

Democracy Commission

Thursday 23 September 2010
6.00 pm
Southwark Town Hall

Membership

Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Columba Blango
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Cleo Soanes

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DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Democracy Commission held on Tuesday 7 September 2010 at 6.00 pm at Southwark Town Hall

PRESENT: Councillor Abdul Mohamed (Chair)
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Michael Mitchell
Councillor Helen Morrissey
Councillor Cleo Soanes

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENT: James Hatts
Chris Hayden
Liliana Dmitrovic
Ari Henry
Max Holloway
Don Philips
Dorren Philips
Catherine

OFFICER SUPPORT: Stephen Douglas - Head of Community Engagement
Julie Timbrell – Project Manager
Deborah Collins – Monitoring officer
Katherine Pitt- Voluntary Sector Commissioning Officer
Shelly Burke – Head of Scrutiny

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

2. APOLOGIES

Cllr Glover and Cllr Blango gave appologies.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 5 AUGUST 2010

There was one correction to minutes; Ari Henry asked for his view, stated at the last meeting, that council officers are 'prevaricating and obfuscating' be recorded. This was agreed.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None

5. HEARING EVIDENCE

SE1 Forum – James Hatts

James submitted written evidence, which was circulated. He then made a few follow up comments. Firstly he noted that the system the Council uses to generate minutes and agendas for Committee meetings can be set up to give members of the public alerts when something new is published. However the system does not work, although it has the ability to. James requested this was fixed. James also requested that people be let into the gallery ten minutes earlier and that sufficient papers be provided. He also asked that the papers circulated in the gallery be available on the website, as presently there can be a delay of several days before these are published.

Southwark TV – Chris Hayden

Since 2004 Southwark TV has been supported by the Community TV Trust.

Southwark TV specialises in media production and training.

In the early days, pensioners made an outstanding contribution. 2 years later for the local elections the SE5 Forum put in 11 short videos (one for each candidate, apart from 1 who was unavailable).

Chris Hayden urged the Commission to consider the use of media / multimedia. There is an opportunity to reach many people, and inspire them to be active, through medium scale technology, and also through the use of Twitter and audio podcasts.

Max Holloway commented that a very important point was made at the conference, that technology can alienate some people. Physical contact is needed as well.

Cllr Al-Samerai pointed out that Council Assembly meetings in Islington and Camden are webcast. Chris Hayden responded that it is possible to film Council Assembly and show it on the Southwark TV website, but it would need funding. It could also be broadcast on the radio station.

Michael Cleere pointed out the radio is a useful medium because there are many people who have no internet access but most people have a radio.

Cllr Al-Samerai said it was important to get information out to groups – then they can decide how to broadcast it. The council needs the audio and video infrastructure. Also there needs to be the right culture to encourage it, and also provision within the council

constitution to be able to make use of recorded material – as the London Assembly does at City Hall, where there are cameras permanently fixed in the chamber, and material is made available to radio and TV stations.

Chris Hayden pointed out that filming an open meeting is hard, because whoever is filming doesn't know who is going to speak next. Audio would be better; or having a each political group give a 'digested' version of the meeting on camera afterwards.

Ari Henry pointed out that councillors already have microphones in front of them in Assembly meetings. He added that anyone can publish on the Peoples' Republic of Southwark website, and that two officers from the Burgess Park Revitalisation Project regularly put information on there. Twitter is useful – as long as it doesn't spot the person who is twittering from actually listening to the meeting.

Cllr Soanes pointed out that material needs to be safeguarded from misuse and being taken out of context. James? Responded that this is a risk that has to be absorbed.

Ari Henry pointed out that basic training is needed for many local people in using technology. He added that a signing person at each meeting, and also 'speaking' webpages would help people with disabilities. He said that he receives email bulletins from Southwark Council that have large headings but very little content – and it's not possible to unsubscribe from them.

The Conservative group submitted evidence and this was circulated.

6. REVIEWING EVIDENCE GATHERED SO FAR

Evidence collected

Cllr Mohamed and Julie Timbrell summarised the amount of information collected since the Democracy Commission began its work on 12th July: around 200 questionnaires completed, 5 focus groups, 3 Committee meetings, oral testimonies, and the conference on 4th September.

The task was now to come up with a set of recommendations before the Council Assembly meeting on 20th October.

Focus Groups

Julie Timbrell said that some of the transcripts of the focus groups had been circulated to members of the Committee. Once participants had approved the text for the members focus groups they would go on the website within a week, with the rest to follow.

Vox pops

Michael Cleere introduced his sound sample. He said that 88 vox pops with local residents had been recorded, out of a target of 100. They had been recorded in shopping centres and libraries around the borough. Some clear themes have emerged:

- A lack of awareness of how democracy operates
- Lack of awareness of Council Assembly and how it operates
- Lack of awareness of what a councillor is
- A willingness on the part of the local community to get involved.

One resident who particularly stood out was a young man called Jason. There was a lot of passion in what he had to say.

Ari Henry said that many people experience alienation from the council. Officers don't answer emails or the phone, or if they do, nothing is done in response. People contact the council to try and find information but give up. He had still not had a response to a complaint he had made regarding a hustings meeting the People's Republic of Southwark had held in April.

Cllr Mohamed responded that the Democracy Commission is looking at how to improve the system, so that people are listened to. He was advised to detail his complaints one by one so they can be addressed.

Ari Henry said he had contact all the councillors on the Commission with a query about SurveyMonkey. None had replied. Cllr Mohamed responded that Julie Timbrell was sorting it out.

Questionnaires

Julie Timbrell said that approximately 200 questionnaires had been completed. The last time she checked, 111 had been completed on-line. Cllr Al-Samerai clarified that all the people invited to the conference had been sent a questionnaire, but it was not included with the second letter about the change of time. One members said he said he had counted 70 attendees atone point . Another member commented that some people came and left and it was probably over a 100 throughout the day. Cllr Soanes said she thought the attendance was healthy, with people from the length and breadth of the borough.

Max Holloway commented that the questionnaire had not appeared on the council's Facebook and Twitter pages. Julie Timbrell responded that Communications were putting it on. Max replied that he had seen some activity on Social network platforms, but not since early August.

Cllr Al-Samerai requested a breakdown of the costs incurred by the Commission so far.

Julie Timbrell presented interim findings of the questionnaire, including the free text responses. She then described the breakdown of the respondents by gender, disability, age, and ethnicity. Representation was roughly equal among women and men, and high among people with a disability, but there was concern at the very high proportion of white people responding.

Cllr Al-Samerai said the issue of BME involvement had been raised at the conference. The Commission should work with voluntary organisations to reach BME communities.

Cllr Morrissey said the diversity of people at the conference was encouraging – apart from the lack of young people.

Michael Cleere said that 42 out of the 88 vox pop participants were BME.

Cllr Al-Samerai said that more work needed to be done on engaging young people. She explained that the Commission had already taken some steps to engage young people. She also described a youth-themed meeting of Bermondsey Community Council which involved outreach in advance to youth clubs; special workshops with young and older people; and voting buttons. Suggestions made by young people at the meeting had been passed to the Cabinet. She stressed that a meeting needs to have clear outcomes or people will become disengaged. She also pointed out that the Southwark Youth Council has control over its own budgets.

Don Phillips asked about the outcomes of the conference workshops. Julie Timbrell responded that these would be posted on-line.

Cafe Conversations

Julie Timbrell talked through the key points raised in the conference Cafe Conversations. These had also been circulated in the papers for the meeting.

Don Phillips asked about the outcomes of the conference workshops. Julie Timbrell responded that these would be posted on-line.

'Plain English' paper

Ian Mark described the paper on Council Assembly which had been tabled. Basically it was a simplified version of an earlier paper which had been circulated.

Ian explained that the Cabinet can delegate plans and strategies to Council Assembly but the Assembly cannot discharge executive functions. It can also receive policy framework documents to consider. He said that there was some possibility of reviewing the regulatory functions that Council Assembly is responsible for – eg the responsibilities it delegates to the Planning Committee, but this would alter the responsibilities of those committees rather than Council Assembly.

Deborah Collins stressed the importance of making it very clear what is being decided at a Council Assembly meeting, especially as debates become more free-flowing, involving more people, with the use of social media etc. There is a question to be resolved of how the results should be recorded. The Commission may wish to direct officers to explore different routes to decision-making.

Cllr Mohamed said mentioned of adopting the parliamentary style of Green and White Paper processes. Deborah Collins responded that the Green and White Paper processes would not fit in with Council Assembly processes as it stands at the moment. Council Assembly has traditionally been used to take decisions, Green papers are early consultation papers that tend to ask questions.

Cllr Al-Samerai clarified that also Council Assembly cannot discharge executive functions, Community Councils can. Any Cabinet function can be delegated to a Community Council. She stressed the importance of getting decision-making as close to the 'grassroots' as possible.

Stephen Douglass said he was going to arrange to have a paper drafted for the next

meeting of the Democracy Commission to comment on the implications of the recent Localism Bill.

7. SCOPING OUT THE REPORT

Cllr Al-Samerai asked about the process of agreeing recommendations from the Commission. Julie Timbrell suggested using the Scrutiny process which involves officers putting back information together. Recommendations can then be devised in a number of different ways, , such as having an informal meeting with councillors , or putting together a number of very draft recommendations or leaving it for Councillors to agree the recommendations once they have reviewed the background information.

Stephen Douglass pointed out that the summary of emerging issues has some broad headings which can be added to.

The councillors thanked Julie Timbrell for putting in a huge amount of work in a short space of time.

It was agreed that information and feedback on other structures e.g. Community Councils needs to be retained, for future use.

Cllr Mitchell proposed that the 'Emerging Issues' document should be used as a basis for the draft recommendations. Broad headings should include:

- The need to address the powers of the Council Assembly, in order to improve democracy in the borough
- We should have full democracy in Council Assembly; how does this work (e.g. petitions)?
- The role of the councillor; e.g. in asking questions and putting forward motions
- Micro-details relating to meeting arrangements
- Location of meetings
- Communication – how do we 'broadcast' the meetings?

Cllr Al-Samerai added that issues should be covered including

- Having meeting papers in the public gallery
- Ticketing
- Having a constitutional officer present to explain to the public what is going on
- Having the 'raw material' of the meeting available in print or webcast so that other organisations can use it
- Links to Scrutiny – Scrutiny reports presented to Council Assembly
- Community Council decisions reported to Council Assembly
- The Localism Bill – exploring the possibility of the council taking more power from central government

Cllr Morrissey proposed that an Equality Impact Assessment of current arrangements should be carried out. Deborah Collins said that the council was required to make reasonable adjustments to the Council Chamber for people with disabilities, but that we have to take the building as we find it and also take resources into consideration. She said it would not be possible to commit resources to an Equalities Impact Assessment in the next few weeks. Stephen Douglass pointed out a lot of the information that would be collected in an Equalities Impact Assessment was already there in the evidence that had been gathered – for example, in the Cafe Conversations on the involvement of BME groups and people with disabilities. Cllr Morrissey said she would send Julie Timbrell her thoughts on the subject.

A local resident present asked a question about the type of decisions that residents can influence. Julie Timbrell explained that very local decisions, for example on the use of a building, would go to Community Council, whereas a decision affecting a wider area, such as about a regeneration scheme, would go to Council Assembly.

Stephen Douglass said that officers would circulate an early draft set of recommendations in advance of the next meeting on 23rd September. Deborah Collins said that she would need to check that anything suggested by the Commission was lawful, and the Director of Finance would need to check that recommendations were affordable.

CHAIR:

DATED:

Submission to the Democracy Commission investigation on the future of Council Assembly

James Hatts, London SE1 community website

6 September 2010

Introduction

I edit the London SE1 community website - www.London-SE1.co.uk - which reports on local news and politics in the north west corner of the borough. Our coverage area can be approximately mapped on to six local government wards: five of them in Southwark and one in Lambeth.

I am a member of the National Union of Journalists.

Our news coverage is non-partisan. One of our driving motivations is a belief that local politics matters and that it is important that people should have access to high-quality independent information about political and civic activities.

The website was established in 1998. For the past five years we have regularly reported on Council Assembly meetings when something relevant to our part of the borough has been on the agenda, such as the Elephant & Castle regeneration.

Members' question time can also be a significant source of local stories.

This submission is a mixture of professional and personal observations. As well as writing about the activities of Southwark Council, I am also a lifelong resident of the borough.

