which the Assembly is member-led.

- The balance of time between evidence and deliberation, as well as the overall length of time for which the Assembly gathers.

- The format for agreeing Assembly recommendations (e.g. different types of voting options).

Involve is a leading organisation in the facilitation of Citizens' Assemblies. Through their first-hand experience of working with governments (local and national) to design and run Citizens' Assemblies, they have developed a set of draft standards, summarised below[6].

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[4] Chwalisz, C. "A new wave of deliberative democracy." 26 November 2019
https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/11/26/new-wave-of-deliberative-democracy-pub-80422
[5] https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/category/library/research-papers/
[6] https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/news/when-citizens-assembly-not-citizens-assembly-towards-some-standards

Involve's draft set of Citizens' Assembly standards	
Clear purpose	Open
Sufficient time	Generative learning
Representative	Structured deliberation
Inclusive	Collective decision-making
Independent	Evaluated

Through the package of support provided by Involve, Democratic Society, the Sortition Foundation, the RSA and MySociety, the approach to delivering Citizens' Assemblies in all three areas was generally consistent. The next section examines aspects of the local context.

Key points

The key points from this section of the report are:

- Although Citizens' Assemblies have risen in popularity in recent times, the approach has not been standardised. However, there are clear phases to how they are delivered, and a sense of what is and isn't a Citizens' Assembly. This makes it possible to compare them effectively and to state when something is not a Citizens' Assembly.

- Despite this level of definitional clarity, as Citizens' Assemblies become more popular and widely used, there is a risk that not all delivery bodies will maintain the standards of what makes a good Citizens' Assembly, and its currency will become de-valued. As a result, there have been attempts to define what a good quality Citizens' Assembly is, such as Involve's standards or that recently published by the OECD.

- Citizens' Assemblies comprise elements that fall within the democratic decision-making tradition and a citizen engagement in design and delivery tradition. Consequently, they may be regarded and used as an answer to both decision-making and policy formation problems.

Different local contexts

The previous chapter presented the key phases of Citizens' Assemblies, acknowledged that it is an emergent and not yet standardised practice, and demonstrated that the Citizens' Assembly tool may be considered suitable for a range of different problems. This section details the local authority partners that were selected to participate in the Innovation in Democracy Programme and the context for the questions that were posed to the Citizens' Assembly in each geographic area.

A Citizens' Assembly is a big undertaking for any local authority. Many of the participating local authorities said that while interested in the concept of the Citizens' Assembly, they would not have been able to try the approach without the place on the programme.

> *"Found out about Innovation in Democracy (IID) and funding - fortuitous. Was offering support we needed to do it [Assembly]. Got to the point where we wouldn't have done it if we hadn't been part of the programme, could see you needed to know what you're doing. Doing it with government buy-in for the process was helpful." Local authority interview*

The programme application process asked each local authority to include ideas that a Citizens' Assembly might address in their area, including a brief case for why this was an appropriate topic. Each area has to fit the Assembly to the issues and the history of local debate, the decision-making structures, and also the local bureaucratic structures. While the previous chapter highlights the similarities of all Citizens' Assemblies, this section assesses ways in which they differed.

Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP)

The Greater Cambridge Partnership was established in 2013, as a 'City Deal', designed to support economic growth in the region. Its four partners are Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and the University of Cambridge.

Through the City Deal designation, GCP has a strong remit to address the future of transport in Greater Cambridge, and it was the authority's transport team which applied to be part of the Innovation in Democracy programme. Just before the Programme, an extensive 'City Access' campaign was completed, examining the possible measures to be introduced.

The Partnership's route to decision-making is led via a Joint Assembly (15 members) and an Executive Board (5 members), comprised of representatives from each of the Councils alongside representatives from the local Universities and business. Given the diverse areas, interests, and political parties represented with the GCP, there is significant potential for decisions to become challenging.

The GCP's Citizens' Assembly question was developed in a way to provide proposals for a part of the transport future that can be particularly fraught, given the different needs and uses of the various stakeholders:

How do we reduce congestion, improve air quality and provide better public transport in Greater Cambridge?

> *"The Citizens' Assembly provided an opportunity to engage with the public in a new and transparent way about a complex and controversial topic where there was no political consensus. Traditional engagement exercises had worked well and had reached large numbers of people but did not give the same opportunity for learning and exchange of views that can help people give more considered views on challenging issues."*

GCP's question can be seen, therefore, as building on recent participatory democracy approaches on a specific and well-discussed issue, but using the deliberative element of Citizens' Assemblies to give a clear steer to a cross-party and cross-boundary body for decision-making.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC)

DMBC is a metropolitan district council in the heart of the Black Country. The geography of the borough features four towns: Brierley Hill, Dudley, Halesowen and Stourbridge. DMBC's application to join the programme, led by their Public Health team, proposed that a Citizens' Assembly would focus on the future of these town centres. Outcomes from the Assembly would inform and help to develop an action plan to support the implementation of the long-term vision for the area's town centres.

DMBC faces challenges to decision-making due to frequent changes in political control. Of the Council's 72 councillor seats, 36 are affiliated to Labour and 36 to the Conservatives. Decisions are made through the DMBC Cabinet (comprising the Council Leader and up to 9 other Council appointed councillors) and Directors. Five select committees provide a 'scrutiny' function to Cabinet decisions.

Dudley chose to call their Citizens' Assembly the Dudley's People's Panel. The question chosen was split into two parts:

What can communities and the Council do together to make Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres places that are vibrant, welcoming and somewhere that we are proud of?

How will we know we are making a difference in: 12 months; 3 years; by 2030?

> *"The topic of improving town centres was important to achieving our borough vision. It was one which both main political parties could support and which local people would have a real stake in. The borough has an exciting programme of regeneration underway and as part of this, the Council is keen to involve more people in looking at the future of our town centres."*

The question focused on specific geographical communities within the borough but was intended to have relevance to all communities. It was a relatively open question and focused

on collaboration between people and the council. It builds on a history of regeneration discussions and again is targeted at unlocking decision making challenges with a focus on the timescale of any recommendations.

Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC)

Test Valley Borough Council is a non-metropolitan district Council. Test Valley's Corporate team applied to join the Innovation in Democracy programme and proposed addressing the future vitality of its town centres as its Citizens' Assembly topic. The Assembly question was focused further on an area south of Romsey town centre, to support the evidence base for the future development of the site.

TVBC's route to decision-making is through its Cabinet (eight members appointed by the Council Leader), alongside three regulatory committees. An overview and scrutiny committee supports this function by holding the Cabinet to account and reviewing the policy.

The question for Test Valley's Citizens' Assembly was:

Building a vision for Romsey: How do we improve the area around Crosfield Hall and the Bus Station to deliver the maximum benefit to Romsey?

> *"Since 2011 the Council has undertaken a cross-party programme of work transforming the way it operates to be more place-based in its focus. Evidence-based decision making also sits at the core of the Council's operating model. Underpinning this has been active and genuine community participation. We were keen to work with the Innovation in Democracy Programme and hold a Citizens' Assembly to help us deepen the connection between participative and representative democracy."*

This question is highly specific and sits within a Corporate team and a local authority which has been held by the same political party for 20 years.

Key points and learning

As the approach to the delivery of the Citizens' Assemblies was largely consistent through the design of the Innovation in Democracy Programme, this study looked to explore and test whether the differences in the overall impact may relate to variation in aspects relating to the local context, in addition to the highly localised nature of the topics addressed. Interviews with local stakeholders indicated that there were four key areas of variation or different potential routes to driving impact between the participating local authorities.

1. **Local authority's relationship to participatory democracy approaches**

   As mentioned previously, both participatory and deliberative democracy approaches are designed to increase engagement by citizens in shaping policy. Citizens' Assemblies may draw upon the results of participatory approaches for deliberation, and as such, the two practises are interconnected. On the participatory

side, the local authority teams interviewed exhibited varying levels of experience in and understanding of different levels of citizen engagement. This level of familiarity influenced how the Assembly was perceived, understood and used within the local authority and with elected members.

2. **Team leading the Citizens' Assembly development, and engagement with wider teams**

Each local authority situated the management of the Assembly in a different team. Those teams brought their perspectives, challenges, skills and attributes. A more central team, for example, was better able to connect with all parts of the authority and understand the connections to governance. In contrast, a more subject-specific team could connect the work to a given issue and prior conversations on that issue. This decision of where to place the Assembly influenced how it was shaped and understood.

3. **Previous work on the topic**

The Assemblies all built on something that had come before. The history of that work influenced the debate and its framing. This applied to how citizens might perceive it – a long-running issue that had never been solved, or a recent development that had a clear and controlled process of previous engagement. Each of these shaped how citizens and officers engaged with and perceived the Assembly.

4. **Elected members' engagement with the process**

Elected members' perceptions of an Assembly's role, and its weight in relation to representative democratic processes, were also important. Elected members' views and activities on this topic could have a significant effect on how the Assembly was perceived, engaged with and used.

The role of the topic

Studies and previous evaluations of Citizens' Assemblies (at a national and local level) have shown that specific characteristics of an issue work to the strengths of the Citizens' Assembly approach.[7] These include the following: the issue must be considered important and relevant by the Assembly members; tackling the issue involves making difficult choices, and; there is political deadlock or politicians feel unable to act.

Our evaluation of the Citizens' Assemblies topic choice drew on these considerations and focused on two key questions:

1. **Was this an important issue for the people involved?**

2. **Was the topic sufficiently challenging, providing enough viable options to foster debate and deliberation within the Assembly?**

These considerations are rooted in the local context. Consequently, it is not appropriate to compare the suitability of the topics addressed by IiDP Citizens' Assemblies in the three different areas. To preserve the anonymity of Council officer interviewees, this report considers the local authorities' relationship to the topics without identifying the area.

Importance of the issue

To merit the significant time and cost commitment involved in the undertaking of a Citizens' Assembly, the topic must be relevant and considered important to both citizens and the local authority. Various local authority interviewees mentioned that the topics of their Citizens' Assembly **represented challenges affecting not just their area, but other authorities around the country**. The issues of the decline of the high street, or the pressures on transport amid growing urban populations and increasing recognition of the relationship between air pollution and poorer health outcomes are far from unique to these places.

For two of the authorities, there was a keen awareness of the political sensitivities surrounding the choice of topic and question. After acceptance onto the IiDP (which required sign-off from the Chief Executive of the local authority and support from a Councillor Champion), wider elected members played a key role in giving the overall approval to the Citizens' Assembly questions in each of the three areas. **It was critical to frame the topic in a way that would garner cross-party support**.