Debates and motions

Too often the Assembly wastes valuable time debating motions which only have a flimsy connection to the powers and responsibilities of the council.

Both of the main political groups are guilty of tabling motions which are motivated entirely by party-political point-scoring.

Sometimes I have seen the debate on such motions prolonged to such an extent that debates on more pertinent local subjects have been shelved due to a lack of time.

I strongly support the suggestions made by John Cade at the recent Democracy Commission conference that Council Assembly should debate the findings of scrutiny reports and also have a chance to debate issues and policies at an early stage of development.

The Chamber

As someone who has spent many hours in the public gallery, I agree with the view of the focus group that the gallery is not fit for purpose. The sight lines are poor and it can be hard to see what is happening on the floor of the chamber, especially when backbenchers are speaking.

Perhaps it would be worth considering the installation of screens visible from the public gallery which could show a feed from a camera positioned near the Mayor's seat facing towards the members' seats.

The sound system, however, is good. If the venue for council assembly is to be varied, I fear that it would be difficult to ensure that the AV arrangements were of consistently high quality.

Availability of printed materials

I have often found that there is an insufficient supply of papers for the meeting in the public gallery. This is especially important in the case of papers tabled on the night of the Assembly, such as the written answers to members' questions, as they are not available for reading on the web in advance of the meeting.

Without access to the yellow answer booklet, it is hard to follow the supplemental questions.

As a journalist I have sometimes been able to scrounge a copy of the written answers from one of the political groups, but if this is not possible on the night, the answers are often not added to the website for many days after the meeting, and getting hold of the answers booklet via the press office can also take a long time.

Resolutions

If you are sitting in the public gallery it is nearly impossible to know what the final text of a motion passed by the Assembly is, once the various amendments have been accepted or rejected.

Please could the commission give some consideration as to how this could be communicated in a timely and clear fashion.

As a journalist it is easier to focus on the colourful interventions in the debate rather than reporting on the final decision or resolution, partly because it is a mind-bending business to discern what the final view of the Assembly might be.

Communications

For a short while under the previous administration, regular press briefings were held prior to Council Assembly (and executive) meetings at which executive members and senior officers would set out the background to the decisions and issues coming up.

Consideration should be given to reinstating this practice, although clearly there are sensitivities about the risk of the cabinet exercising media management on the reporting of an all-party council meeting.

Webcasting

I strongly welcome the comments recently made by the leader of the council in support of the idea of webcasting meetings of the council.

Even if the audience for webcasts is not large, I think it sends an important message about transparency that the meetings are in some way accessible beyond the confines of those who choose to (or are able to) venture to Camberwell to sit in a gloomy public gallery.

I believe that Council Assembly meetings are already recorded to aid the preparation of the minutes of the meeting.

At a minimum, the council should publish these recordings as a podcast.

This would have a negligible cost to the council and would dramatically improve the accessibility of Council Assembly meetings.

When parliamentary and London Assembly proceedings are available online both live and on-demand, it is incongruous that Council Assembly debates should only be accessible to those physically present in the building at the time of the meeting.

Broadcast and publication of audio by third parties

The council should also consider relaxing the rules on the recording and broadcast of Council Assembly meetings by media organisations.

Clearly there is a risk that material will be used out of context or misrepresented, but if the words of other elected politicians in other debating chambers are freely available for publication and broadcast, the justification for restricting coverage at council level seems to be non-existent.

It would be good, if reporting on a Council Assembly debate on, for example, the Elephant & Castle regeneration, we could embed some audio clips from that debate on the same web page as our written report.

Some people may prefer to consume the material in this way rather than read a lengthy piece of text.

I will not pretend that the audience for such material would be large, but in the interests of transparency and accountability the council should at least consider redrawing its constitutional arrangements so that local media - professional and non--professional - can use the latest multimedia technology to creatively cover the meetings of the Assembly

without having to seek special permission in advance and jump through lots of bureaucratic hoops.

Audio transmission to the town hall foyer

There have been occasions when I have arrived at the town hall too late to secure a seat in the public gallery. Most recently this was at the mayor-making meeting, but it has also happened at ordinary Assembly meetings when a particularly contentious issue has been on the agenda.

On the most recent occasion there were a number of friends of the incoming mayor, and other members of the public, who were kept in the foyer for some time until space became available in the gallery. This was very frustrating for those who had made a special journey to be there.

The council should consider the costs and benefits of transmitting the audio from the chamber to the foyer. At least those of us waiting in the foyer, and the staff controlling the queue, would be able to tell what stage the proceedings had reached.

Social media

I know that the commission is considering how social media might be used in relation to Council Assembly.

I would like to draw to the attention of the commission the Twitter account I set up in July 2009: twitter.com/councilassembly

I have used this for ad hoc tweets from the public gallery at some, but not all, council assembly meetings.

The account has not been updated or managed on a consistent basis - it is as much a way of passing the time sitting in the gallery waiting for whichever agenda item I am intending to write about for the SE1 website as anything else.

So far the account has a limited following - 99 people at the time of writing, including quite a few councillors and council officers.

However, a number of people active in Southwark life have expressed appreciation for the Twitter coverage as it has enabled them to keep tabs on a meeting that they were unable to attend in person.

There is a burgeoning informal network of hyperlocal website publishers and bloggers in South London.

If the council is serious about a culture change, perhaps it could consider making wireless internet access available in the gallery to encourage 'live' reporting on Council Assembly meetings by local journalists, bloggers and 'citizen journalists'?

The council may struggle with the idea of making life easier for its critics, but the benefits of than by ensuring that the council's proceedings can easily be subjected to informal scrutiny.

Gimmicks

Finally, I would urge the commission to resist the temptation to recommend changes to Council Assembly for the sake of change. It is clear that there are improvements that can be made, not least in how the meetings of the assembly are communicated - in advance, during the meeting and afterwards - but ultimately it is the place where our elected representatives come together and their representative role should not be compromised by creating an illusion of consultation or involvement.

James Hatts

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DEMOCRACY COMMISSION
SUBMISSION BY CLLR LEWIS ROBINSON
CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER

Council Assembly

The decline in the importance of Council Assembly can be traced back to the decision by the last Government to move the vast majority of decision making powers in local government to a “Cabinet” model.

So when the question is asked, how can we re-engage residents in the functions of Council Assembly, we have to consider that if it does not have the power to change a decision or even debate it, then people are hardly going to waste their time attending the meeting.

The most important recommendation that the Democracy Commission could make is to restore some decision making powers to Council Assembly, or if the Council is restricted from doing so under current legislation, the Cabinet could take major reports to Council Assembly for debate before taking a decision.

When Council Assembly does have to take a decision, such as with the debate on the Aylesbury Estate regeneration proposals earlier this year, members of the public will attend, as they know the decision does have a real impact on their lives. To sum it up, if Council Assembly is used as no more than a “*talking shop*” after the decisions have all been made, then the residents of Southwark will see it as such, and we will all have failed them.

Venue

There has been some discussion of “alternative” venues for Council Assembly. I suspect that the practicalities of this will prove difficult, disabled access, cost etc. The current venue is located in the heart of the Borough with good transport links, and there is an argument that the “*Town Hall*” has a civic identity which would be lost if we were just reduced to renting floor space at other venues, in other words a “homeless council”.

Format of the meetings

Public Question Time, Deputations & Petitions

Both of these should be made more interactive. I welcome the return of deputations, but the ability of members of the public to ask questions of the Cabinet is restricted, and only a councillor can present a petition. The responsible cabinet member should be required to report back on the actions taken following a petition or deputation

The threshold for petitions to Council Assembly is too high and should be reduced.

Members Questions

Member's questions is one of the few opportunities for holding Cabinet Members to account in a public meeting. It should be retained.

Council Reports and Debates

Often Council Reports and Debates seem arcane and remote to members of the public. I would suggest that one way to re-engage members of the public would be for the Leader of the Council to be required to present a full annual report on his decisions for debate as a "State of the Borough" debate.

Other issues

I would welcome webcasting and an annual meeting with the Southwark Youth Council to discuss issues of importance to young people. I am happy to attend a future meeting of the Democracy Commission to discuss their work in further detail.

Council Assembly powers and opportunities for change

The Local Government Act 2000 ('the Act') radically changed the nature of government by introducing the system of a powerful Cabinet with a statutory remit that dictates it takes the majority of decisions as set out in the Act. Further amendments by the Local Government and Involvement in Health Act 2007 extended these powers; it is now the Leader who appoints the Cabinet and decides who makes executive decisions.

The Act abolished the old committee system. This used to have elected members of both the ruling party (or coalition) and opposition parties and would report to the full Assembly where all members sat.

The Act abolished the committee system and introduced a Cabinet of up to ten members and Overview and Scrutiny. Scrutiny committees involve backbench members from all parties and their role is to hold the Cabinet to account and contribute to policy making. (Southwark has a 'mother' overview and scrutiny committee and 5 sub committees covering set policy areas). Scrutiny reports to Cabinet which has to consider its recommendation, but does not have to adopt them.

Under the old system the full Council was previously the ultimate decision maker, but this is no longer the case. The Assembly decision making powers given to it under the Act are now, principally, to set the policy framework within which the Leader & Cabinet act and agree the budget. The Assembly also retains overall responsibility for non-executive matters (essentially regulatory activities covered by Committees such as the Planning Committee, Licensing Committee and Standards Committee), to appoint members to committees, elect the Mayor, ratify the appointment of the Leader and Cabinet, and agree changes to the constitution.

However the Act does allow Cabinet to delegate additional roles and functions to other bodies, including Council Assembly. For Council Assembly this is restricted to such matters as plans and strategies which could be added to the policy framework and therefore become its responsibility. A list of these is listed below. When considering this the Commission would need to consider good governance including how to best strike a balance between the need for effective and timely decision making and the benefits of wider consultation by both more members and the wider public.

These are some of the principles that underpin Cabinet decision making:

- Efficiency – in that a small cabinet can act quickly;
- Transparency – the Cabinet arrangements enable the public to ascertain from the outset who is making decisions; and
- Accountability – the Cabinet can be judged by whether it has implemented the policies on which it was elected.

When considering if it would like to recommend more powers are delegated to Assembly the Commission would need to consider the need for good governance including how to best strike a balance between the need for effective and timely

decision making and the benefits of wider consultation by both more members and the wider public.

The Commission could consider recommending Assembly debate and make recommendations that would ultimately go to the Cabinet (or in some cases the Leader) for decision or it could recommend the assembly both debate and make decisions. It is for the Cabinet ultimately to decide if this is the right course of action.

The Act also gave provision for decisions to be devolved down to a local level and Southwark introduced local based decision making bodies; which evolved into the Community Councils. The Commission could recommend that more executive functions are delegated down to Community Councils, while taking into account the need for good governance.

This is what Council Assembly has to do by law

- *Appoints Mayor
- *Receives the Leader's report on the delegation of executive functions at the annual meeting
- *Establishes committees and appoints chairs and vice chairs, except chair of standards committee
- *Agrees constitution
- *Agrees the budget and sets the council tax
- *Agrees the Policy Framework plans and strategies, most of these are statutory requirements (see below for details)
- *Agrees licensing and gambling statements of policy
- *Confirms appointment of head of paid service i.e. chief executive
- *Makes, amends, revokes, re-enacts or adopts by-laws or opposes making local legislation
- *Adopt the local authority's code of conduct
- *Agrees members' allowances scheme
- *Confers title of Honorary Alderman or Freedom of the Borough
- *Agree any application to the Secretary of State in respect of any housing land transfer
- *To consider petitions submitted under the Council's petition scheme
- *Taking decisions in respect of functions which are the responsibility of the cabinet which are not in accordance with the policy framework or budget agreed by council assembly
- Taking decisions in respect of functions which are not the responsibility of the executive and which have not been delegated by council assembly to committees, community councils, sub-committees or officers

These are the policy framework documents it has to receive:

The 'policy framework' means the following plans and strategies

- Children and young persons plan
- Corporate plan

- Development plan documents (which form part of the development plan framework)
- Policy on community councils
- Sustainable community strategy
- Treasury management strategy (including prudential borrowing arrangements)
- Youth justice plan

Council Assembly is also responsible for agreeing the following policies:

- Licensing statement
- Gambling statement

These are plans and strategies the cabinet has responsibility for and it could ask the Assembly to decide or debate

This list includes some of the plans and strategies that are currently the responsibility of the cabinet. These include:

- Asset management plan
- Employment strategy
- Enterprise strategy
- Food law enforcement plan
- Green travel plan
- Housing investment programme
- Housing renewal policy
- Housing strategy
- Local area agreement (LAA)
- Medium term resources strategy (including the housing revenue account)
- Renewal areas strategies
- Road safety plan
- Schemes for financing schools
- Special education needs action plan
- Statement of community involvement
- Supplementary planning documents
- Waste strategy
- Youth strategy.