> *"[The] nature of the question has been something that both parties were happy with, that was meaty enough to add value without being overly contentious for any political party." Local Authority*

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[7] See, for example: UCL The Constitution Unit (2017) "The Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit." P.33-34.

Ireland's The Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018 "Final Report on the Manner in which Referenda are Held." P.110 - 114

Nevertheless, all local authorities were clear that the questions set would yield important outcomes. Two had already done some degree of public consultation on the issue, while one highlighted a longstanding political deadlock as a driving motivation to hold a Citizens' Assembly.

This perception of the topics' importance was shared by Assembly participants in each of the three areas. Overall, 73% of the participants scored their issue 5 or 6 (on a 6-point scale, where 6 is the highest) for importance. In addition, the participants generally considered that those living locally shared their perception of the issue's importance. This suggests that on the whole, the participants did not consider that their interest in the topic was significantly greater than other local residents' interest in the issue. It also indicates that the outcomes produced by the Assemblies are likely to be relevant to local residents beyond those directly involved.

Although the participants mostly rated the topics as important to their local Council (81% rating it as 4 or higher in importance), the topics were generally viewed as being of slightly less importance to the Council than it was to the participants. Some level of disparity is to be expected here, as a Citizens' Assembly approach is **intended to deal with fraught topics in circumstances where the existing system has failed to make progress**. Interviews with Council officers in two local authority areas showed that there was an awareness of public frustration relating to the chosen Citizens' Assembly topics.

> *"An issue has been that a lot of things have been talked about for a long time, but there has been a perceived lack of actual action for the town."*
> *Local authority*

All areas succeeded in recruiting the required numbers for the Assembly, suggesting no influence of topic choice on involvement. The majority of participants' **motivations to take part linked to an interest in their local area and the opportunity to be involved with shaping its future broadly**, as opposed to connecting with the specific topic of the Citizens' Assembly.

> *"I was very interested with Cambridge and what was the intention of happening with Cambridge and what we wanted to do in Cambridge basically." Participant*

> *"[I] was interested in possibly finding out more about Romsey and how I might be involved in the local area." Participant*

Some comments given in the surveys and follow-up interviews suggested that perceptions of the issue's importance were also **influenced by the energy and behaviour of both the other participants and the Council staff during the Assembly itself**.

> *"[The Council staff] came along, listened, were engaged in the feedback afterwards. Gave the impression it was important. Ultimately don't know if it was important, haven't got that far in the process yet. The process of whether it's to be acted on is still an open question." Participant*

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Were the topics sufficiently challenging?

Prior to the Assemblies, participants in all areas judged that they had some knowledge of the topic, suggesting that the **topic choices were neither inaccessible nor irrelevant to the majority of participants.** The middling responses to the knowledge scale question (69% answered 3 or 4 out of a 6-point scale) also indicate that the participants generally did not consider themselves to be experts on the topic and that there was room for learning.

The exposure to informative content shared by the experts was highlighted by participants as a favourite aspect of their Citizens' Assembly experience. Over half of those participating (52%) strongly agreed with the statement: 'I have learnt a lot about the issue through the Citizens' Assembly process'. For some, **the complexity of the topic became more evident over the course of the Citizens' Assembly.**

> *"If you asked me before I went what would be my thought for Brierley Hill town centre, I would have thought knocking it down - what can you do with it? It became apparent there was a need for the people in that area for something to be done. So it was really challenging to think things out."*
> *Participant*

Although these are the broad findings in relation to the topics of the Citizens' Assemblies, there were inevitably local nuances to the experience - which are detailed below.

Greater Cambridge

In Greater Cambridge, the topic was considered important for regional outcomes and sufficiently complex that a Citizens' Assembly was a worthwhile exercise. The question interlinked three issues, congestion, air pollution and public transport where trade-offs would need to be made.

Although congestion in Greater Cambridge is an issue for which the authority has already explored technical solutions, it was a topic that people without technical expertise or interest could relate to. The participants engaged with the complexity presented, but there was feeling that the topic had potentially been narrowly explored through the Assembly design.

> *"Transport is an important issue, but it's not just about commuting to work - a much wider issue, worth debating and discussing as a community."*
> *Participant*
>
> *"They were very clear what is on the table and what wasn't on the table. I suppose because of the nature of the questions, it was much more specific. I found for participants and being a table facilitator, you couldn't roam in terms of the topic." Table facilitator*

The comments above illustrate the **challenge of setting the topic and question appropriately** - sufficiently focused that the Assembly is able to grapple with a high level of complexity, while still enabling the Assembly to have the freedom to explore different

directions within the topic. It was clear that, over time, a lot of work has been done by various stakeholders, including GCP, to explore the possibilities to address the issue. Consequently, there were expectations of how the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly could move the debate around regional transport, congestion and air pollution into a new gear.

Dudley

The topic and questions set by Dudley's People's Panel [DMBC's name for their Citizens' Assembly] resonated with those that took part. 86% of participants considered the topic to be a significantly important issue (rating it 5 or 6), and 88% considered it to be a significantly important issue for those locally. While participants' motivations to take part in the IiDP Assemblies were generally linked to interest in being involved with plans and decisions concerning their local area, various **Dudley People's Panel participants alluded specifically to their concerns about the identity of town centres in the borough**.

> *"Brierley Hill sits really close to the out-of-town shopping centre Merry Hill, literally in walking distance. Owners of Merry Hill shopping centre have taken the [Brierley Hill] identity as well." Participant interview*

The question posed to the People's Panel encouraged the participants to be imaginative with their ideas for the future of Brierley Hill and Dudley town centres. **The issue's complexity was shown more in its breadth of scope than in a requirement to make decisions about trade-offs or options**. Some participants felt that the Panel struggled to handle the complexity involved with two town centres and that over the course of the Panel, some people were more invested in discussions relating to either Dudley or Brierley Hill.

> *"It wasn't given enough scope for the two weekends. Really, you could have done a lot more if it was a Brierley Hill weekend and then a Dudley weekend." Participant*

> *"In Dudley, there was a little bit of Brierley Hill vs Dudley going on." Facilitator*

Although the question included a timeline to ground the Panel to consider feasibility and to come up with tangible actions, overall feedback suggested that it was too early in the exploration of the topic to do this full justice. With this in mind, the People's Panel may have benefited from either an exploration of town centres in the borough more broadly or a focused exploration of one town centre and its challenges.

Test Valley

In Test Valley, the future vision of a Romsey area was regarded as being a relatively important topic to participants, but it was perceived to be of marginally more importance to others living locally as well as to the Council.

> *"It wasn't an area I was particularly concerned about. If it hadn't changed then I wouldn't have been too bothered, but if you're going to think about*

changing it, it's an ideal opportunity to do something really worthwhile and make a real difference to the town." Participant

47% of participants thought it was a highly important issue (5 or 6 on a 6-point scale), and 51% perceived the topic to be of high importance to the Council. This may reflect the prominence of the Romsey Future project locally, and the various consultations and stakeholder work carried out prior to the Assembly. Several participants indicated that they had been aware of (but not necessarily engaged with) previous communications relating to the Romsey Future project.

The topic and question were crafted carefully, taking into account the needs of the Assembly to roam and consider wide-ranging options, while also locating the discussions to a specific place. Some participants indicated that discussions were beginning to circle towards the end.

"Felt there was some repetition. After first weekend, felt like we were moving the chairs around but nothing new was coming up really."
Participant

"One weekend is fine, two is too long." Participant

Detachment from the process may suggest that the Assembly was reaching the limits of exploration within the topic.

Key points and learning

Participants generally felt that the IiDP Citizens' Assembly **topics were highly important for their local areas**. Whether from the outset or over the course of the Assemblies, the participants were strongly invested in the Citizens' Assemblies topic discussions.

The question plays an important role in determining the dominant type of **complexity** with which a Citizens' Assembly will grapple. In two of the areas (Dudley and Test Valley), the focus of the Citizens' Assemblies questions were open and centred around developing a vision for their local area, while the GCP Assembly was focused on exploring specific measures and decisions around trade-offs. All three of the areas noted the need for the Assembly to be able to 'roam' the topic as well as determine support for tangible 'options' - but found it difficult to engage the Assemblies with both types of complexity.

Decision-making in local government follows a set structure and timetable, which shapes the forward planning and work of Council officers. The framing of the Assemblies' questions appeared to be steered strongly by the local authority perspective and decision-making needs. The Assemblies could have benefited from incorporating other earlier participation to uncover the range of ways in which people would like to engage with the topic.

The Citizens' Assembly experience

Once the model is chosen and the topic is set within the context, the bulk of the experience for most of the individuals who are involved in the Citizens' Assembly is the two weekends.

This section of the report explores the Citizens' Assembly experience in three ways:

1. **Deliberative process:** How did the facilitation, timing and flow of information affect participants' experience of the Assemblies?

2. **Independence and impartiality:** This delves into participants' perceptions of the overall 'validity' of the process through choices in Assembly design - such as the recruitment of table facilitators and selection of speakers.

3. **Representation**: This report does not evaluate the Sortition Foundation's methodology in the population sampling and recruitment of the Assembly participants, but assesses the extent to which the participants felt satisfied that the Assembly was representative of their local community.

Deliberative Process

In terms of the process of the weekends, this section explores the structure of sessions, their facilitated, their timing, the information flow, and final decision making.

Structure

The Citizens' Assembly participants at all three local authority areas: Greater Cambridge Partnership; Test Valley Borough Council; and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, met over two weekends and engaged in over 24 hours of learning, deliberation and decision-making. Across the areas, the process was designed by primary delivery partners Involve and the Democratic Society working closely with local authority officers, with input from an advisory group.

Local authority	Primary delivery partner	Support partners
Greater Cambridge Partnership	Involve	Sortition Foundation
Test Valley Borough Council	Democratic Society	
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	Democratic Society	Area-specific advisory group

The Assembly weekends were designed and facilitated by lead facilitators from the primary delivery partner organisations. There were also table facilitators for each session who facilitated the conversations on tables of six to eight assembly participants. These were made up of independent facilitators, and some council staff, who had been trained in facilitation techniques as part of the capacity-building element of the programme. The role of table

facilitators was to promote deliberation and conversations and document what was being discussed. They would then support the group to develop thoughts into recommendations.

Assembly participants sat according to a seating plan to provide a diversity of demographics at each table. This was changed each day to ensure that participants heard from the different views and perspectives of other participants.

The Assemblies allowed individuals from the local area and national organisations to hear evidence and witness the process as observers. However, to prevent disruption and minimise their effect on participants, they were not allowed to listen in to table discussions or approach participants of the Citizens' Assembly.

As part of the deliberation process, Assembly participants were presented with evidence from experts, residents, community groups, local businesses and the council. Experts could be called on to answer questions during group discussions.

Each weekend was designed with a specific focus. The purpose of the first weekend was to provide participants with wide-ranging background information and relevant context of the issue. In the second weekend, participants built upon their ideas from weekend one and consolidated these into actionable recommendations which they would be asked to vote on.

Facilitation

Broadly, participants were very complimentary about the facilitation of the Assemblies. On average, 91% of participants rated the lead facilitators 5 or 6 on a 6 point scale (where 6 represents the highest). Using the same scale, 89% of participants also rated the table facilitators as 5 or 6. There was little to no difference in people's perceptions of facilitation on the first weekend compared to the second.

> *"The actual process was seriously good, ran very well indeed. Facilitation was very good. We all felt collaborative as community and would talk about things happily." Greater Cambridge, participant*

The assemblies were viewed as well organised, balanced and engaging. At the start of the assemblies, participants created conversation guidelines for having a constructive and respectful conversation. These were shared and displayed around the room as a reminder of how to have a good conversation. Participants valued this as it set the tone from the start to make sure that everyone's opinion was heard and had the chance to contribute.

> *"I think that was a real mixture of good facilitation and people just really grasping what it was all about right from the beginning, because it had been so clearly explained from the very first letter that you got through the door it was obviously going to be an inclusive exercise." Test Valley, participant*

From the observers' point of view, the assemblies included **a good mix of evidence hearing, facilitation and discussion**. The atmosphere at the citizens' assemblies was safe and inclusive and offered a space for participants to open up, be heard and engage.

"I think overall it was a great way to engage with local people." Dudley, observer
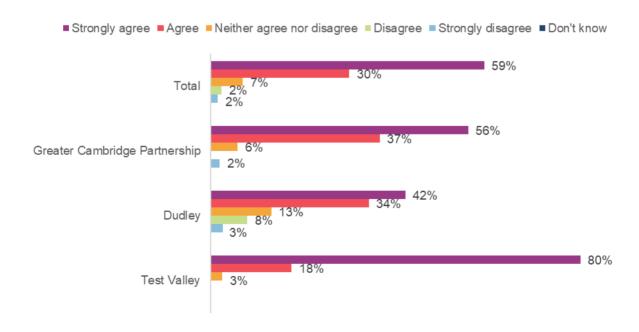
This was echoed by assembly participants who felt that facilitators cultivated a respectful and supportive environment, giving participants a sufficient opportunity to speak and ask questions. For instance, participants were given yellow and red cards, which they could hold up at any time if they felt a presenter was going too fast, or if they did not understand anything. These were used less than expected. More often the cards were held up to notify a speaker that they could not hear, rather than to clarify a point.

The chart below (relating to the final day of Citizens' Assembly weekend 2) of the Assemblies shows that the majority of participants felt that they were given sufficient opportunities to speak in the table discussions. Participants will naturally vary in the way in which they would like to participate in table discussions, and table facilitators play an important role in helping to ensure that the people at their table had an equal opportunity to speak and share their views.

"[The facilitators were] almost obsessive about making sure that anyone had an opportunity to express their view." Greater Cambridge, participant

In Test Valley, 80% of participants strongly agreed that they had plenty of speaking opportunities, which was significantly higher than in the other two Assemblies (and also a significant increase on the Test Valley participant response in weekend one. The observing researcher was present in the post-Assembly debrief in weekend one, where table facilitators reported that in their view, some voices were dominating the conversations. Strategies to address this (such as having a different format to the table activities) were discussed and implemented in weekend two.

Chart 1 I was given plenty of speaking opportunities during the table discussions

Timing

A key part of Involve's Citizens' Assembly standards is that sufficient time is available proportionate to the question and purpose of the Assembly. Additionally, there should be enough time for each of the three phases of the Citizens' Assembly: learning, deliberation and decision-making. As mentioned above, the Citizens' Assemblies took place in 24 hours, over four days.

> *"In an ideal world, we had a larger budget we might have done it over a slightly longer period of time, had a third weekend." Local authority*

The time limitations (linked to budget in the above quote) were commented on numerous times following the first weekend of all Citizens' Assemblies and was observed by the facilitators. In particular, participants noted time constraints on some evidence panels or questioning opportunities, the discussion between tables and the space to generate ideas. There was a constant sense of time pressure. On occasion, participants were limited to asking one question as a table to each expert or experts were cut off from speaking as they reached their 5-minute presentation limit.

> *"Felt a little rushed for some talks, 5 minutes is not enough time for key speaker lecture points." Greater Cambridge, participant*

Despite this, participants mostly felt that they had enough information to participate effectively in the second weekend.
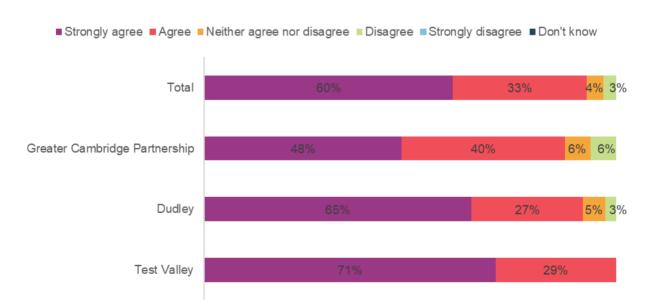
Chart 2 Day 4: I have had enough information to participate effectively this weekend

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Total	60%	33%	4%	3%
Greater Cambridge Partnership	48%	40%	6%	6%
Dudley	65%	27%	5%	3%
Test Valley	71%	29%		

However, there were marginal differences in terms of how participants experienced the time pressure across the assemblies.

The GCP Assembly had a defined purpose, despite it being large in question scope. In that Assembly, facilitators and participants thought there could have been more clarity on topics

that were in and out of scope. Participants would have benefited from more information on what funding was available and more time to question experts on the complexity of the issues they were asked to consider. Some participants sensed that there was a clear purpose of the Assembly and did not feel they had sufficient opportunity to come to their own conclusions, other than the suggestions that had been given.

"… again, in hindsight we might have been more clear about the scope of the Assembly - it had quite a defined purpose (whilst being large in question scope) …" Greater Cambridge, facilitator

The issue in Dudley was similar. Assembly participants were asked to address two key questions for two town centres, Dudley and Brierley Hill. The council chose Dudley and Brierley Hill because of the planned regeneration work and projects in the next five years. In their view, there was a real scope for people to use those town centres differently.

However, the challenges in Dudley and Brierley Hill are similar. Both towns experience high levels of deprivation, with empty shop units and significant regeneration plans around them. Although participants selected similar themes they saw as important for both town centres; they reflected that the content applicable to these themes presented a lot of information to absorb and digest in the allotted time.

There may be some tension between delivering information and discussion time. This may be driven by the flexibility to adapt to the process. The facilitators in Dudley found that as more experts were brought in on the second weekend, participants lost out on time to deliberate. Moreover, as experts are brought in later within the process, there is less time to brief them beforehand appropriately.

"Dudley in particular, a case of listening to expert after expert." Table facilitator

In Test Valley, some of the conversations were also viewed as repetitive. A shared reflection of the process was the issue of 'blue-sky thinking'. Participants did not feel that an appropriate amount of time was allocated to consolidate and 'flesh out' their final proposals with the necessary level of detail. There was a lot of similarity between the priority statements. This was slightly confusing for participants at the voting stage. Hence, all the proposals for improving the area received support from at least 50% of participants.[8]

Having come to a set of recommendations, it would have been useful to offer a space for participants to identify and refine the key themes. After the report came out, participants explained that they identified four themes which included all their recommendations. **They found that bringing these themes together was most valuable when presenting to the councillors at a cabinet meeting.**

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[8] The Democratic Society, Romsey Citizens' Assembly, 2019, pg. 30

"Then we had to vote on which statements were our most important ones and we were so confused about what we talked about where. I think everyone just voted for everything, they were all incredibly important." Test Valley, participant

Between Weekends One and Two

Across all three Assemblies, **the gap between the two weekends was perceived as a valuable part of the deliberative process**. For the participants, the break was used to crystallise ideas and build on discussions over the first weekend. There was no expectation from the facilitators that the participants would undertake supplementary research, although some did so. They did research, looked at academic papers or requested additional material. Other participants took a light-touch approach, they spoke to their friends and family to explore how the issue affected the world around them.

"What was really good was we did Saturday to Sunday and there were some weeks before the next one comes along." Dudley, participant

"I think that that that gap between the first weekend and the second was was terrifically important because it enabled those who hadn't perhaps heard some of the arguments against their own opinions to consider them and come back willing to explore the other side of the story further." Councillor

The organisers and local authorities found use in the break for different reasons. The delivery partners received feedback from the assembly members after the first weekend. This was used to think about what worked well and less well. For instance, GCP used this feedback to draw on their advisory board and worked together to decide what to change, and what not to change. It enabled Test Valley to reflect on where they had got to in the process, and they appreciated this flexibility when considering how they would design weekend two.

".. we had some flexibility in terms of how we were going to do weekend two well, because I think what that enabled us to do was to reflect…" Test Valley, lead
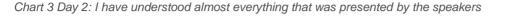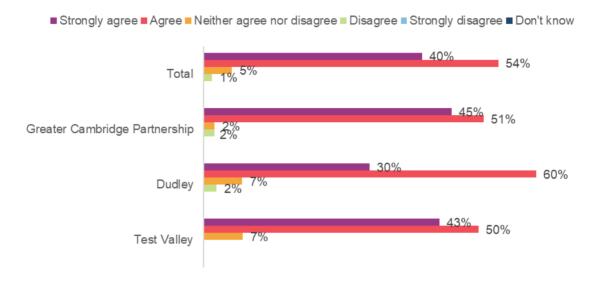
Flow of information

The two weekends had different purposes, as discussed above. In weekend one, participants received information from experts, residents, community groups, local businesses and the council. By the end of the second day, 92% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned a lot about the question during the Assembly.