Community Councils

The Act enabled functions to be discharged by an area committee. An area committee is defined as a 'committee or sub-committee of the authority'. Area committees have to meet certain conditions

In Southwark 'area committees' are known as community councils. At present decisions on the following have been delegated in part to community councils;

- local planning applications,
- the cleaner, greener, safer capital programme,
- the community fund programme,
- traffic management,

- appointment of local education authority governors to local nursery and primary schools
- and community project banks.

Community councils therefore take decisions which affect a relatively small area and the commission could recommend the Cabinet delegate more executive functions to Community Councils.



7th September 2010

The purpose of this report is to give expert witness evidence to inform the Democracy Commission.

The background of the witness.

Aisha Bryant MA

Active Citizens Hub Manager, Volunteer Centre, Southwark.

Community Development practitioner for 30 years.

Former senior local government officer -Head of Community Development, Rochester City Council, Medway Unitary Authority.

European Social Fund Integgra project leader; Action research in France, Corsica, Ireland, Italy, Spain and UK. Investigating local government reform on social inclusion.

Visiting Lecturer at Westminster University on Community Development Masters course and International Community Development Masters Course.

Published author: Community Development: Local and Global Challenges. ISBN: 978-3-906413-55-6

Include Us In: Participatory measures and mainstream governance.

The Context.

Communities and Local Government, which sets policy on local government, housing, urban regeneration and planning is committed to giving,

'local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives' (Stronger Prosperous Communities', Oct. 2006.

National Indicators reinforce this;

- N14 Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.
- PSA21; Building cohesive, empowered and active communities.
- N13 Promoting Democracy

The Democracy Commission

Democracy is a multifaceted word as it covers so many voting systems and political philosophies. Involvement Commission would better describe what the Commission is looking into.

The fact that there are no terms of reference may be viewed as positive as it allows a more flexible approach to what is tackled next following the initial focus on the Council Assembly.

The time limit of the exercise does not enthrone optimism, as community development is a long term process and cannot be a quick fix. Other local authorities have approached the Duty to Involve by way of doing reviews to study involvement/engagement.

Ref: Research into the determinants of National Indicator 4(N14) Scores-relating to the Place Survey question 'Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?'

This commission is basically about change Management and research shows that 70% of all change management fails unless you involve ALL the people in the process.

Key Issues:

When we look at the question of promoting local democracy and increasing involvement in local decision making by individuals and communities we must be realistic and recognise there are significant barriers to being an influential active citizen which are well documented.

REF: Empowering Agencies to engage Communities: Exploring how public agencies can assess and improve their openness and ability to respond to community influence. 2008. National Empowerment Partnership.

The outcomes of the commission will be most successful and positive if the main focus is on the enablers to involvement rather than the barriers.

Conflicting role of the Council

Levels of trust in authorities and public authority figures are generally low, and this judgement encompasses councillors and MP'S, Officers and staff, and consultation processes.

There is a national distrust of institutions that on the one hand have an enforcement role and then try to engage communities and individuals to get involved in their decision making processes.

Communities are encouraged to inform on their neighbours and at the same time encouraged to be more neighbourly.

Community capacity to influence

It is a misnomer, that people decide to become active in their community and then continue on a trajectory path and then become a Councillor for example. It is indeed a pathway and unrealistic to expect someone who has not been active in their community to suddenly be able to sit on a scrutiny planning committee for example and be influential. They would be nothing other than tokenistic and require training and support and opportunities to enable them to gain experience and confidence to become influential.

The UK General Household Study GHS 2000 Research found that few people go straight from a situation of no involvement to one of active engagement within their neighbourhood. Knowingly, or not, most are on a ladder of involvement, with simple acts of good neighbourliness at one end and a regular commitment with a formal or statutory organisation, or a position of community leadership at the other end.

There is a lack of understanding by the general public of how the local authority functions the restrictions and legislative requirements that councillors and officers have to operate within and its relationship to regional and central government. Knowledge is power and in order to redress the imbalance of power in partnerships with the community sector and the local authority, it requires the giving up of some local authority power.

Training.

Individuals require training to enable them to be more effective and influential in local decision making. All the courses that the Active Citizens Hub offers are fully subscribed and if Southwark is to increase its citizens participation in democratic renewal, more training of this nature will be required.

Opportunities need to be created for individuals to shadow and be mentored by councillors, especially young people -or where will the next generation of active citizens come from? It is highly recommended that knowledge of how local democracy works is introduced in future through the PHSE school curriculum and that thought is given to the establishment of a youth parliament.

The Council Assembly

The Council Assembly function is to meet the legal requirement that LA'S make most of their important decisions in public. It is the meeting of all 63 elected councillors and is chaired by the Mayor. However, the major decisions governing the council are taken by the executive cabinet members and the assembly is seen as a rubber stamping exercise. Although debate between political parties takes place it is irrelevant as decisions have already been made. The public cannot interact in the debate or ask questions. They can deliver petitions or deputations which have been agreed to prior to the meeting.

Whilst the business of the assembly involves the following functions, a major part of the function is approving the policy framework, the budget and the council tax.

- Adopting and changing the constitution
- Approving the; Policy Framework' (see below)
- Appointing the leader and members of the cabinet
- Agreeing and amending the terms of reference for committees, the composition and appointments to committees.
- Appointing representatives to outside bodies.
- Adopting a members allowance scheme]Making, amending, revoking, re-enacting or adopting bye-laws and promoting or opposing the making of local legislation.
- Approving licensing and gambling statements of policy.

Most of the above functions are internal and can be dealt with at the beginning of term.

The 'policy framework 'means the following plans and strategies part of the function, in which therein lays an opportunity for meaningful involvement of citizens.

- Children and Young Persons plan
- Corporate Plan
- Development plan documents (which form part of the local development plan framework.
- Policy on community councils
- Sustainable community Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy(including prudential borrowing arrangements)
- Youth Justice Plan.

In the Democracy Commission workshops on Influence 4th September common themes that emerged were:

- Community Councils policies and procedures need changing with a uniform protocol across all areas.
- Facilitators needed to help people express their views.
- Accountability- midterm appraisal of Councillors.
- There needs to be a mechanism/organisation to co-ordinate the gathering of community issues other than the council.
- The assembly should move around the borough in different locations and at different times, as evening meetings are not accessible to everyone.
- The issues that are gathered and fed up to the council should be addressed at the assembly meeting.
- The thematic groups that are held by CAS are for agencies and not accessible to ordinary citizens.
- There is no way that the community or individuals can challenge council decisions without recourse to legal resources.
- More use of online media.

The public are consistently more interested in the outcomes of their interactions with authorities, and the way that these have left them feeling, than in particular engagement mechanisms. Improving these interactions, feeding back outcomes to the public in appropriate and segmented ways, and linking this contact to ongoing involvement in local decision-making processes will be vital. Feedback is very important to people.

How open to being influenced are the Councillors and Officers of the Council?

It is also a misnomer to expect all councillors to be adept at community engagement attitudes and techniques. Echoes is a diagnostic tool developed by the National Take Part programme that helps local authorities and statutory agencies examine how 'open' they are to being influenced by communities and individuals.

REF: Voice is the tool for community agencies to measure their influence and Echoes is the tool for statutory agencies to examine how open they are to community influence. 2008. LEP. Attached.

It is a common complaint that council officers are perceived as obstructive, refusing to answer questions or giving the wrong information. The Councillors are accused of arrogance and not being accessible, who are only seen profusely at election time.

CONCLUSION

There are many barriers to participation, particularly for deprived communities, and community development has a significant role to play in strengthening community involvement for democratic renewal. Community development has a long history of working at the interface of communities and local and central government. In practice community development workers in many circumstances often act as '**navigator**' to help councils and communities understand each other better.

By investing and supporting community development work, local government can more effectively balance their new duties of community leader and facilitator of community empowerment.

SOUTHWARK DEMOCRACY COMMISSION

ELECTED MEMBERS FOCUS GROUP 1

Southwark Town Hall

2 AUGUST 2010

Transcript and interpretation of key comments

COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD (VW)

At least half the people who came (to the public gallery) for the (July 14) assembly meeting just left. Maybe that's saying a lot about what they thought of the assembly. That they thought, "Stuff this!" and went.

COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON (WN)

Many of us didn't know there was a focus group (of residents) up there.

COUNCILLOR CLAIRE HICKSON (CH)

I think that's quite a good thing though, isn't it. Otherwise we might have behaved differently. We're asking for honest feedback so it's good for them to see what we're like.

VW

There's a very poor understanding out there in the community about the whole process - who councillors are and what we do. So we can look at the assembly but so many people don't have a context to think about it.

WN

It's true. People don't realise what councillors do in the first place. You have simple things that councillors do that you need to address before you can even go into council assembly.

COUNCILLOR ABDUL MOHAMED (AM)

So are we talking about education, being made aware of meetings?

VW

Just awareness. Knowing how it all works. They have no idea that there are members who are accountable in relation to local services.

CH

I think it's one thing educating them but they're only going to get engaged if they see something useful in it for them. I think a big thing about council assembly is - what do councillors think it's for? And if they think it's for a particular thing which is at odds with what we might want to make it for the public, then we need to be aware of that because they're (members) the people speaking. If they're going to get up and use assembly for one thing, which is never going to engage the public, then we might have to give up on council assembly as a central part of engaging the public.

I think you have to find really easy ways to engage people. A lot of it is about accountability. I wonder how much budget information we publish in a way that people can understand. Can people walk into their local school and find out how much funding that school gets, where it comes from, and what is the role of the local council in that?

That's the kind of information they're interested in and then they might turn up at council assembly to shout at us for not doing it well. But they'll only come and do it if they realise that there's something to shout about. Then they'll come and get engaged. I think saying that "we're going to have a meeting and we're going to try and make it more fun" is

AM

Being devil's advocate - the Freedom of Information Act means that they can go through that route (to find out how much money is being spent on their local school).

CH

They shouldn't have to do that. When they're stood outside their school waiting for their kid to come out they should be able to see what the budget for their school is and where it came from.

AM

On a board?

CH

Yes.

VW

You can always have council assembly. It is the final formal ratifying assembly. You could have a very formal meeting which finally agrees all those things that have to be agreed by all members, and another kind of meeting which involves people, to engage people out there about issues that concern them.

CH

And maybe move them from here so that you can actually see us. I don't think in that hall there's any chance of changing it so that people can see us.

AM

There could be a recommendation that the venue is not suitable. That is a valid suggestion. But there are certain things which the council does now and the only way we can change them is if you change the law.

We could look at perhaps concentrating those formal decisions of the council in as few meetings as is possible.

WN

I don't think that would have anything to do with the style of room.

COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY (TE)

But that's the ultimate accountable place. Let's just suppose there's a motion of no confidence in the leader, or a lot of people defected from one party to another. That particular debate would require the public to be present to listen. And it would require a high debating standard from councillors, although it probably wouldn't be achieved. But it should require that.

There are some key policies which also, under statute, have to be agreed by the council assembly. Most of those go through on the nod because they seem to be motherhood and apple pie when they reach the council. But they shouldn't. There should be a debate on those as well.

And you will find that when cabinet recommends changes to various policies which have to be ratified by council assembly - there's about 10 of them listed in the constitution - those require sensible debate in council.

What does concern me a bit, Abdul, is that in your manifesto you said you wanted more council assembly meetings, I think. And very sensibly you decided to do that. But if you're going to whittle that away now by having many fewer formal council meetings, I think there would be some concern about that. Because that would rather demean the role of the traditional council assembly in the eyes of the councillors, particularly the newly-elected councillors. So I would caution against substantially reducing the number of traditional council meetings.

I think what is interesting is that you - the new administration - is thinking of some form of alternative gathering: councillors with a better informed public, and the public participating more. And the point about visibility is that it's an absolute killer because this building is not suitable for that and nobody is going to spend a lot of money reorganising the council chamber. Therefore, if one is going to go along the road of organising two or three of those new style council meetings per year, then thinking about alternative venues is going to be very important. Because it means that it's going to be very expensive to hire the halls because we haven't got one big enough really.

I think it would be constructive for the democracy commission to concentrate on the new style meetings which the new administration would want and I would have some sympathy with.

AM

I just want to respond to that question about reducing the number of council meetings. I wasn't personally suggesting that we reduce them but to look at the content of them. Perhaps we could strip away, or you could concentrate, the formal bits that perhaps tend to keep members of the public away from the council (meetings), because they tend to be bored or it doesn't get them involved in the decisions that are being made, or the debate that happens as a result of issues being raised in the chamber. So perhaps it's the content of what happens in the council chamber that needs to be looked at closely.

Can we concentrate those formal decisions in fewer meetings? And leave the new style council meetings more open for residents.

RENATA HAMVAS (RH)

I think the problems are far more fundamental than that. A lot of people in my ward don't understand the fundamentals of what a councillor does. They don't understand basics and council structure. I've just received a letter from someone who addressed me as an MP, because they don't know the difference between an MP and a local councillor.

I think community councils are very good for engaging members of the public. The problem is you always get the same group of people, the converted, who turn up to the community council.

WN

The problem is, if people are not aware of what we do as councillors, how are they going to engage and come to a council assembly and listen to what we're talking about?

RH

I wonder if an issue of Southwark Life could be dedicated to going through the basics of what the council does, about the council structure. That individual councillors don't have the ability to make huge changes, but how we liaise with council officers. I think that would be really useful if that went to all the members of the borough. It might encourage more people to come along and have a look at community councils and what goes on there.

WN

Unless there's an issue that they're interested in, like when we were discussing the Elephant & Castle.

VW

There are formal decisions that have to be made, but how you try to make that meaningful?

CH

There is the official purpose which is making decisions. And then there's the stuff which occupies quite a lot of time. You could call it 'debates', although I'd be interested to hear your views on the quality of that debate. But an awful lot of what is actually said in those assemblies would alienate the public. There's too much politicking for people, and obviously politicians are not going to abolish politicking, but I don't think that's particularly engaging or that people like that kind of thing.

RH

Could assembly meetings be broadcast live on the Southwark website? Unless there's closed issues that would have to be blocked. And then people who are unable to come to the meetings, if they're interested, would be able to follow it.

CH

But if they do watch it, will they think more of us at the end of it?

WN

I think on the mayor making there can be a lot of changes because it happens so quickly. There must be something they can do to make the changeover better.

The Chair then invited participants to look at community councils again and how they work.

TE

One of the reasons why community councils are different is because the chair is obliged to throw the discussion open to the people present. So, if councillors stray from talking sense the next person who speaks as a member of the public is going to rubbish that councillor. I think that's a key difference between those meetings and assembly meetings. So community councils have a lot of merit. Because some of that debate is prior to taking decisions on, for example, CGS (Cleaner Greener Safer) allocations. So you do have more participation and you have an inbuilt discipline on councillors not to be silly and engage in excess party politics.

How much of the community council structure could be replicated in the council assembly is another matter. You could do it by topic. So that one of the new style council assemblies could have maximum two or three topics, which could be animated or dealt with by the Mayor if he or she presides, in the same way as the chairs of community councils achieve those benefits. It's quite a big step but I think, yes, look into it. But I would repeat the point about not diminishing the number of formal decision-making council assembly meetings.

RH

I agree with Toby but I also think that there are other issues because in community councils you're dealing with very local issues. And in some ways politics doesn't come into those local issues at all. But in council chamber you're often dealing with large issues that affect the whole borough. And you're going to have issues that are linked in with the fundamental differences in the parties and their party politics.

TE

Council assembly agendas today are, unfortunately, largely opportunities for party machismo. They're used to boost the morale of the person who put down the motion or the person who's speaking, to show off to his party colleagues and to show he's in charge and doing his duty. And that's because so much of the council assembly meeting is devoted to motions. And that is a function of the recent legislation which has actually diminished the decision-making powers of the council assembly. I personally find that very regrettable but we live with that.

So we have to realise that the council assemblies are sort of show cases for member's motions. They could be reduced and replaced by the kind of participatory idea we discussed already, which might be more constructive.

VW

But it's only the large things that come up for decision-making. They have gone through months and years of input and discussion. We still do try to put things in at the last minute but you can't put something like the core strategy before people and say, "Right, let's have a general discussion about it". And if you were going to have a discussion involving the public you'd have to explain what you were doing - that you were now ratifying this large thing. It's the same with the budget.

TE

In practice you're right. They do become set pieces, mere ratifications. But legally speaking, amendments can be taken which are discussed in those statutorily reserved items. So, somebody could put down an amendment to the children's plan and that would have to be debated. The quality of the amendment or the quality of the person who moves the amendment is interesting. This person would have to be so good that you'd be required to withdraw the item before it was put to the vote. That is the only way in which council can effectively use its debating power with items that are statutorily required to be taken by council assembly.

CH

The question then is who is the real audience for what is said in there and it seems to me that it's primarily those who are sat on the seats (councillors). And to some extent the media.

Either we continue to do the formal council assembly meetings and we think of some other way of engaging people, or you have to try and make council assembly meetings something else. But I think that trying to weld two things together in one meeting is not going to work.

To be honest, if I wasn't a councillor and I wasn't involved in politics I'm not sure that it would be the most tempting prospect of how to spend a Wednesday evening - watching decisions being made. Unless you had a strong interest in something like Elephant & Castle and you were going to come and talk about it.

VW

Which is why deputations were so useful because it focused on a very contentious issue in the borough, which some members of the community would come in a deputation about, to say this and this and this is happening, and we want you as an assembly to know about it and we want your support. And you would pack the gallery for that kind of issue.

AM

But some deputations can have other agendas. They can be vexatious or are generated politically to create mischief.

TE

It would certainly increase interest and the new style council meetings could have one deputation but how you would select between competing deputations I have no idea at all. But if it's a themed council meeting then a deputation would have to stick to that theme. That would allow kick off with participation so you would have solved part of the participation issue straight away.

RH

Some of the issues are better dealt with at community councils though, if they're very specific local issues. And you do get quite a few deputations at community council meetings.

WN

That's the reason why you have community councils in every area. If you're going to talk about a specific issue that affects an area it's better to do that with the people who live in that area.

RH

Also some discussion is devolved via Scrutiny. For example, I went to a Scrutiny meeting about primary school places and you had a large number of people from the local area who were concerned about primary school places. I think those kinds of meetings work very well to engage members of the public when it's about a single issue and I think we should have more of those.

The Chair then invited participants to add anything else they felt strongly about.

WN

People have no idea what councillors do. They think all we have to do is to have surgeries. They don't know about all these meetings we have to attend. People are not aware of that and that's how we get all the bad names.

CH

That's why I think Renata's idea is so good about having case studies (in Southwark Life) of councillors and what they do. And what they're responsible for.

TE

Because of the visibility issue (*a reference to the physical layout of the council chamber*) the new style meetings will have to be outside the council chamber. But I wouldn't rule out using the council chamber for more traditional ones. After all, it's free.

If we are going to go for a new style council meeting, what are going to be the outcomes? Let's just say that it's going to be a themed meeting to do with transport. What happens at the end? Are motions going to be allowed, moved by a councillor and debated? If we don't think about the outcomes there's going to be even more frustration. The danger is that there could be yet another stage of decision-making.

It depends how the cabinet reacts (to all this) and if the actual decisions are still taken by the cabinet. Because at the moment the decisions of cabinet meetings are in fact taken behind closed doors before the actual cabinet meeting takes place, which is the absolute antithesis of open decision-making.

CH

My experience of community council meetings has been good in the past, except that there has been quite a lot of demand from council officers to come along with their presentations. It went on for a quarter of an hour, nobody understood what it was about, but they went off and ticked a box that they had consulted with the community. We have to be careful that they (any new style meetings) don't get hijacked by consultations also.

Participation can be a woolly word which you say you've done but nobody has benefited from it.

VW

There are dangers, and we've started to have these discussions nationally, about how you can have people discussing what they should set the council tax at. Fine, but who are the people from the community that we're talking about and who do they represent, apart from themselves? You have to be extremely careful.

I think it would be good to involve the community in a discussion about the budget so that people understand what they're paying for, how it all works, and why there isn't enough money to go around. But you have to be so careful when it comes to council tax.

RH

I'm just wondering if it would be good to have meetings themed loosely around each of the cabinet positions. And then it could go to Scrutiny, or full council, or to cabinet, depending on what was brought up by members of the public at those meetings.

WN

But don't you think that's better discussed at community council meetings? You could bring the cabinet member to those meetings. Otherwise you're going to have a lot of extra meetings.

TE

That would involve a possible constitutional enlargement of community council powers, which is separate at least to the initial task of the democracy commission.

VW

We've got to look at community councils as well.

SOUTHWARK DEMOCRACY COMMISSION**ELECTED MEMBERS FOCUS GROUP 2****160 Tooley Street****9 AUGUST 2010****Transcript and interpretation of key comments****COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU (TS)**

Many people have approached me about the issue of poor visibility in the public gallery and one proposal is the provision of a video link. This would mean that every councillor, including those at the back, could be seen. This would solve the problem because then members of the public could listen to the debate and see the particular councillor who is speaking.

COUNCILLOR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE (RL)

I'd very much agree with that but I think there's another side to this in that members can't see the gallery either. I sometimes feel that this establishes an artificial division between the people we represent and the members. As it is I don't think people in the chamber realise how full the gallery is or how many people have left at any particular time. They probably see how full it is at the beginning of a meeting and then continue to play to a full house at the end of the meeting, when there might be a couple of people and their dog left up there.

Also, knowing some of the individuals who can be up there I think it would be useful to know who is listening and who we are engaging with.

There's also a bit of me that wonders as to whether we should always have council assembly in the council chamber. Are there other venues around the borough that might be better fit for purpose so that we're aligned in such a way that we face the audience as opposed to having our backs to them? Perhaps for one or two assemblies.

Do they always have to be in Camberwell, for example, which is in the middle of the borough but can be quite difficult for some people to get to? It would also mean that we would stand a better chance of having a different audience each time.

COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK (PC)

I take your point but I also think that for meetings like that it's good to have them at the same venue. I'm not saying that's the best venue (the council chamber) but at least it's good for people to know that if there's going to be an assembly meeting it's always going to be at building A. Perhaps we could look at community councils because some have moved around and some have stayed in one place. Maybe we could find out from them which has worked better.

TS

To have a council assembly in a particular venue is very good for democracy and my experience with community councils has been that shifting the venue from one area to another causes problems. I think it's better to locate the meetings, whether community council or full council assembly, in one place. It would be a more stable arrangement for people.

The facilitator then moved the discussion to what participants saw as the purpose of the council assembly.

RL

It's an important forum for debate. It's the only place where all 63 councillors come together and we can have that big discussion. But I think we should try to use that more to get a broader spread of views. We do need to have smaller groups working together to get things moving but it's also useful to be able to reflect on the views of all 63 councillors. I think that both would help us to make better decisions.

For example, budget setting and council tax is a thorough debate each year and I think that's healthy.

One of the things we've talked about is looking at other big strategic decisions that have previously only been taken by the Executive and taking those to full council. The council's capital programme is a good example. That has massive implications for how the council operates and I'm sure all councillors would have a view on that. So that's something we're planning on bringing to council assembly in the autumn.

Where council assembly has fallen down to some extent is that it's often very tribal. It's always going to be like that to some extent and some decisions do need to be whipped but there's others where, on occasion, we could have more of a free debate. And I don't think we're very good at doing that.

When council assembly is coming up we'll (Labour) sit together and decide which motions we want to put up in terms of our political messages, and I assume it's the same for other groups too. And actually there probably ought to be a bit of a broader selection of motions coming up which are not about putting a particular political stance forward for the group but looking at strategic issues around which there might be broader cross-party consensus. There might even be some inter-cutting things where people are allowed a freer vote. It's certainly worth exploring.

The danger is at the moment that some key strategic documents get to the council and they've been worked through to such an extent that it becomes very difficult to change things. And is it the best use of a councillor's time if we're always presenting a *fait accompli* in front of the council chamber? An earlier discussion might enable more of a freer debate and a lot less of nodding through things on a party political basis.