"I did learn a lot… I'm beginning to understand how much I learnt. I thought I knew everything and obviously I didn't." Greater Cambridge, participant

Participants heard from a wide range of speakers and rated these positively. 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they understood almost everything that was

presented by the speakers. Information was also presented in different ways and gave participants a chance to include deliberation that occurred outside the assemblies.

Chart 3 Day 2: I have understood almost everything that was presented by the speakers

In Dudley's Assembly, the results of an online survey in which residents had been asked to comment on Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres, were included as part of the evidence provided to participants. The Assembly was encouraged to consider these findings when planning their proposals.

> *"[I liked] learning about our towns from both the speakers and other local people."*
>
> *Dudley, table facilitator*

To provide some insight into the views of young people, participants at the GCP Assembly were shown a video from the young travel ambassadors.

Decision making

Across the areas, participants were asked to input on a select few themes. At the Dudley and Test Valley assemblies, themes relating to town centres were used as a framework for the Assembly to allow participants to explore the question from several perspectives. Similarly, at the GCP Assembly, participants were introduced to the measures available to address congestion, air quality and public transport. These would then form the basis of their recommendations, as they would later be asked to vote on these. Participants recognized that this management of conversation allowed them to come to a concise and workable outcome, based on their priorities.
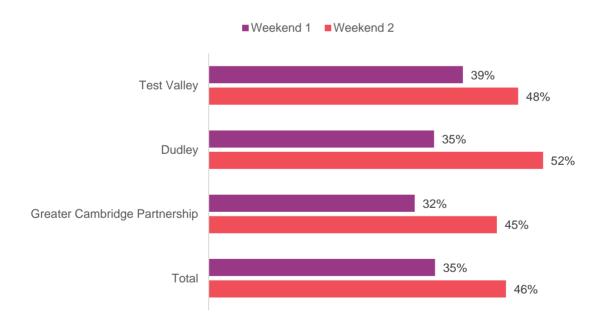
> *"We were able to identify our priorities. Organisers were directing the process in the sense they had organized the programme... we were asked to discuss them and asked our thoughts, we were in control of what we felt was important." Greater Cambridge, participant*

While there was general agreement that the Assemblies gave participants sufficient opportunity to deliberate, the extent to which participants felt that they were directing the process varied. Some participants thought that direction from facilitators was necessary to ensure that the Assemblies achieved their overall objectives.

However, some participants did express that they felt restricted in what they could discuss. Perhaps, the effort to keep the Citizens' Assemblies within scope was viewed as a roadblock in dialogue. To reduce the feeling of constraint, participants could put questions out of scope to the local authority in an allocated space at the Assembly. These would then be answered later.

The design of the process calls for evidence and experts presenting at the first weekend, and more time for deliberation in round table discussions on the second weekend. It would be expected that the data would reflect this, in what participants selected across the weekends as accountable for changing their views. The data showed a general increase between weekend one and two in the percentage of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they changed their views because of both the table discussions and presentations. Participants become active actors in Assembly during the second weekend when participants were asked to vote on priority statements and settle on their recommendations.
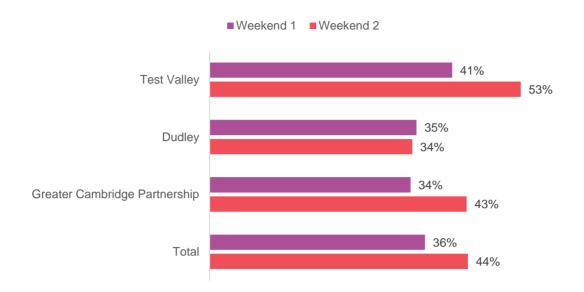
Chart 4 I changed my views as a result of the presentations

Chart 5 I changed my views as a result of the table discussions

Independence and Impartiality

Another significant aspect of Citizens' Assemblies is their independence and impartiality. After a period of time spent learning and debating a topic, members of the public are asked to come to a set of considered recommendations, independent of the body commissioning the Assembly. This section examines the extent to which the participants felt that the Assemblies were independent and impartial.

Facilitation

Most participants thought there was not a bias in the facilitators' approach. 72% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the table facilitators tried to influence the group with their own ideas. From the participants' perspective, facilitators were helping to guide the process. They would record opinions and checked with participants to ensure that they had interpreted what they said correctly. Similarly, some participants reported that throughout the Assembly, they noticed participants gaining confidence and presenting more in feedback sessions.

For some, having facilitators who were not from the area meant they had a lack of contextual knowledge. Others thought it helped that facilitators were not from the area, because it meant that the discussion remained impartial.

> *"Facilitators were not from the area which helped [them remain neutral]."*
> *Test Valley, participant*

For this reason, the **use of council staff as facilitators** caused distrust in the process and raised questions about the impartiality of the Assembly – for a small number of participants that became aware of this arrangement. From the authority perspective, there are longer-term benefits to using council staff in this role, including capacity building; sustaining connections with citizens; and the impact on staff involved. It would have been valuable to

inform participants at the outset about the Council's role within the Assembly, how their involvement had been decided and the training they had received to fulfil their roles effectively.

Council facilitators acting as table facilitators in the assembly process had varying opinions on their ability to stay independent and impartial. Some thought that they adjusted well to facilitating and balancing their contextual knowledge. They found that their understanding of the local area was beneficial, and while not personally interjecting in table discussions, were able to make use of on-hand experts to correct any information that they knew to be false. Others shared that given their awareness of the council and topic area, it was somewhat difficult to withhold their opinion or correct inaccurate statements.

"Played it straight because was worried about a conflict of interest… There was something around showing I understood the local area. Managed to avoid interjecting with things that were true/false, avoided that generally."
Council table facilitator

Part of the facilitator's role is to **ensure that varying opinions are heard**. Participants were encouraged to share any needs or accessibility support they might need to take part. For example, participants were seated according to their needs such as hearing, access to bathrooms or proximity to fresh air. Participants were also able to arrange interpretation and other considerations which made it easier for them to participate fully in the process. One facilitator described working closely with a participant who had disclosed that they had mental health needs to ensure they could contribute.

"A lot of barriers were removed that might have stopped certain members from sharing their views." *Table facilitator*

88% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that facilitators made sure that opposing arguments were heard. At the GCP Assembly, a facilitator became aware early on that several participants were in favour of public transport and cycling. They described actively managing their table to ensure that one person who was a driver was not deterred from sharing their opinion.

"In Cambridge, if the problem is cars, you need to have people who are car users – you don't want the unpopular view being muted."
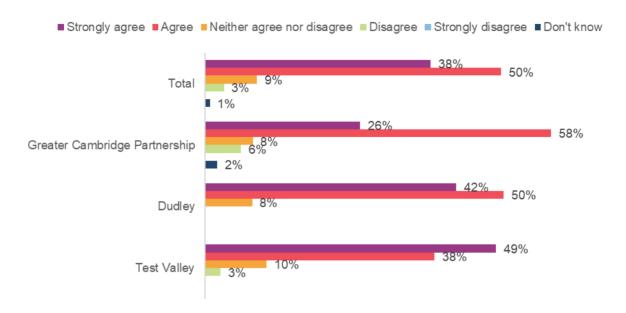*Table facilitator*

Chart 6 Day 2: The table facilitators made sure that opposing arguments were considered

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

Total
- Strongly agree: 38%
- Agree: 50%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 9%
- Disagree: 3%
- Don't know: 1%

Greater Cambridge Partnership
- Strongly agree: 26%
- Agree: 58%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 8%
- Disagree: 6%
- Don't know: 2%

Dudley
- Strongly agree: 42%
- Agree: 50%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 8%

Test Valley
- Strongly agree: 49%
- Agree: 38%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 10%
- Disagree: 3%

Use of delivery partners and advisory groups

All three Local Authorities emphasized that the use of delivery partners, Involve and the Democratic Society, helped to build trust in the process both internally and externally. The involvement of external contractors with wide-ranging experience of delivering Citizens' Assemblies, helped to legitimise the process and build trust that the local authority may be accountable to act on the recommendations. This was especially the case where members of the public have existing perceptions about a local authority. The delivery partners also reassured the local authority governing bodies that the Citizens' Assembly process would be of a good standard. Delivery partners stressed the importance of having clearly defined roles at the assemblies. To ensure transparency, facilitators, observers, experts and council staff were asked to wear name tags or other easily identifiable indicators, e.g. coloured t-shirts or dots on name badges.

> *"One of the great advantages of this has been partnering with [delivery partner] and others as it allows us to step back from being [local authority name] is doing this, to [local authority name] is doing this with other people. There's a little bit of a toxic legacy from [local authority name]'s early days which makes people suspicious of what we are doing."*
> *Local authority interview*

Likewise, the area-specific advisory group was seen as a sounding board to enable independence and impartiality of the Assemblies. An area-specific advisory board was formed to work with each local authority and delivery partner in agreeing to the evidence and content of the Assemblies. When deciding which evidence and experts would present, the authorities reported being questioned by their advisory board on why some evidence was overlooked. Also, the advisory board provided suggestions on other information that might be relevant for the Assembly.

"Most of those recommended have been people that our advisory group have recommended, so it tends to be more local, hearing from the other groups, it has been the same, tend to recommend people they know and in their own sphere of influence. Useful to have that mix of both local and national people on that advisory group." Local authority interview

While the independence and impartiality of the local authority from the Citizens' Assembly process is necessary, the presence and visibility of the authority is equally important. Participants can draw on knowledge of the local authority officers and councillors. It also demonstrates that the process is taken seriously by those who will be making decisions based on the Assembly recommendations if participants can see decision-makers present. The calling of the general election in November 2019 impacted on councillor ability to be present at the Test Valley and Dudley Assemblies. This did not go unnoticed by participants. Hence, there is a fine balance between ensuring independence from the local authority and engaging with the process. Especially, to convey the message that Assembly participants and their recommendations are valued.

"Could have seen more councillors. On the latter part, was nearing the election, wasn't right they were seen to be influencing in the election. On the first day, had one councillor would've been good to see others."
Dudley, participant

"Would say there was election and things at the time, so a bit of a wobble in terms of participation."
Test Valley, participant

Evidence and experts

From the surveys, just over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the information they received during the Assembly was fair and balanced between different viewpoints. In the feedback surveys, the quality of the speakers and evidence was frequently mentioned in the open box responses to weekend one's question: 'What did you like most about this event, if anything?'
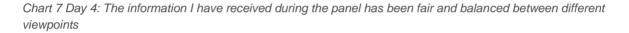
In the follow-up interviews, most participants thought that they heard from a variety of generally neutral experts. A small number of less positive comments around the balance of evidence appeared to be linked to how information on the local authority's previous work or plans (relating to the Citizens' Assembly topic) were shared. For example, some participants mentioned that evidence of earlier consultations or plans were only shared after some Assembly discussion about related options had already taken place. This confused the participants about the scope of the Assembly and led to open questions about its validity. Although the researcher observer notes showed that the organisers noted and responded to concerns where they occurred, the evaluation data indicates that this did not entirely reassure the small number of participants voicing concerns.
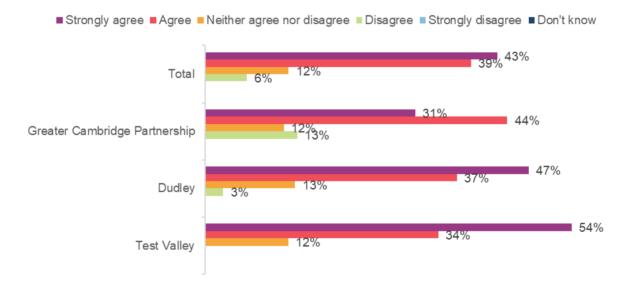
"But then, there is this whole master plan process that was actually already underway before we had the Citizens' Assembly and that was another thing where everyone was like "oh". It's not like they'd kept it from us, it just

wasn't made clear enough where the Citizens' Assembly fitted into the wider development of the master plan." Test Valley, participant

Interviews with local authority officers showed that the scheduling of speakers and evidence was far from a simple exercise and that a short lead-in time meant that some choices were pragmatic ones, rather than the authority's preferred option. **The findings above suggest that local authorities working on future Citizens' Assemblies would benefit from allocating more time to consider the timing of key speakers and evidence throughout the event – not only to aid effective deliberation but also to maintain trust in the process.**

The process of deciding on the type of evidence and experts that would be presented at the Assemblies was a joint effort between the local authority, advisory group and delivery partner. When making their recommendations, the local authority had to ensure that those they selected would not favour a particular outcome.

Chart 7 Day 4: The information I have received during the panel has been fair and balanced between different viewpoints

The Assemblies in this programme were looking at localised issues. Consequently, the design, evidence and expert presented at the Assembly should reflect the local nature of the issue. For example, the Dudley Citizens' Assembly located the first weekend of the Assembly in Brierley Hill, and the second in Dudley, reflecting the two town centres featured in the Assembly question.

"So, there was a good spectrum of what they perceived would give us information…"
Dudley, participant

Comparatively, the GCP Citizens' Assembly looked at the issue of transport, air quality and congestion across the Greater Cambridge area. There was an effort to include participants, evidence and experts who would be affected by the Assembly recommendations. For

instance, the geography and travel regularity of Assembly members was included as part of the stratification criteria.[8] There was some concern among stakeholders that not enough information and evidence would be presented relating to those travelling long distances to the city centre.

Some participants felt there was an imbalance in the evidence and speakers. They suggested that there had been significant consideration of the Cambridge city centre and those travelling to the area. They felt over-informed on some aspects of the issue, such as commuter times, and thought the issue for wider Cambridge region was insufficiently discussed. These examples illustrate that it is crucial to consider who the issue is important for and represent their voices in the evidence and experts at the Assembly.

> *"The problem here was the people who were present things, steering us towards discussing what they wanted us to discuss about."*
> *Greater Cambridge, participant*

Representation

Local authorities' reported that the process of working with the Sortition Foundation on selection and recruitment of participants was generally smooth.

Several of the local authority officers mentioned that their motivation to try a Citizens' Assembly approach was the opportunity to hear from residents that other forms of consultation do not normally engage.

> *"I am still really excited about the idea, every council experiences the same. You end up speaking to the same people that end up making a loud noise, whether that's small campaign groups on certain topics, you are not really getting the full voice. Stepping in the right direction by starting to tap into the thoughts and ideas of ordinary people that are not normally included."*
> *Local authority interview*

From surveys of the Assembly participants, the majority reported that **they had not been familiar with the concept of a Citizens' Assembly prior to their invitation**. This suggests that the Assembly participants were not the 'usual suspects,' i.e. those that are familiar with different forms of civic engagement and were keen to take part for the experience of the Citizens' Assembly itself.

Of the Assembly participants interviewed, the majority were also satisfied that those attending the Assembly was either a fair reflection of their area's population or represented a sufficiently varied group in which to discuss the issue.

> *"I think the different users of the transport system were represented. Also a good split with gender, ethnic and able bodied/disabled, lots of representation across the board."*

"I think the group I was in I would say it was a range of different people. I couldn't say that we were all after one thing, was a mixture. And ten people is a fair number...I thought it was a fair way of trying to get info from the public." Assembly participant interviews

Within representation, it is also important to address questions around inclusivity, as aspects of the event design may prohibit certain groups from taking part and being represented. Researcher observation at all three Assemblies showed that the facilitators were responsive to feedback, and a number of adjustments were made to accommodate those that were visually impaired or had hearing difficulties.

In Test Valley, the authority together with support from MySociety, found ways to enhance the Assembly discussions through the integration of lived experience evidence. Participants could go to four 'lived experience zones', which used information collected from previous public consultations and were led by someone who had taken part in the consultation. Council staff highlighted that the purpose of these zones was to involve groups of people who do not usually engage with participatory processes. First-hand engagement with the lives of people on low incomes or living with disabilities resonated with the Assembly participants. Facilitators found that participants returned to the findings from the consultation in their discussions.

A second approach, the 'walk and talk tour', was an opportunity for participants to visit the sites being considered as part of the Assembly question. This was effective because participants were able to talk to experts along the route and at each site.

"The walking tour was very useful."

Test Valley, participant

The next section of this report develops this exploration of involvement in Citizens' Assemblies beyond deliberative participation through consideration of the overall reach of the IiDP Assemblies.

Key points and learning

Overall the assemblies were successful and positive experiences for those involved, and through the process, the independence and the representative nature of the Assemblies, a key theme that ran through all of the feedback was one of credibility and authority. There were lots of different kinds of authority that needed to be achieved, and these influenced (in different ways) the experience of participants during the assemblies.

1. Firstly, there was the authority of **quality**, created by a well-run event that gave people confidence. This was influenced by things running to time, with credible and relevant processes and participants (of all kinds). From the venues to the quality of slides and speakers, this created a sense of credibility around the event. The investment of the programme ensured that this could happen in all areas.

2. Secondly, there was **representative** authority being deemed essential to give the assemblies legitimacy. Many went in suspecting that this might not be possible with a small group and that there would be perspective missing. The work of the Sortition Foundation and the methodology used gave people confidence, and then their experience of the weekends was one of seeing visible diversities, hearing diversities of perspective, and being part of a meeting that wasn't the usual suspects. As such, representative authority was achieved for all areas.

3. Thirdly, there was **positional** authority, and how individuals or institutions with existing authority connected to the event. This meant things like, were there elected members there, and if so were they getting the balance right between endorsing the event but not getting in the way? This applied to council staff as well, and potentially become challenging in the facilitation role – could they facilitate well given their existing positional authority? Finally, did the speakers and other experts have credibility on the issue so that they were respected in relation to the topic. This was harder to achieve, and sometimes didn't always happen in each place.

4. The final type of authority was an authority achieved through **balance**. It links to positional authority, but is about how evidence and complexity are presented, the range of speakers (not just their institutions) and the feeling amongst participants that their decision was not being assumed by those who had designed the Assembly (through structures such as timing or guided questions/ frames). The evaluation showed that this was generally achieved but was perhaps the most challenging for the authorities to achieve for all Assembly participants – bearing in mind that the participants enter the process with a range of pre-existing views and opinions on the topic, as well as of the local authority.

The examples of this section highlight the different challenges of achieving this authority.

Reaching beyond the Assembly

This section of the report moves out of the weekends, looking to wider communication and its success.

In evaluating the reach of the IiDP, this study examines how the IiDP participating authority areas sought to raise awareness of their Citizens' Assemblies - their participation in the process, the activities of the Assembly as well as the recommendations and final output of the Assembly. It is important to explore the extent to which the impact of the process extended outside of the two weekends of the Citizens' Assemblies itself.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this report, the focus of this evaluation is primarily on the communications output of the participating local authorities. Determining the success of communications activities is challenging (effective techniques are debated within the communications sector). It was not within the scope of this evaluation to gauge the level of awareness of the IiDP - or the local Citizens' Assemblies - within the broader public due to budget limitations and the scale of work needed to ascertain this. However, where possible, we have included examples which give indications of how the local output was received.

All three local authorities worked closely with their communications teams to plan and execute communications campaigns regarding the Citizens' Assemblies. Through interviews with the local authorities, four overarching communications goals emerged regarding the external promotion and visibility of the programme in their area:

1. **Enable public and internal understanding of the rationale for participating** in the programme, positioning it strategically in relation to ongoing Council work and local area aims through crafting appropriate messaging.

2. Support the **recruitment and onboarding of Assembly members** through general promotion and targeted communications.

3. Support **public confidence in the transparency of the process** through publicising Assembly FAQs, online streaming and publishing of recommendations and evidence.

4. Boost **public profile and raise wider awareness** of the pilot's achievements.

Two of these goals directly relate to increasing the wider awareness of the Citizens' Assembly (supporting the recruitment of Assembly members and celebrating the participation in the pilot), while the other two were about supporting a smooth and successful implementation of the Citizens' Assembly event with key stakeholders.

The local authorities also highlighted the level of capacity and inhouse resource required to support the communications requirements. All three local authorities acknowledged that a significant amount of time was required to support internal communications processes with Elected Members and Council stakeholders connected to the subject of the Citizens' Assembly.

Communicating the Citizens' Assembly purpose

The local authorities' communications activities about their involvement in the Innovation in Democracy Programme included initial press releases about their involvement in the programme and social media. For prospective Assembly participants, this was supported by liaising with local groups and forums and covering the Assemblies in Council printed magazines. The approach adopted was based on existing local authority practice (such as the communication channels used) alongside local knowledge of the topic and the area.