PC

What about community council decisions being linked into full council?

RL

There is a bit of a problem with community councils at the moment in that they're in a bit of a *cul de sac*. There's nowhere for community council decisions to formally go within the council structure - other than those decisions which are delegated to it such as planning decisions and Cleaner Greener Safer allocations. But I would have no difficulty with issues raised at community councils that are of borough-wide significance being fed through to the Executive, full council assembly, or Scrutiny. It might be a very healthy way to move things forward in the future.

PC

I think it's a really good way of engaging the public and it's a stepping stone for them.

TS

I quite agree with that, and with the point that there's an overall need for shaping up. It would be very good for decision-making at community councils to reach the council assembly or the cabinet. The community council is the lowest link to the community so if there are issues or policies coming from that there should be some way, directly or indirectly, of getting that to the full council assembly. Local people would see that as real participation in the mainstream.

The facilitator then invited participants to talk about the role of deputations.

TS

I can understand why deputations have been a bone of contention for some. A minority of people can use them to cause problems but there should always be a role for the community deputation, for people to come and explain things in a limited way.

RL

I understand that some people were nervous about them and that's why the previous administration decided to curtail them.

However, what we've lost through that is the ability to hear the public's voice. Maybe we need to look at the balance of things and how we get this right. What we've got at the moment seems to be too limiting. In the past, before the rules were tightened up, we had some really interesting issues that were brought before the council which we all across the chamber realised that we needed to do something about. I'm thinking, for example, of when the Carrib Football Club came to the council assembly it made us aware of an issue that most of us weren't aware of at all at the time. Hearing what the deputation had to say was very powerful and across the chamber there was a degree of cross party working together. Another example was the deputation in relation to the tragic killing on the Wooddene Estate. It was important that the council as a whole heard that story and not just the cabinet.

I think we've lost quite a lot through the tightening of these rules and we need to look at redressing that imbalance.

PD

Do you think that deputations could have the opportunity of speaking with a committee before going to full assembly? So that there could be some filtering out. In the past some deputations have been used as a talking shop and it hasn't been very constructive. Maybe we could encourage more people to go and meet together and propose a deputation, and these could be looked at before going to full council. I think it would be good to have a half way house of some kind.

The facilitator then invited participants to consider the role of Scrutiny and questions in the context of full council assembly.

TS

For democracy to be strong we need Scrutiny. It's good for those in power and it's good for those in opposition.

RL

The interviews that Scrutiny have of lead members happen once a year and they tend to be quite detailed, with a number of supplementary questions, whereas question time in council assembly is more regular and is more public forum. So they're doing slightly different things but the two complement each other.

I think that being asked questions in such an exposed environment makes you a better cabinet member. It helps you to think things through and to make better decisions. But I'm not sure that having it where it is on the agenda is necessarily the right thing.

The discussion then turned to who we should be involving more.

TS

We need to look at ways of involving the voluntary sector and small businesses more. We need to link with them so that they can participate more fully in decision-making, or at least so that they know what is going on. There are so many parts of society where they have a role to play.

Our recent experience in the development of Peckham Space (newly opened arts gallery in Peckham Square) is a good example, where we have worked closely with small businesses and the voluntary sector. It would be good to filter their views through to community council or cabinet. And they have a clientele whom they can help us to reach. So it works both ways.

PC

But the councillors themselves represent all parts of society. We have people (as councillors) who've got businesses, who are professionals, or have been teachers and lawyers. But this doesn't always come across to the people because they don't always know the background of the councillors unless they've met them as individuals.

RL

I think generally there's a relatively low recognition of what councillors do and what they're for. Some people are surprised when a councillor doesn't answer an email after two hours because they assume that all councillors are doing it full time and are paid massive salaries to do it. How we change that perception is an interesting question. And maybe that's something we need to do when looking at council assembly. It might be useful to explain to people what's going on, why it's going on, and who these people are.

TS

In my experience of holding surgeries, people will know individual councillors as someone they voted for. But most of them have no concept of councillors meeting in a full assembly. I think we need to publicise more the fact that this (the assembly) is where decisions are made that affect local people. And that's why we have to be careful about shifting the meetings around because as soon as they get used to it being in one place then it's moved to another.

The facilitator then introduced the idea of having themed meetings.

TS

I think it would be a good way of generating interest, even for those people who think it's (the theme) not relevant for them at the moment. And word of mouth will help too. Issues like risk assessments of social housing, and cost effectiveness - these are themes that local people are interested in and will want to talk about among themselves or at meetings. For example, they will have a view on the cost effectiveness of a publication like Southwark Life which many people think is not being used as well as it could.

I have noticed that when council officers text people two or three days before a community council meeting to remind them about it we have a big turn out of people.

Maybe we should also report a summary of the decisions made at council assembly in Southwark Life.

RL

Yes, and it's a relatively cheap way of telling people that the meetings are coming up and maybe give them a quick snippet about what's going to be discussed. That might be a good way of being proactive about it.

The facilitator then asked if people had any final thoughts to offer.

RL

I think we should use community councils to publicise council assembly meetings. Have a leaflet on the table among the other stuff that's there.

On themed-meetings: we do it once a year already with budget-setting, when that's all the meeting is about. I guess the question is, how do we schedule other themed meetings far enough ahead so that political groups can be ready with what they want to put in for debate? And how do you fit all the other stuff council assembly *has* to do around it? But I couldn't see a problem with, for example, a council meeting that starts at 7pm with an hour and a half on a particular theme and then spends the rest of the meeting dealing with the other business.

PC

I have some very simplistic views about encouraging people as soon as they get there, because I've been sitting in the gallery for a long time and I know my way around the paperwork. But you see people coming who don't know what it's about and the paperwork is just sitting there. So, I think a simple guide on how the meeting is going to be formatted would be more important than all of the paperwork that's already there. I think there should be a council staff member there - not just a security guard - whom you could ask questions of about the paperwork.

Also, it's quite nice when people know the face of the councillor. Just having one of the posters up at the back that have the photos of the councillors and which wards they represent.

The other thing is that people are not let into the gallery until 5 to 7, so there's no time to familiarise yourself with the questions and the rest of the paperwork.

TS

Local government is about services to the local people and we must never lose sight of that. Otherwise the people will think that we are just like central government, making cuts here and there.

RL

I don't think we always help ourselves in that. We're all very keen at times to use the motions to discuss national issues and perhaps put some kind of local slant on that. But you have to ask yourself, is this really what we're here to do? Maybe we need to find more ways of doing things that are directly relevant to Southwark, and maybe what we really need to keep in mind is what we can do about this issue locally when we're putting forward motions. What can we do to address it?

Asking a member of cabinet to write a letter to someone, where the chances are that he was always going to write it anyway - is it really worth us debating the issue for an hour about something like that?

TS

But this is what takes so much of our time because there will be debate and counter debate of less relevance to our main business of giving very good services to local people. That's the reason why we have been elected – to be the last link from central to local government.

SOUTHWARK DEMOCRACY COMMISSION
VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR FOCUS GROUP

19 AUGUST 2010

160 TOOLEY STREET

CLAUDINE BONGO (CB)

We're making an assumption here - that local residents know what council assembly and community council meetings are. It would be good to explain to people what the different levels of involvement are, or the decision-making within the structure. Then we could see if they understand and if they want to be involved. And at which level they want to be involved.

AISHA BRYANT (AB)

Yes, that's fundamental. We run a course called How Southwark Works because people have no understanding of how local government is structured, how regional government fits in, back to central government. Expecting people to give their responses to a body they don't know anything about - how can they contribute if they don't even know it exists? Fundamentally they need knowledge that it exists, what it is, what it's for. Then you can try to engage them to participate in it.

CB

People generally know about community council meetings. It's not that they attended any, but they can more or less understand what they're about. They don't agree with the way they're planned, organised, or run, because it doesn't really give them a way of interacting during the meeting itself. But as for the assembly and committee meetings, there's something to be done around all the other meetings and how they actually fit in with one another.

Is the assembly meeting the highest level of decision-making? Is it possible still to get some kind of involvement at that stage? People need to know what's in it for them.

AB

Or is it a party political stage show where people from the public are not allowed to speak? Even if they came they aren't allowed to interact.

MAIRI MILLS (MM)

Sometimes decisions have already been made by the time you get to this kind of meeting. And that's relevant to the consultation about the children's and young people's plan, which the community and voluntary sector feed into. So where I've been asking groups to look at these strategies, or the planning consultations - that doesn't seem to be reflected in the questionnaire. If people have already been very involved, isn't there a duplication in some way in the assembly meetings?

Working with the council, when we get things like the Core Strategy, to the extent that residents can engage with things like that, those that do engage can develop a lot of knowledge through that engagement process. But then others just don't have the time to even start that process.

Sometimes the information that's available on the (council) website is a little difficult to access and that's a big challenge – to present information in an easily accessible way. An example of this is the fact that planning documents can be huge downloads which are not well labelled, and links change or disappear so that information can't be found again. This complex information could be made more accessible by improving the signage, format, labelling, etc.

Also, information about the council can be almost impossible to access - even for highly educated people with resources and time. For example a Rotherhithe public realm study was compiled with input from residents but when those residents asked officers about it, no information was available. Then, after 2 years, it appeared on the council's website as part of the Core Strategy documents, where it could be downloaded - but anyone finding this at this point was likely to be trying to read and make sense of 50 or so very large files involved in the Core Strategy. Another example is that people heard there was a food growing strategy, or perhaps a draft food growing strategy, that some residents had been invited to have an input to, but others were not able to find out about at all. This sort of thing is confusing when the information involves resident input, or should do.

So it's not just about the challenge of explaining complicated concepts, but also facilitating access to information so that people (possibly, but not necessarily, those who are already actively engaged) don't have to spend lots of time searching for it.

AB

Yes, and it's making an assumption that everyone can negotiate textual information. That's just not the case in such a diverse borough as we have. And if the council assembly is just a public meeting where there's no real representation of areas around the borough, people need to be supported on that pathway of knowing nothing to being able to be effective and influential.

In the Active Citizens Hub we're asking for opportunities in the council so that people can shadow councillors and council officers and sit on Scrutiny committees, so that they could get a feel of where they might fit in - to actually participate and contribute. You're not just going to take Joe and Joanne Public off the street and put them in a room and suddenly they're going to be experienced representatives of the borough.

So, it's great that these changes are being looked at but it's not something that can be achieved overnight. There's a pathway to it.

CB

We're in a borough that is 47% or 48% BME - you know the stats more than me. The way the information is presented at the moment, this commission seems to be targeting the people who are currently involved in democracy. It is targeting or will be attractive to the white middle class to upper class person. But the average Southwark resident coming from Sierra Leone or Latin America wouldn't find a way of being engaged with it. We're making a lot of assumptions here. It's about accessibility. If the language isn't right, if the information is only on the internet, if there are so many things that to some seem normal and not a barrier, then the average person is just not going to have access to it.

MM

I think it's still a barrier because you have to spend so much time reading and learning about whatever the topic is. Things are so involved and complicated.

AB

I favour the *shurah* model. It's an Islamic principle where people in far out areas meet together to discuss their issues and then one person in that area brings it up to the next bigger *shurah*. They debate and discuss that there and then it's brought up to the parliament of the country. And the community councils are one link in that chain here but they need to be changed as well.

So it seems to me that there's a whole range of things that you could do. But there's also the legalities of what you can and cannot do under local government legislation about what can and cannot happen at council assemblies.

I would also take a longer term view and have a youth parliament developed through the citizenship or PHSE (Personal, Health, and Social Education) curriculum. So that at least the young people know and understand the structures. They can in turn educate their families as a way of raising issues, and the voluntary sector could play a part in the development of that *shurah*-type model.

The facilitator then introduced the idea of themed-meetings.

MM

If you take an issue like housing, there's several areas of interest or concern among residents about housing, which might mean having to hold several meetings.

AB

I'm thinking of (elected) members as well. If they had an opportunity to have a dialogue beforehand with people who are putting items up for discussion, then they (members) could champion them. They have a duty to champion community engagement and involvement in decision-making. Maybe we need another layer before the actual assembly. What usually happens at assembly is that the different political parties will say their piece on whatever agenda item comes up. They have to say something and that is very time-consuming as well. It's not feasible to do everything on that night so you need another layer beforehand.