For example, in Greater Cambridge, a keen awareness of the interest from local stakeholders in both the topic and the Citizens' Assembly process meant that some activities were undertaken that were not repeated in Dudley or Test Valley. This included a Twitter Q&A session, where members of the Involve team helped to answer queries. In addition, a local stakeholder event enabled representatives from local community and campaign groups to find out more about the Citizens' Assembly.

A couple of the local authorities acknowledged that their advance promotion of the Assemblies had **primarily focused on activities which would support the recruitment of Assembly members, with a lesser focus on raising awareness of the Citizens' Assemblies more generally**. Concerns were expressed about over-promoting the Assemblies, given the unknown outcome of the process and the political sensitivities of the topic.

> *"We have signed up to something where ultimately recommendations will be made that we as an authority might not be able to deliver or be politically palatable, but it's got to be in the public domain. The challenge has been keeping the communications on a tight leash and really preparing for what's to come." Local Authority interview*

> *"Every press release we've put out we've used Twitter. After we got everybody [Assembly participants] we dialled it down a little bit." Local Authority interview*

A cautious promotion of the Citizens' Assemblies, while understandable, would have had an impact on the overall reach of the Citizens' Assemblies. One area that may have been affected were the number of observers present at the Assemblies themselves. The number of Citizens' Assembly observers in attendance generally comprised a mixture of individuals that were linked to the hosting local authority, those who were interested in applying the Citizens' Assembly process to another issue/in their area and a small number of individuals that wanted to follow the proceedings related to the topic itself. The reach of the Citizens' Assemblies, and observer attendance by citizens in the local area, might have been greater with wider promotion.

> *"She said she was surprised there were not more observers there and wondered whether it had been advertised widely." Researcher conversation with Citizens' Assembly Observer*

All three local authorities succeeded in recruiting their target numbers for the Citizens' Assemblies. Overall, the majority of Assembly members (84%, 85% and 84% in GCP, Dudley and Test Valley respectively) felt that the Citizens' Assembly aims and objectives had been clearly explained before the event.

Of the participants that had seen the Assemblies mentioned in wider communications (not directed to them as participants), some commented that seeing the output was reliant on engagement with Council communication channels.

> *"Nothing obvious on social media. Have since looked for it on social media and seen it. I suppose if you're not linked into the council on social media, you wouldn't see it." Participant interview*

Finally, there was close working with local community groups and forums so that cross-posting news and promotion of the Citizens' Assemblies could be achieved, particularly through groups that might have a thematic interest, as well as the wider interest in local democracy.

Communicating the activities of the Citizens' Assembly

The speakers, presentations and voting were live-streamed by the Dudley and Greater Cambridge Assemblies, but this was not possible for the Test Valley Citizens' Assembly. The live stream enabled those that were not able to be present at the Assembly (particularly due to the exceptional circumstances brought about by purdah) to witness the event.

> *"So I watched the whole of the proceedings online, at least the ones that were published… Especially when the votes came in, that was actually quite an exciting moment. And best of all was hearing the feedback from the tables afterwards." Councillor interview*

The impetus to live stream the Assemblies appeared driven by a wish to support the validity of the process, as opposed to expectations that this would significantly raise awareness of the Assemblies. No targets or specific promotion was mentioned in relation to securing views of the livestream. See table below for publicly available figures at the time of writing.

Area	Viewing figures
GCP **https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL19jDKboDATChvbx9q9F6xApVY_cPbFz4**	Day 1 livestream - 148 views Day 2 - 56 views Day 3 - 38 views Day 4 - 50 views

Dudley **https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIIPE122JkkywEQJeGglh7g**	9 speaker videos, of which the highest number of views achieved for one video was 13 views. Weekend 30 Nov: livestream 56 views 1 Dec livestream: 43 views

The speaker presentations and additional materials were also uploaded to the Local Authorities' websites after the events.

> *"We did have a couple of residents who are involved in their local communities come and observe all four sessions. And they've been in touch about being involved in helping deliver some of the recommendations and also using some of the materials presented." Local authority interview*

Communicating the outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly

All three areas received local media coverage of the Citizens' Assemblies (see table below). Success in coverage will depend to a large extent on the existing relationships between the local authority and local media; however, the local authorities mentioned some challenges in securing media coverage which linked explicitly to Citizens' Assemblies. The challenges were that:

- **The concept of a Citizens' Assembly was not widely known or understood.** This presented a challenge to journalists looking for stories that would interest the public. However, through formal and informal connections made via the RSA's peer learning network sessions, the Local Authorities shared learning as the pilot progressed, and accessed the expertise of Citizens' Assembly practitioners from across the world. The Local Authorities communications teams learned more about the concept of a Citizens' Assembly and were then able to communicate it more effectively to local press.

> *"Essentially giving some people some guidelines about what this process is, so they understand it and reflect that in any press." Local authority*

- **The media (local, in particular) were not interested in covering the Citizens' Assembly in advance of the event.** The communications teams perceived the media's interest to be linked to potential changes or decisions relating to the topic of the Citizens' Assembly.

> *"We're struggling to get media to put a camera on it, because it's not a complete story." Local authority*

The majority of the local press was achieved following the release of the report by the Council.

Area	Local press
Cambridge	"Could a workplace parking levy work in Cambridge?" *Cambridge Independent,* 1 November 2019 "Cambridge City Centre 'should open to electric vehicles only'" *Cambridge Independent*, 22 November 2019 "Extinction Rebellion activists disrupt Greater Cambridge Partnership meeting", *Cambridge Independent*, 19 February 2020
Dudley	"Fight on crime in focus after violent attacks in Dudley", *Express & Star*, 21 December 2019 "Tackling crime in Dudley and Brierley Hill is top priority for towns, People's Panel finds", *Halesowen News*, 28 December 2019 "Government minister praises Dudley People's Panel", *Black Country Radio*, 26 January 2020 "Dudley People's Panel praised by government minister", *Stourbridge News*, 27 January 2020
Test Valley	"Thousands granted for Romsey revamp", *Romsey Advertiser,* 7 October 2019 "Plans to revamp Romsey town centre are nominated for National Planning Awards 2020", *Romsey Advertiser*, 30 April 2020 BBC South East covered the second weekend of the Citizens' Assembly for a local TV news segment.

Key points and learning

Overall, there were five, consistent messages from across the three areas:

- Greater promotion of the Citizens' Assemblies in advance may secure more observer attendance during the event and greater interest in and awareness of the outcomes.

- A longer lead-in time may enable more groundwork with local stakeholders to increase the reach in relation to the whole process.

- No goals on what success in achieving 'wider awareness' means - meant that local authorities, with little spare capacity, focused on the essential communications tasks for the Citizens' Assembly to happen.

- Local media interest in the story was, on the whole, linked to action on the topic, as opposed to publicising aspects of the process.

- The Local Authorities appreciated the support that was enabled by the peer learning network; communications functions mentioned that the peer learning sessions had helped to inform their external work around the Assemblies and support internal communications about the process.

Impact on participants

This section looks at the participants and how the experience has contributed to their skills and social capital, affected relationships with the Council and their wishes to be involved in future decision-making. It also explores the case for reimbursement/reward for the time given. To an extent, the impact on participants is dependent on the follow-up actions of Council, and so this leads into the next section.

Interest, enjoyment, and learning

Participants took great pleasure from the experience, many of them commenting that they enjoyed it more than they expected to. Participants indicated that they developed skills that would be of use in their professional lives. The social capital which participants gained from the Citizens' Assemblies was an unintended benefit of the programme. In building these relationships and being involved in the process, they felt an increased sense of connectedness to their local area.

"I have met people that, we haven't connected to the point where we have swapped numbers, but now when I bump into them in town we have conversations, and if I really wanted to get hold of them I could get connected through the council." Test Valley, participant

"I think I have gained the ability to actually take time to look and explore what is happening locally. I realized that having had all that presented to me a lot of work going on in the background and by doing this council being open and honest saying 'this is happening what do you think?'" Dudley, participant

The reach of Citizens' Assemblies on resident engagement was particularly highlighted in Test Valley. An assembly member who, in effect, had been housebound for a substantial period had been able to participate. The organisers ensured that accessibility requirements were considered. For instance, at the walk and talk session, a mobility van was made available to enable the participant to take part to the same extent as other assembly members.

"… this experience opportunity, just enabled this person to come out of the house [for] the first time in six months, two weekends, and she had a great time." Local authority

Relationship between Councils and citizens

As mentioned in the local context section of this report, the authorities' relationship with their local citizens is not uniform, either across the areas or for all participants. The range of feeling towards the local authorities was apparent in surveys of the participants' motivations to attend.

For genuine engagement in the Assemblies, it was important that this diversity was acknowledged and old issues or preconceptions were able to surface and be addressed. Table facilitators played a role in supporting participants to overcome deep-rooted views of the council and encouraging the participants to think about what they would do as decision-makers.
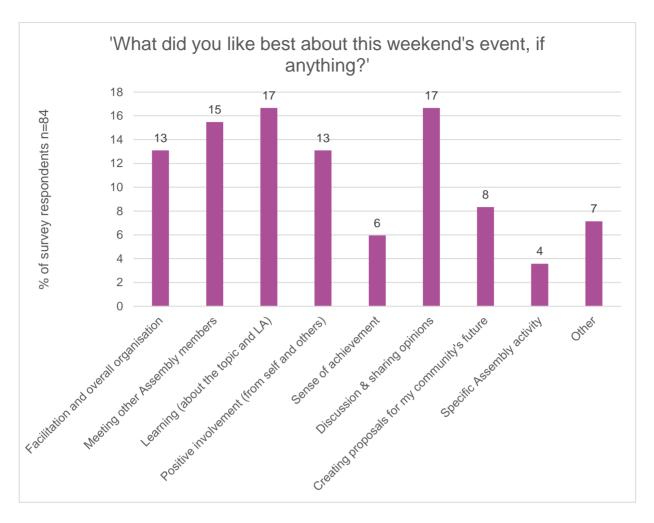
> *"Had to work very hard as facilitators because of that diversity, some entrenched positions in terms of how the council was - negative views of the council." Table facilitator*

Through the first phase of the Assembly, participants gained a stronger awareness of the authorities' ongoing and future work, and the in-person connection provided opportunities to ask questions and challenge any areas which were felt to be unclear or omitted. The focus of the Citizens' Assembly gave participants a way to engage collectively with the Council's plans and local challenges. In each of the Assemblies, the participants were proactive in asking for clarity on where the Council's work stopped, and the Assembly's role began.
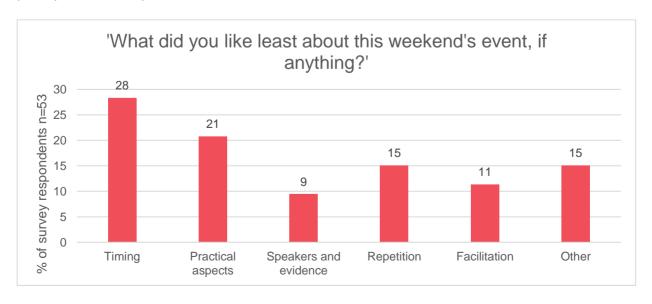
This was in part due to participants' questions around the validity of the process, to be sure that their participation was not 'rubber stamping' the authorities' predetermined decisions. **However, it shows that participants and authorities were beginning to navigate and redefine the boundaries of their relationship to each other, in the new format of engagement provided by the Citizens' Assembly.** This step is essential for the Assembly to become participant-led, to move from a participative exercise towards a collective forum with a clearly defined role and decision-making function.

> *"Seemed really enthusiastic, courageous to come and present. In some ways, a large percent of audience will be like we've heard it all before. I think over the four-day period eventually started to sink in that it is something that is happening." Dudley, participant*

Over the course of the two weekends, comments on the quality of organisation and management of the Assemblies were very positive. Inductive thematic analysis of the open box answers to the participant survey question 'What did you like best about the weekend's event, if anything?' in the second weekend of the Citizens' Assemblies led to the following breakdown of responses.

'What did you like best about this weekend's event, if anything?'

% of survey respondents n=84

- Facilitation and overall organisation: 13
- Meeting other Assembly members: 15
- Learning (about the topic and LA): 17
- Positive involvement (from self and others): 13
- Sense of achievement: 6
- Discussion & sharing opinions: 17
- Creating proposals for my community's future: 8
- Specific Assembly activity: 4
- Other: 7

Not all the participants chose to complete a survey or that particular question, so the total number of respondents does not represent the views of all the Assembly participants. A smaller number of participants chose to respond to the survey question: 'What did you like least about this weekend's event if anything?'. The most common responses were about practical aspects of the event (such as the venue, acoustics, or quality of refreshments) and perceptions that aspects of the event had felt 'rushed'.

'What did you like least about this weekend's event, if anything?'

% of survey respondents n=53

- Timing: 28
- Practical aspects: 21
- Speakers and evidence: 9
- Repetition: 15
- Facilitation: 11
- Other: 15

Some of the more in-depth qualitative data captured from participants following the Assemblies indicated that the overall Citizens' Assembly experience had generally left a positive impression. Some participants expressed wishes to be involved again or to continue to develop a closer relationship with their local authority. There was a recognition that while there may have been specific aspects that could have improved, participants were impressed by the event. A few were explicit that the event had exceeded their expectations. Participating local authorities also reported that the anecdotal feedback which they had independently gathered or received following the Citizens' Assembly was also broadly supportive of the process and the outcomes.

> *"A great opportunity, the way they did this process – it was like we were in government. [The] public have put faith in our representatives, to take our proposals towards the council. [It] gave us the confidence to give feedback and raise issues to the local authority." Participant interview*

> *"I think the overall … process has been worthwhile in terms of building trust with the community… the feedback we've had from people is that they felt that was kind of a shift in the way the council was engaging." Local authority*

Involvement and efficacy

At the beginning of the first Assembly and then again in the second weekend, Assembly participants were surveyed on the strength of their agreement with the statement: *"When people in this local area get involved in their local community, they really can change the way their area is run."*

Assessing the average across all three Assemblies, there was a moderate increase in the percentage of participants that agreed with this statement across the weekends. This indicates that participation in the process, at least in the short term, has some positive impact on an individual's perception of their ability to influence decisions in their local area.

There was a small decrease between weekends 1 and 2 in the participant responses to Test Valley's Assembly. It is difficult to account for such a small difference, but reviewing data on Test Valley's Assembly gives a couple of possibilities for this – potentially the similarity of the statements (see the Citizen Assembly Experience chapter) when it came to voting, had lessened participants' opinions of the likely overall impact of their involvement. Alternatively, there were also a number of Test Valley participant comments about repetitiveness, and circling of discussions, which may have affected their opinion of efficacy.

Chart 8 When people in this local area get involved in their local community, they really can change the way their area is run

This shift in attitude about the community was also seen in the stated position of individuals. At the end of the process, when asked about their response to the statement 'taking part in this Citizens' Assembly has made me want to be more involved in other aspects of local decision making', 47% strongly agreed, and 41% agreed. This is likely influenced by the positive experience, but 88% remains a very large proportion of the group and suggests that they are thinking differently about their current and potential involvement.

For one participant, the act of taking part in the Citizens' Assembly amid wider political uncertainty, showed the advantages of deliberative democracy approaches, in enabling a different sort of contribution from citizens.

> *"Taking part in it, particularly at a time when national politics was so fraught, and there was such a feeling of disenfranchisement, that to take part in local democracy that's really deliberative and think this is what it should be like, get involved and make a difference." Test Valley, participant*

However, cultivating feelings about the ability to influence decisions in the local area is also linked to the local authority's actions outside of the Citizens' Assembly experience. Overall, 65% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *"I think there will be improvements as a result of this Citizens' Assembly."* For many participants, there was cautious optimism – with the main concerns linking to the likelihood that the recommendations would be taken on board, alongside reservations about the level of buy-in from senior decision-makers.

> *"If nothing else, it gives a bit of inspiration, life, hope. I think people being people, 70% [think] 'is it just lip service? How much did it cost? Is it going to happen?'" Assembly participant*

Building on previous work is partially responsible for the development of a mutual relationship between a local authority and citizens during and after an Assembly. Over the past few years, Test Valley have been investing in community building and development. For example, through its community engagement officers, some of whom acted as table facilitators at the Assembly. They felt the success of the Citizens' Assembly was linked to relationships that already existed between the council and residents.

Although participants generally agreed that they would like to be more involved in decision-making, there was also recognition of the work involved, the time and the commitment required by the assembly members. While the payment may not have been a driving motivation for all to attend, nonetheless participants appreciated that their time was valued.

> *"It doesn't sound like a big amount [in time contribution], but when you are working full-time, it suddenly went from: well yeah I could do this and fit the shopping and my parents and everything else around it, to oh God I'm going to be so tired by the end of this month. I have to say, I really was, I was absolutely exhausted by the end of that month." Test Valley, participant*

Key points and learning

It is clear that the experience of the Assemblies were positive for the majority of the participants, and that it engaged them in a range of ways which could have positive, long term impacts. That potential positive impact can be seen in:

- The development of personal skills and knowledge

- An increase in the sense of personal efficacy and social capital

- A growth in respect for and awareness of the local authority's aims and workstreams.

The potential negative impacts, however, are:

- Limited and reduced sense of efficacy and social capital *if* the quality of the Assembly recommendations are disputed or not implemented.

- A weakening of relationships between the local authority and the Assembly participants *if* the output from the Assembly is not implemented or adequately addressed.

Outcomes

This section looks at the outcomes of the Citizens' Assemblies and whether they can be considered a success. Giving the timing of this report in relation to the Assemblies, all of this section is largely tentative.

A success?

Bearing in mind the Innovation in Democracy Programme's overall aims, there are three main ways in which the Programme could be considered a success.

Firstly, the local authority makes a *decision directly as a result of the Assembly*, and it is widely considered to be different or influenced by that Assembly. Secondly, the authority values the process enough to want to *use it again within a separate topic area*. And finally, the programme is deemed positive enough that it encourages other areas to take up the approach, *and grow the usage of Citizens' Assemblies.*

Below, and based on interviews, this section looks at what might be driving this success, what might be an opportunity for local areas to push on with the progress made, and what might be risks to achieving the outcomes.

Drivers for that tentative success

Post-Assembly interviews with councillors and authority staff members indicated that a number of drivers had been set in place that will support longer-term positive outcomes.

Enthusiasm and development of the participating Local Authorities

While the previous section highlights the positive impact of the Citizens' Assemblies on participants, this was, in fact, two-way; interviews with the Council staff members showed that they had developed confidence in the way that deliberative approaches can lead to learning for the authority.

> *"There was one comment in particular that kind of stuck out: 'even if it's a no, please explain why it's a no, rather than just giving us a straight no answer'. So, I think that kind of openness and transparency part teaches the Council a lot of things in general." Local authority interview*

> *"Then I suppose on the third thing is that importance of having that evidence and those experts in play with the Assembly, sort of that blend of things made it work really well. And that felt quite different to things we've done in the past, I think is probably the truth of it. And I think we can see as a result of that where the added value has come from." Local authority interview*

This confidence was supported by recognition from the authorities and elected members that the IiD Citizens' Assemblies had involved people in a 'gold standard' approach to design and implementation. **Interviews with authority staff members indicated that their involvement in the programme had shown them the value of organising an Assembly which adheres to a set of quality standards.**

For authorities that considered themselves to have more experience of participatory democracy, the IiD programme helped to understand deliberative democracy further and locate the particular strength of the Citizens' Assembly approach, as compared with participatory democracy approaches. For authorities with less experience with participatory democracy, involvement with the programme kick-started conversations about opportunities to trial other deliberative and participatory democracy approaches within their organisation.

Trust in the process

Instilling trust in the Citizens' Assembly process is sometimes presented as important to ensure that the participants feel confident and enthusiastic about engaging in extended deliberation, however, it is also crucial to the overall legacy of the Assembly's output. Once the Assembly has disbanded, its recommendations must be of sufficient weight that they can be folded back into representative democracy processes without being lost or diluted.

The authorities and the elected members were all positive about the significance of the Citizens' Assembly recommendations to their ongoing work on the issue, some citing specific actions that had already taken place. The elected members recognised that the recommendations required a thorough response, which demonstrated how they proposed to take the recommendations forward. There was an awareness that while the Assembly may have concluded its deliberation, the Assembly participants would continue to be residents in their community and that they were now likely to be more invested in and engaged with local issues.

"I think that most of my colleagues who have approached it with an open mind or even those who are slightly critical have found it very rewarding to have this level of dedication. The fact that so many of the Citizens' Assembly participants are keen to continue the dialogue, I think is in itself a superb reflection of the value of the process, because, you know, if nothing else, it has generated a pool of active citizens who may get engaged in other ways." Elected Member

Opportunities that have been highlighted that would support it

Post-Assembly interviews showed that there were ways of working, which would help the authorities to make the Citizens' Assemblies successful.