MM

Maybe spread things over two evenings to avoid going on until one in the morning.

CB

It's about looking at everything that exists at the moment and looking at the most effective way of utilising that without creating duplication.

Surely people will get fed up if it's about the same thing being talked about over and over again and they can't see where it's going.

AB

People need a simple straightforward line of communication as to where they can get some kind of support from their political representatives, and they can get an issue aired and raised in public, and debated. That loop doesn't exist at the moment because the structures are too formal for residents across the board. If they came to those meetings (now) they wouldn't know what people were talking about.

We need to get down to reality and provide a forum and a format where ordinary residents can get their concerns up and through a channel. And to report back to the person. That's what so many people complain about - that you consult with them and they never hear anything back. You raise an issue and it just gets passed around. Southwark Council needs to get a reputation for getting back to people. We need to break down this them and us attitude of the council being in opposition to the people.

And see it as a partnership where the members are the servants, the representatives of the people, and there has to be a channel of communication than is better than the one we have at the moment. That would realise real democracy.

The facilitator then moved the discussion to the role of the voluntary sector.

AB

Maybe the surgeries councillors have could be placed more in the voluntary sector, where they would get more people dropping in because they're in places where people would be dropping in anyway, rather than in some secluded office somewhere.

And even the language of "surgeries" - these are just old things we've kept going. So much of the language needs to change.

(Council) officers are busy doing the work of the council. Councillors need to concentrate on building contacts in their local communities.

CB

There's also a need for councillors to work more closely with people involved in community development.

MM

I also wonder if there's scope for using social media forums more, where you could have specific cases raised, not necessarily by councillors because of confidentiality issues, but by residents themselves. Or have a set of frequently asked questions dealt with.

AB

Or a series of "How To's": How to campaign effectively, how to contact the council, and so on. People could perhaps find their problem there. Council assembly as it is can't work like that. It's not the right level. And that's what people need to know: where do they come in to get things passed up for decision-making?

But you still need a community and voluntary sector interface because people don't want to go on the council website. You've (council) got these different hats on. One minute it's an enforcement hat, then it's a "come and get involved" hat. People are not going on there and baring their souls, but you do get that at the community and voluntary sector interface.

CB

It seems to me that we're starting this democracy discussion at the highest level - in terms of how can we improve community participation in the council assembly. But there's only so much people can do at that level. Why don't we start at the grassroots?

AB

Members (councillors) need training in community development so that they can feel confident themselves in all these different types of approaches and in how to communicate with the electorate. From that will come a lot more engagement among themselves as well. They might decide that they're going to break up into thematic work groups, with four focusing on faith groups and another six focusing on planning, and so on. But if they had more knowledge and understanding they'd be so much more effective in their community champion roles.

The discussion then moved to the issue of community councils.

CB

I'm going to be a bit blunt here, and I've been saying this for years to the council. Community councils are good but they do not work. The same people come. It starts at 7pm and ends at 9pm. It is very intimidating for the average migrant person I'm working with. If it's a single mother she just wouldn't be able to go to it at that time of the day. The language is pitched so high. There are so many things that make it so difficult for people to have access to it. So what you end up with is the average person on Camberwell Grove who has been to every meeting of Camberwell Community Council for the past ten years.

AB

You've got to think about the enablers as well as the barriers, to make things like council assembly and community councils work better and be more accessible.

What you're undertaking is huge change management and for any change management to be successful you have to bring the people along with you who are involved in the change. It's admirable that you're taking the time to do these consultations but trying to rush it through for an October deadline is optimistic to say the least.

You've got another piece of work to identify the enablers. Do you need translators there? Do you need council officers to explain the process? Do you need great big billboards throughout the borough saying, "Assembly Meeting Tonight"? What do you need? And it will have a cost and it will have a process.

MM

I'm still struggling slightly to understand why people would want to go to assembly meetings. It's got to be something to do with our work, or our environment, or housing. It can't be just to go and hear stuff.

AB

Most people are struggling to survive and struggling with time. That's why we've been training people (at the Active Citizens Hub) to become community champions across the borough, to be involved in decision making and to develop a close working relationship with their local councillors, so that they can give them the kind of information they need.

Research shows that people will come together around an issue. When a child gets knocked down they'll want a (pedestrian) crossing. When their aim is achieved, or not achieved, then they go back. People take action and then they plateau. Then they take action again and then they plateau again. They're not on a trajectory. It's a pathway of involvement and it's often not a continuous chain. That's why to have people trained as community champions, it is their role to be part of a continuous chain.

People have their own lives to lead. They're not just locked into the council's agenda. When they come to our How Southwark Works course they don't understand what your departments are, what they do, where benefits come from, how things function at all. They are so empowered when they see how it all works. They're like, "Ah! I know where to go now!"

MM

But they still can't have the kind of discussion and debate that is perhaps being offered by this opportunity to engage. It's something that is ongoing.

AB

And it's also about wiping out some of the mystery of the knowledge council officers hold. Local authorities need to be more flexible and more open to influence.

CB

Yes, if we're serious about empowering people this means that someone has to be willing to let go of their power. But I have to say that the democracy commission is a good idea and Southwark is a place where the council is really trying to engage the people. It's all about being open to discussion, and to hear what people are saying. That's why we have the partnership.

MM

And you need to get all the (council) departments on board, including Planning.

CB

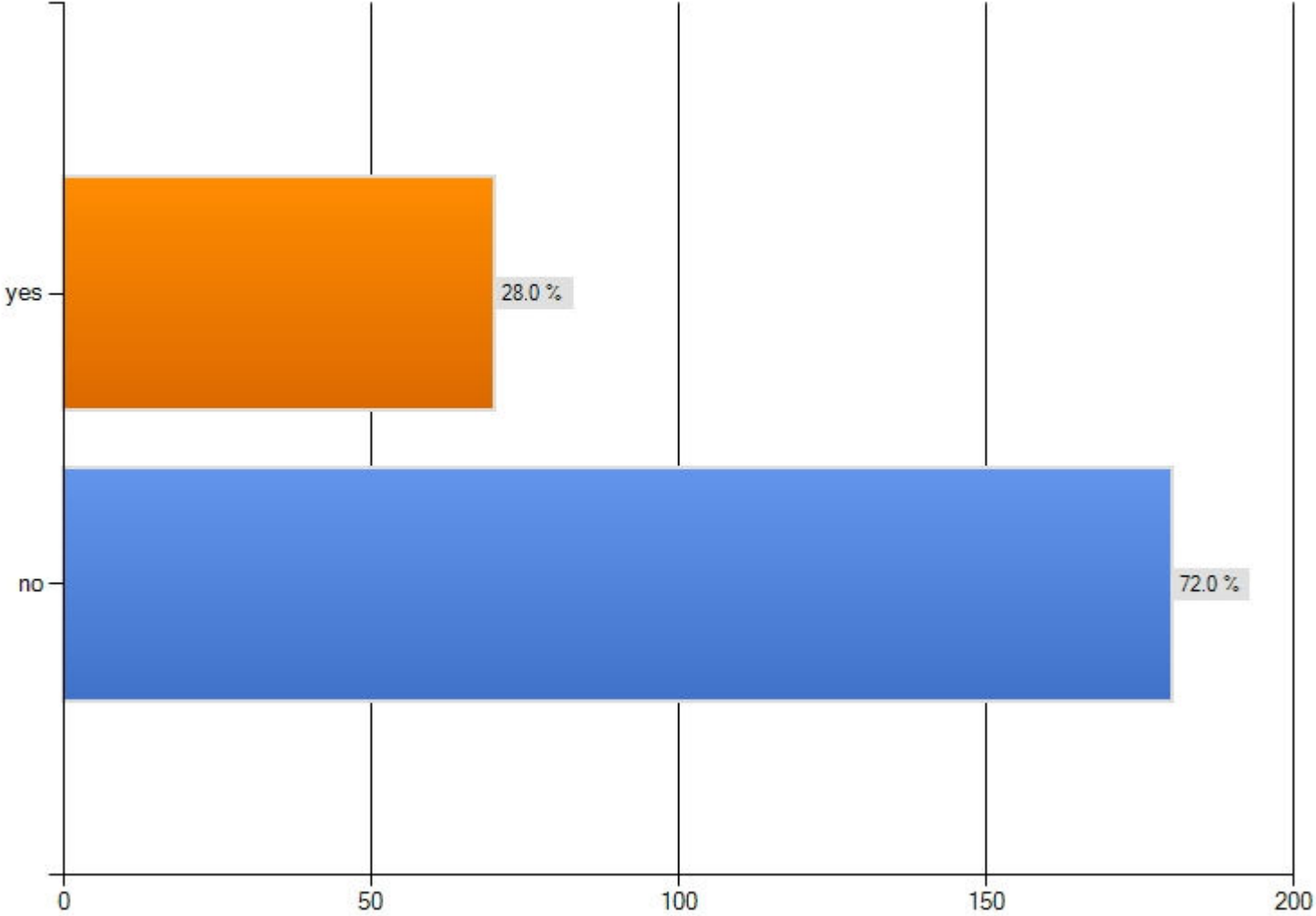
Community development and engagement should be at the core of every housing department. It shouldn't just be (the role of) Community Engagement or Scrutiny. The same goes for children's services and young people. Every department should do it.

AB

It's the responsibility of every part of the council to be inclusive but a lot of officers put it off on to this community engagement team and it's not their affair. So there's training to be done within the council. Sometimes it's the council officers who are hard to reach, not the community.

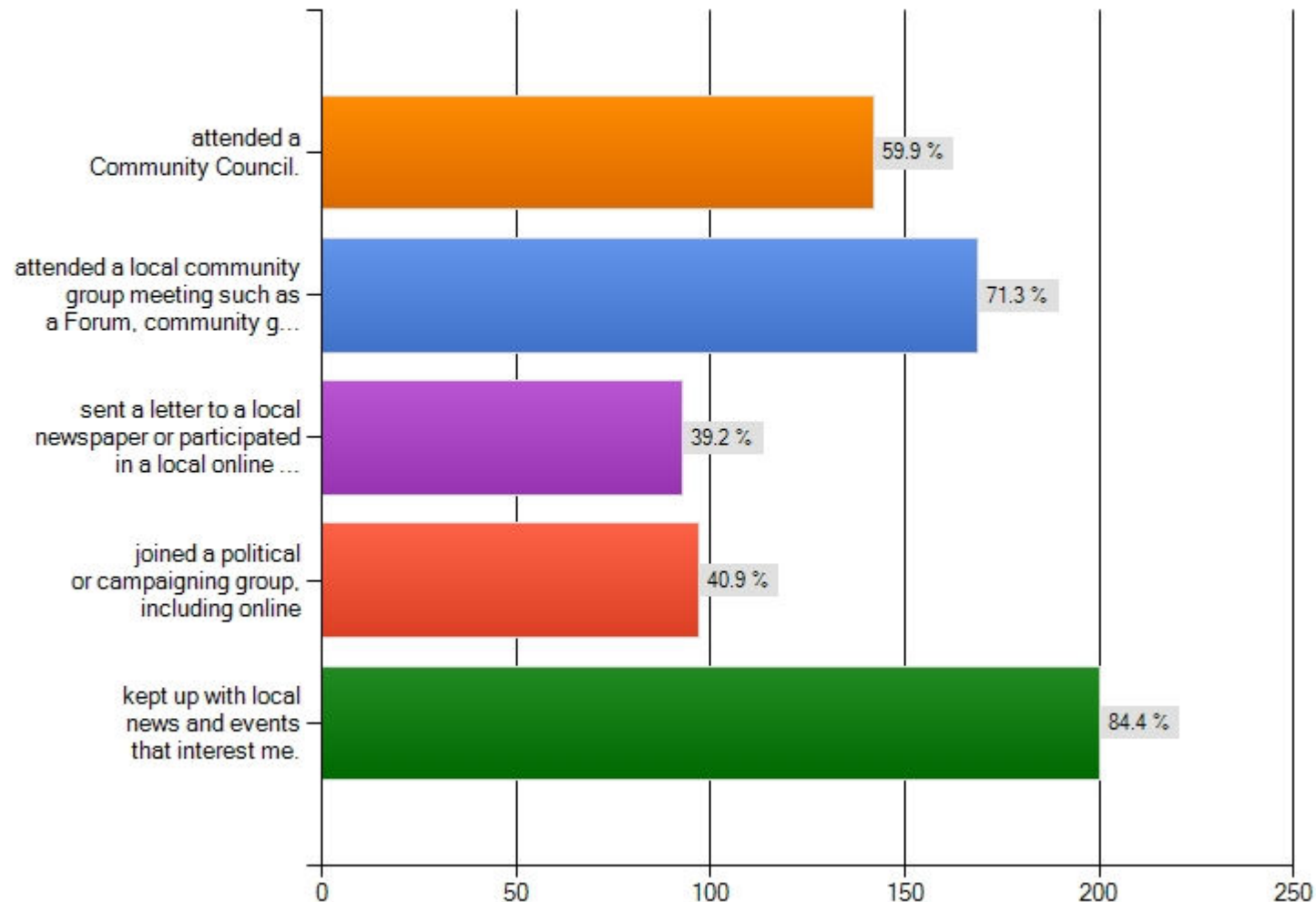
Have you ever attended Council Assembly?

Have you ever attended Southwark's council assembly?



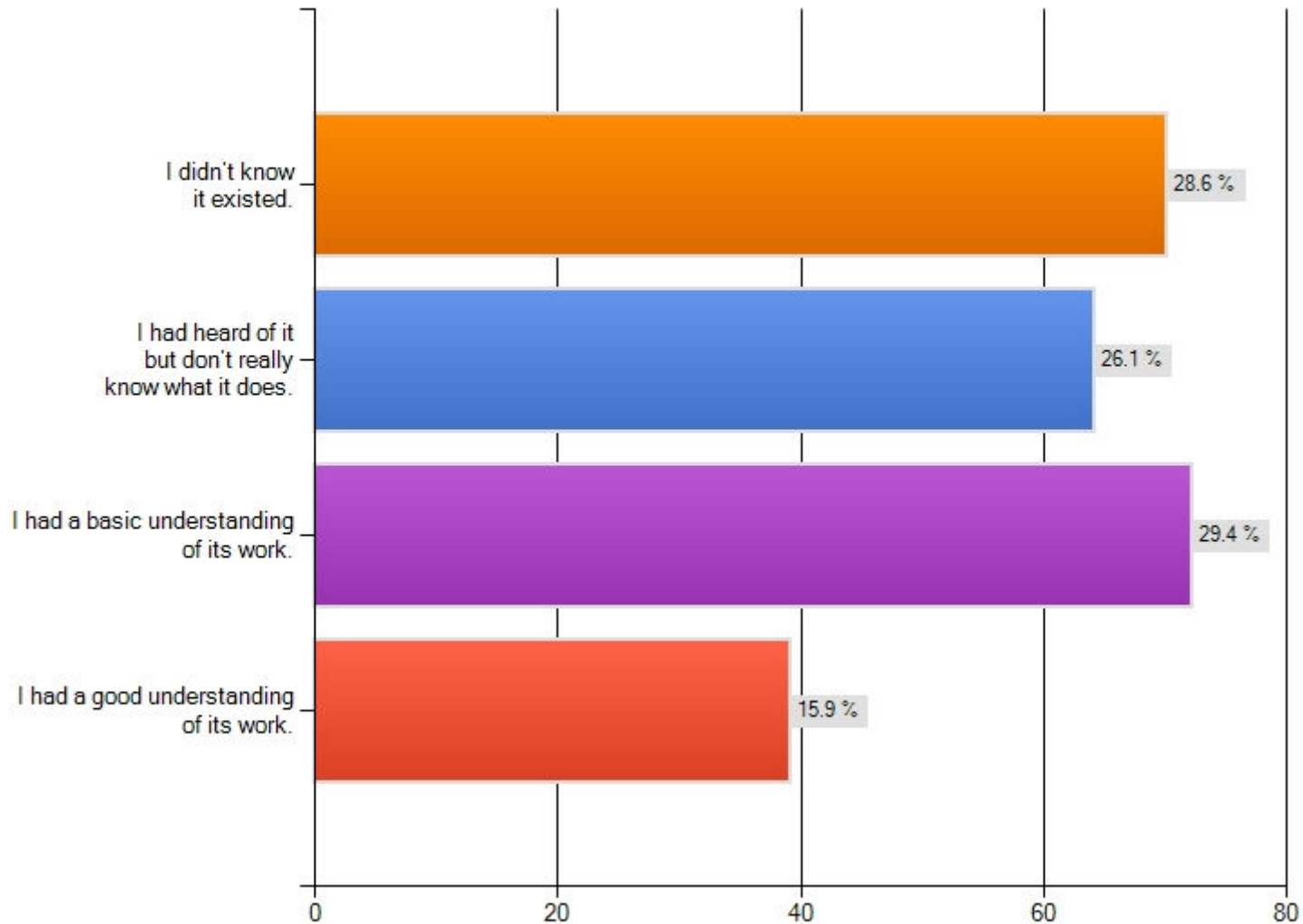
How active are you in your local community?

How active are you in your local community? Tell us about the different ways you have been involved in local activities and decision making. I have:



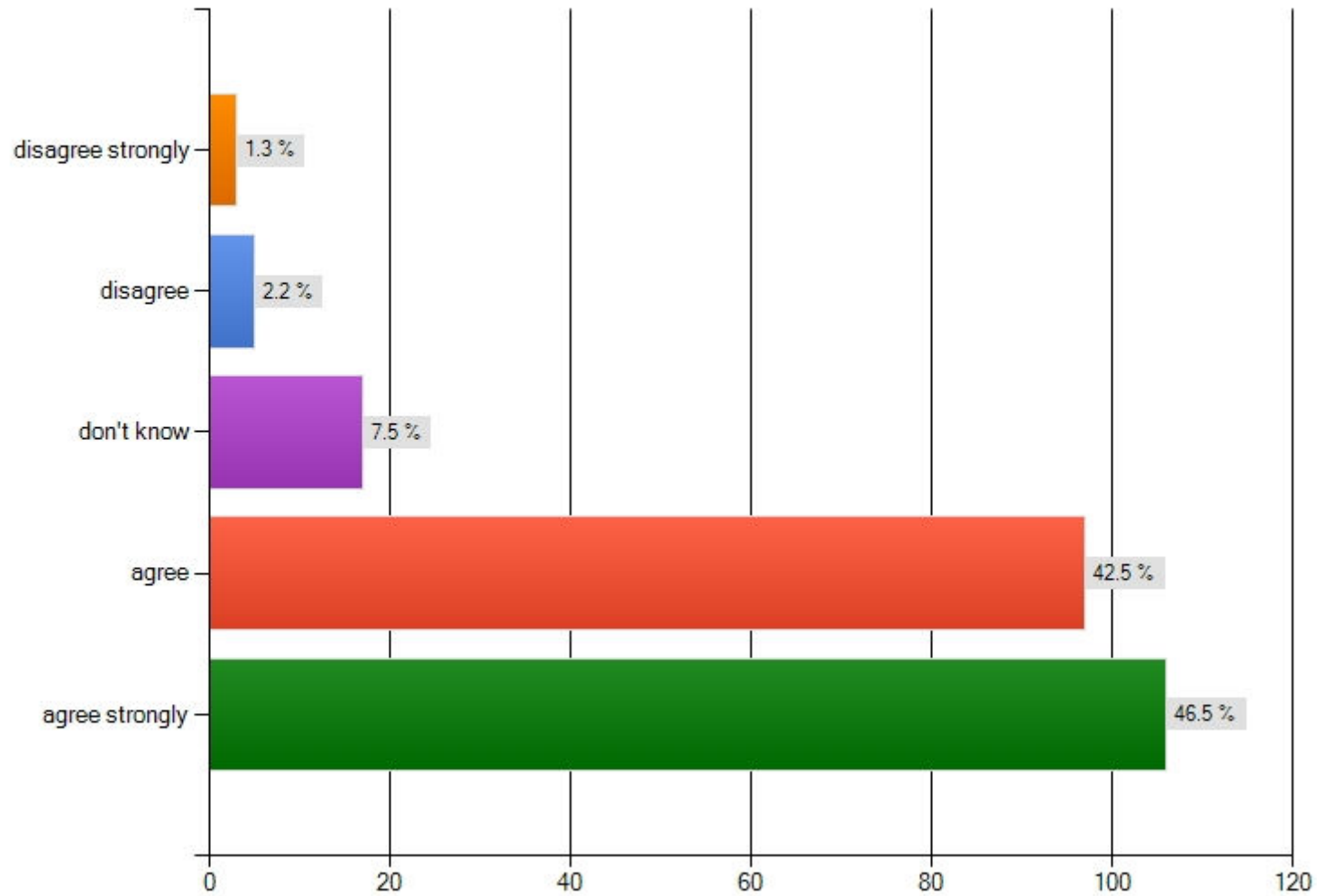
What you already knew about Council Assembly

Tell us what you already knew about the council assembly before completing this survey.



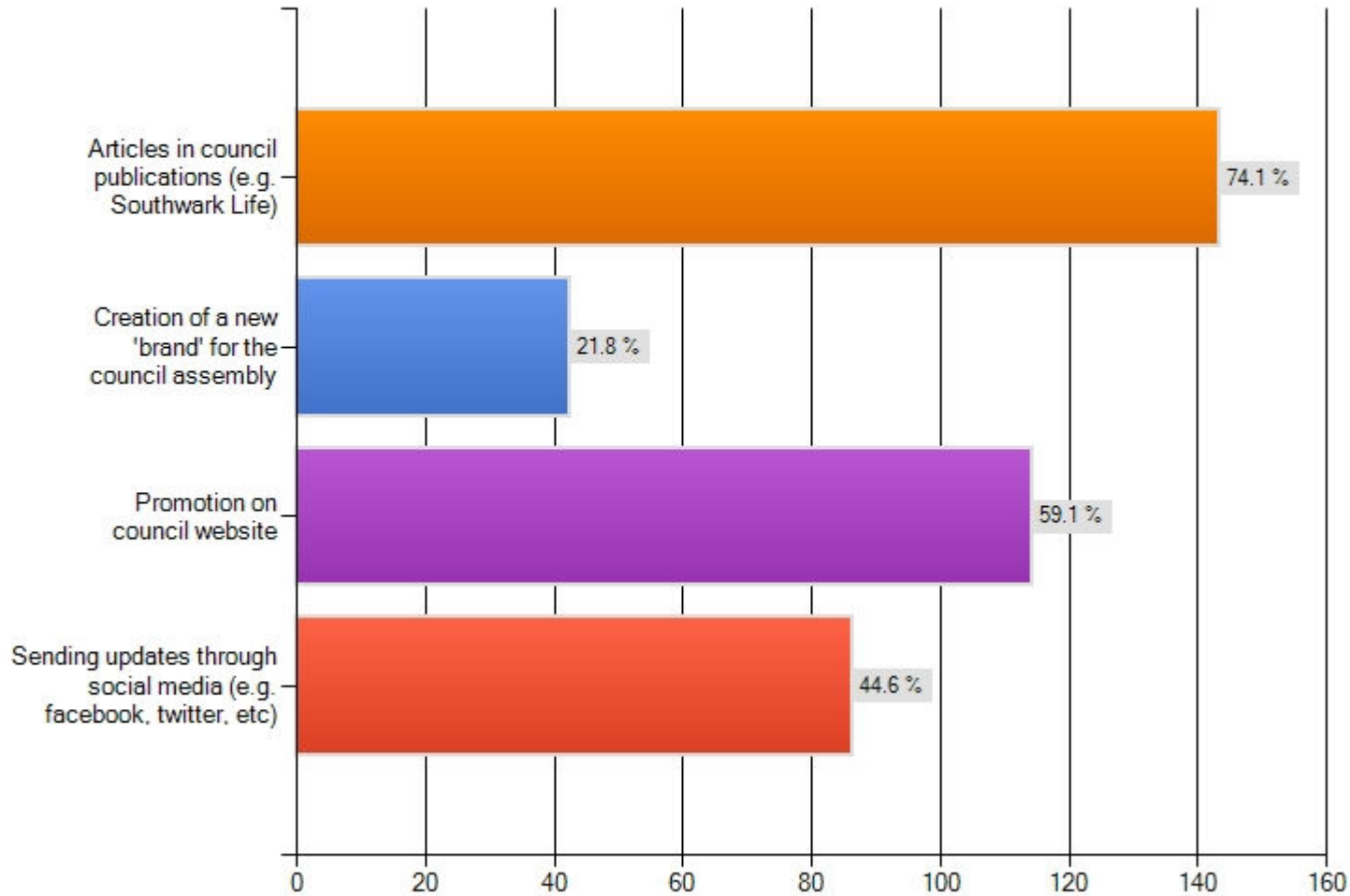
Should we do more to promote Council Assembly?