Implementation of some recommendations will require new partnerships and relationships, both internally and externally to be formed. None of the recommendations produced fall solely within the remit of the specific authority team responsible for organising the Assembly,

with some connecting to a neighbouring authority or necessitating engagement with local businesses or the wider local community.

"There will be some things perhaps around sort of licencing and street management around more of the kind of outdoor festivals and use of outdoor spaces, so kind of community events which again, can be partially facilitated through the council, through different departments." Local authority

The authorities were enthusiastic about the new links forged through the formation of the Assembly advisory groups and selection of external speakers; **building on these connections in their locality and taking a collaborative approach is likely to increase the chances that the Citizens' Assemblies will be successful.**

Each of the Citizens' Assemblies produced some outcomes that were unexpected for the authority. This might be the priority level given to a particular slant on an issue, or preferences collectively given which directly contradict the results of previous consultations.

"No set expectation of what they would come up with, but what they came up is different to other public engagement we have done, surveys etc. Interesting but a challenge in terms of responding. If we choose to say yes to the things that they propose we'll need to explain why that we are approving things that others have said no to." Local authority

Acknowledging these unexpected outcomes and being open about approaches to moving forward maintains the Citizens' Assembly ethos of transparency. **This links directly to the importance of continuing and communicating the overall narrative with respect to the topic, both for the Assembly participants to see that action is taking place, and to keep it at the forefront of the agenda for elected members.**

Risks to that success being achieved

Many of the Assembly participants were clear in their comments that the success of the Citizens' Assemblies would be judged by the action of the authority with respect to the recommendations. **As the Assembly topics link to longer-term plans, some extending into the next decade, this presents a challenge for how the authorities demonstrate that the recommendations are being implemented**. There is a risk that while authorities may be busy behind the scenes, if this is not communicated externally, this will not be visible to the assembly participants. This will lead to disillusionment with the process and undo the trust that the participants placed in the Councils.

"Want to know who brings the Council in to make sure something does happen. Worried something won't happen. Has been nothing in the papers." Assembly participant

In addition, the authorities noted that it was sometimes difficult to communicate the atmosphere, the level of energy and enthusiasm, that made up the experience of the Citizens' Assembly.

"We did record that we would look back over time and remind ourselves of the words that were used then and of see the people passionately reporting on it, because I think that that can get lost." Local authority

Local authorities should think carefully about what channels or ways will enable them to continue engaging with Assembly participants (those that wish to) on the implementation or scrutiny of the actions that take place in relation to the recommendations. At a minimum, careful communications will be key to **maintaining the momentum and the spirit of the Citizens' Assemblies** – this could be done through anniversary celebration events or newsletters. Connecting elected members to the dynamism of the assemblies will help to ensure that the Assembly output has a quality that is distinct from other forms of evidence.

Key points and learning

Although it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of the Citizens' Assemblies in each place, several drivers were identified that support the likelihood of overall success:

- The drive, motivation and upskilling of the local authority staff members involved, supported by new networks of contacts.

- The fact that Citizens' Assemblies have been recognised as a genuine, high-quality process by participants and decision-makers.

Local authority consideration of the recommendations has shown that further adaptation and new ways of working are required to render them a success in the eyes of the Assembly participants.

Continuing the narrative with regards to the Citizens' Assembly outcomes and future decisions is important to maintaining the trust that participants have placed in the process. This is crucial for upholding the deliberative value of the Assemblies, as a decision-making channel which supports and enhances representative democracy.

Conclusions

The IiDP Citizens' Assemblies were participative and deliberative

It was notable that despite differences in topic and local context, overall there was marginal difference between the three Assembly sites regarding the participants' feedback on the quality of event facilitation, the independence of the process and the sense of community representation. Participants felt assured of the events' authority in these aspects, which in turn enabled high-quality engagement. On the final day of the Assemblies, 86% of participants rated the second weekend's event as 5 or 6 on a 6-point scale (with 6 being the highest). For the first weekend, it was the same figure – 86%.

The evaluation data shows that it takes time for the Assembly as a whole to move from the learning and deliberation phase to a decision-making phase. Table facilitators needed to learn the group dynamics of their tables and participants needed to learn not only about the topic but also the format of the event, and the boundaries of their new role. It was in the second weekend, following a break that enabled further reflection, that participants began to form the opinions that would guide them through the final voting process.

There is no exact science to engineer the perfect split between participative engagement and deliberation – the challenge with all three Citizens' Assemblies was managing this balance - being responsive to the needs of the Assembly without underestimating the time required to absorb and make sense of the material. Participants endorsed the credibility of the deliberative phase, with 84% (the overall average across the three Assemblies) stating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the recommendations that were put forward to their Council.

The Assembly question was crucial

A similar tension between wide-ranging exploration and decision-making was seen with the treatment of the topics, the subjects of the Assemblies. In broad terms, the three topics were seen by the majority of participants as important to their local areas and sufficiently complex to merit extended consideration. The framing of the topic, through the Assembly question, steered the content and complexity that ultimately characterised each Citizens' Assembly: either around creating a shared vision (Dudley and Test Valley), or debating potential measures (Greater Cambridge Partnership). In terms of the spectrum between participative and deliberative democracy approaches, it was easier to see how recommendations that include choices on specific measures lends itself more easily to integration with future local government decision-making.

However, the evaluation showed that it is not just the topic which should resonate with the participants, but also the focus of the Assembly through the question. Here, local context in relation to the topic is key – an Assembly focused on measures could be counterproductive without some degree of co-productive groundwork on the issue, jointly undertaken with local residents and groups prior to the Assembly, and effectively communicated to the wider community.

Longer lead-in times will strengthen the Assembly outcomes

The Assemblies will have a wider reach, and potentially greater impact, with a longer-lead in time. All three authorities acknowledged the need for a longer lead-in time to prepare and organise the Citizens' Assembly, in order to make the event *happen*. A longer lead-in time is also required to enable the wider communication regarding the overall narrative of the Citizens' Assembly, including the positioning of the topic and question to overarching strategic aims, in order to help the event *land* with local residents and the wider community. Situating the Assembly within a longer-term narrative is likely to improve the wider engagement with the event itself and reduce any risk that the deliberative, decision-making element of the Assembly is downplayed.

The Assemblies had positive impacts for those involved

In particular, participation in the Citizens' Assemblies had a positive effect on the relationships between the local authorities and the Assembly participants. For participants, the experience provided them with greater awareness of their Council's aims and work, and there were early signs that participation had increased their sense of personal efficacy and social capital. It had significant impact on their stated desire to get more involved in other aspects of local decision making The training and support provided by the external contractors meant that the Council teams have developed their knowledge, skills and confidence in facilitation and deliberative democracy approaches – although this was limited to several key staff members within a team, the authorities received external expressions of interest in learning from their experience, in order to host a Citizens' Assembly elsewhere.

The process does not end with the completion of the Citizens' Assembly

Now that the assembly recommendations have been produced, the overall success of the Citizens' Assemblies for participants and local authorities will be judged by the degree to which those recommendations are implemented. The joining up of deliberative democracy with representative democracy requires elected members to recognise that the Assembly's output represents evidence that must be acted upon. It is unclear at this stage whether Citizens' Assembly outputs will generate consensus or bridge divisions along party or geographic lines.

While key elected members or decision-makers approved the local authority participation in the process, this approval was not necessarily shared by the majority of the areas' elected representatives (as is perhaps to be expected for a pilot).

There are some indications that outputs have been used to support further consultation (inclusion in Test Valley's Romsey Future Masterplan consultation, and suggestions that a subsequent consultation in Cambridge ran more smoothly because the Assembly's work had been publicised).

Recommendations

Context really does matter. As a result, our recommendations for local authorities are:

● **Do a self-assessment on your organisation's experience with participatory approaches.** A Citizens' Assembly is likely to be more effective, as well as easier to implement if there are Council colleagues that can support or help champion the approach internally. A similar exercise should be undertaken with elected members – a briefing activity may be helpful to gauge levels of awareness and enthusiasm for the Assembly concept and its key features.

● **Do not underestimate the time involved in selecting the topic and refining the question.** As shown in this evaluation, the focus of the Assembly question shapes the overall content, nature of the deliberation and the recommendations that are ultimately produced. Are you looking to explore an issue or are you (and community stakeholders) ready to test some real options?

● **Invest in the Assembly to ensure the credibility of the recommendations for decision-makers.** This study showed that the quality of the organisation and facilitation provided the Assembly with an authority that was respected by both participants and elected members. While some compromises may be possible, cutting corners too far on any of these aspects may undermine the overall credibility of the results, which will, in turn, lessen the likelihood of achieving the aims of the Assembly.

● **Carefully craft and establish the narrative that wraps around the Citizens' Assembly.** In the IiDP Citizens' Assemblies, the short lead in time was a weakness – affecting the ability of the authorities to clearly and prominently position the Citizens' Assembly in the context of their overall strategic aims.

● **Do not expect that a Citizens' Assembly alone will significantly affect relationships with the wider community**. Make use of the opportunities presented by the process to expand the reach and build on the positive impact of the Assemblies. Ensuring the visibility of the Assemblies and their output is a key part of this, but also consider issues like how to involve residents who were interested in taking part but were not selected or explore alternative ways to engage stakeholders that are likely to support this work. This could include facilitating Assembly activities such as a 'walk and talk tour' or 'lived experience zones'.

● **Choose the lead team (that will take responsibility for designing and holding the event) carefully.** Organising an Assembly is time-intensive and for the best results, requires a set of core skills. The staff that are involved in running a Citizens' Assembly will see a significant shift in the nature of their day-to-day work. Recommendations from a Citizens' Assembly are also highly likely to have implications for the work of other teams and functions within the authority. It is important to consider the connections between the lead team and other internal stakeholders?

About Renaisi

Renaisi is a social enterprise that has been helping people and places to thrive for more than 20 years.

Working from our London offices (in Hackney, Haggerston and Lambeth), Renaisi does three complementary things:

1. Help people to learn, work, and connect with their communities.
2. Work with institutions across the UK to understand and increase their impact.
3. Generate learning from across our work to explore the question: what does it take to improve a place?

By working with all the people and organisations that can turn a place into a thriving community, Renaisi has a unique insight and ability to spark change.

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