We should do more to promote council assembly so people know what it is and what it does.
(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follow)



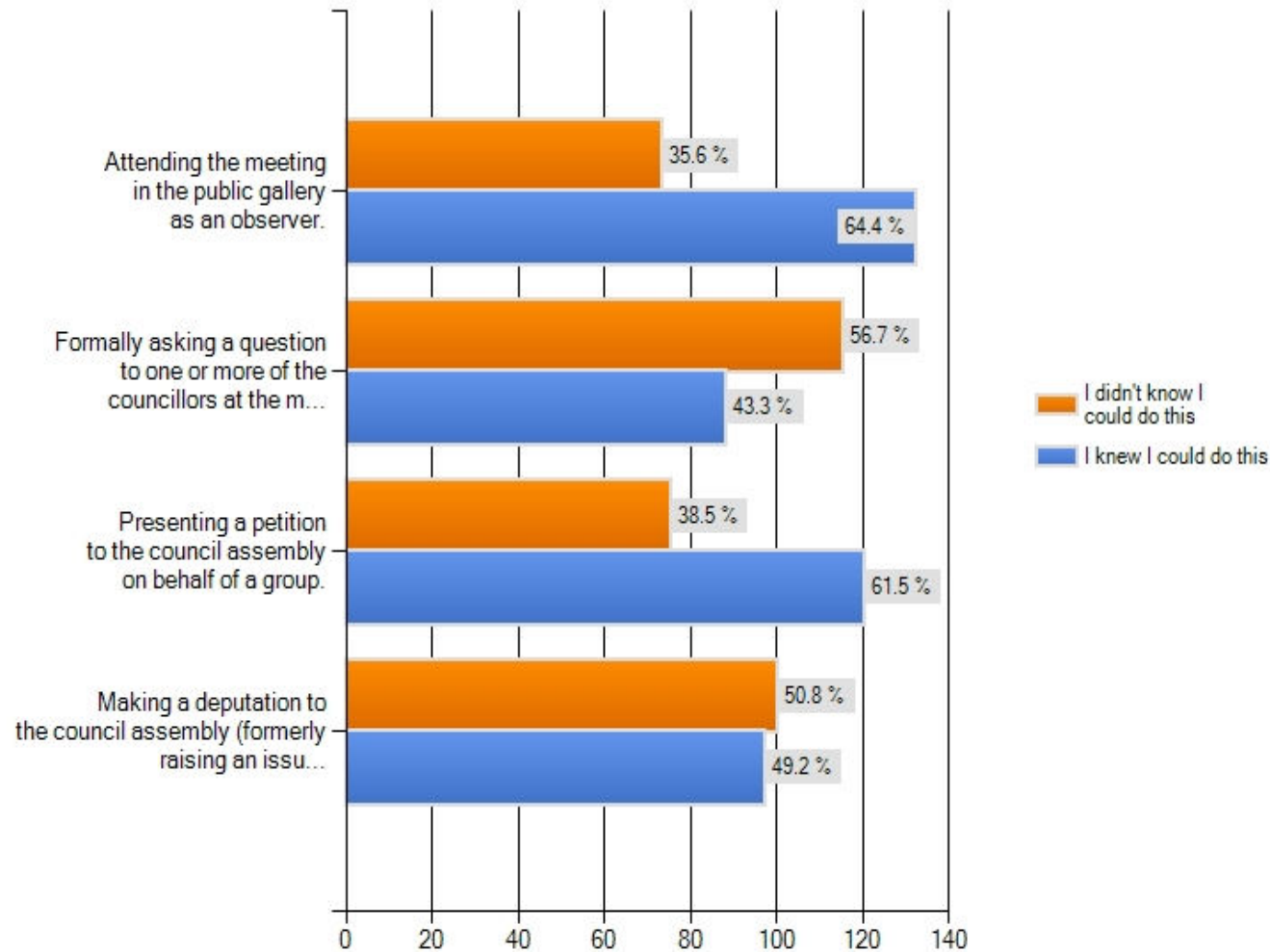
Promoting Council Assembly

We would like to find out the best way of letting people know about the council assembly and how it works. Which of the following do you think would work? Do you have any other ideas for promoting council assembly?



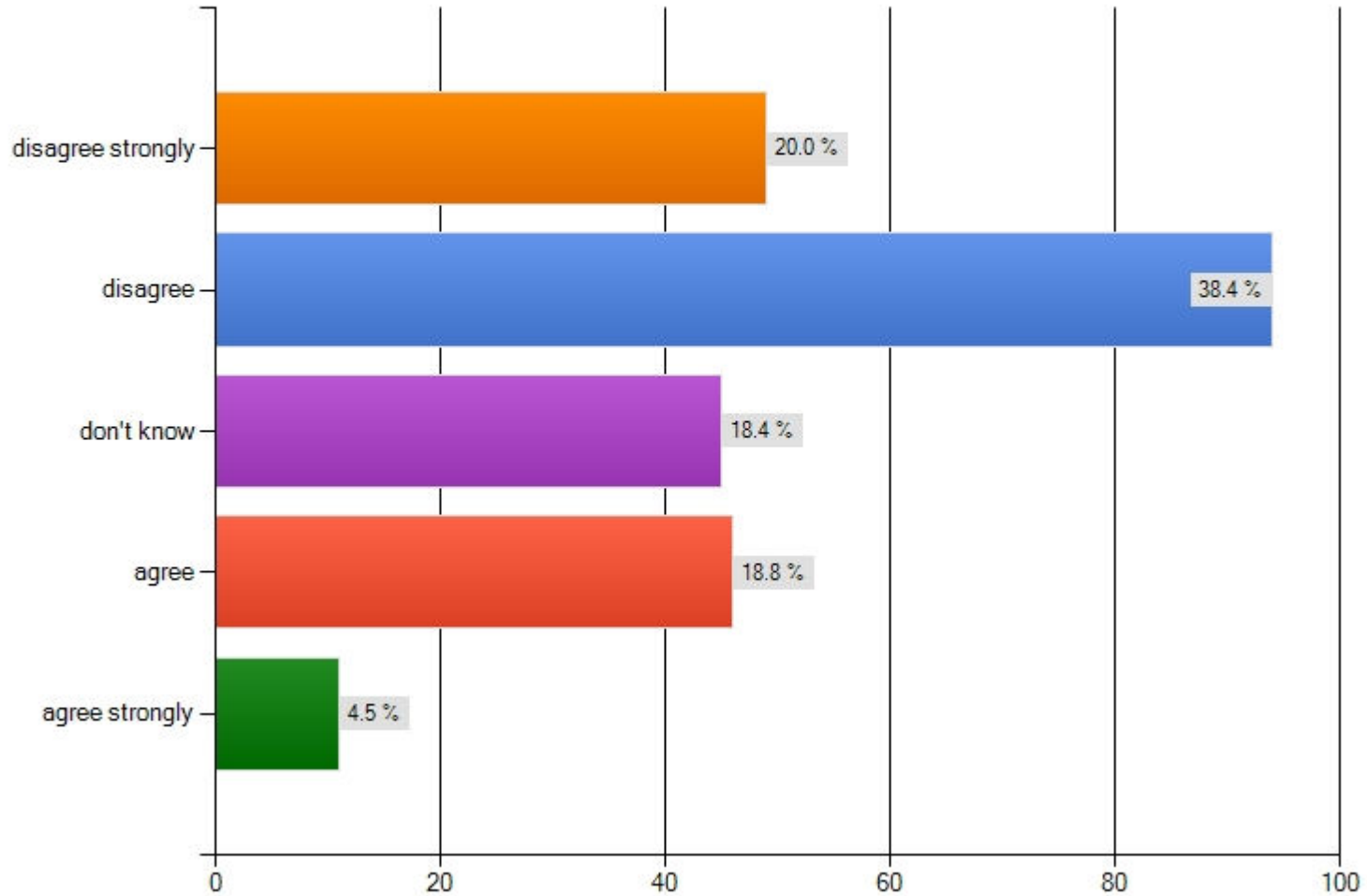
Knowledge and views on each type of involvement

Please check the box or boxes to describe your knowledge and views on each type of involvement.



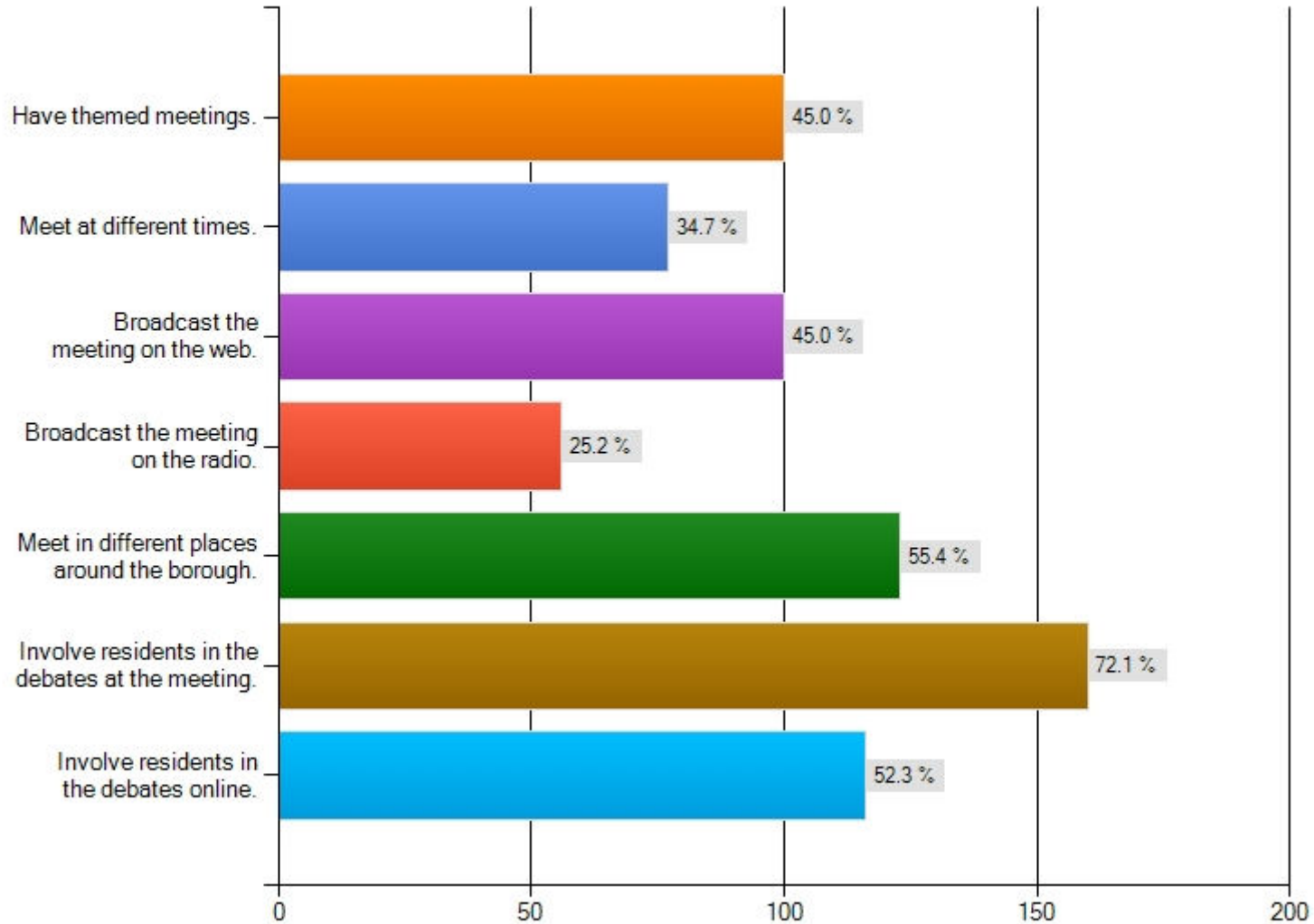
Is there enough information available?

I believe there is sufficient information and help available to enable me and other people to make the most of the above opportunities.(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follows)



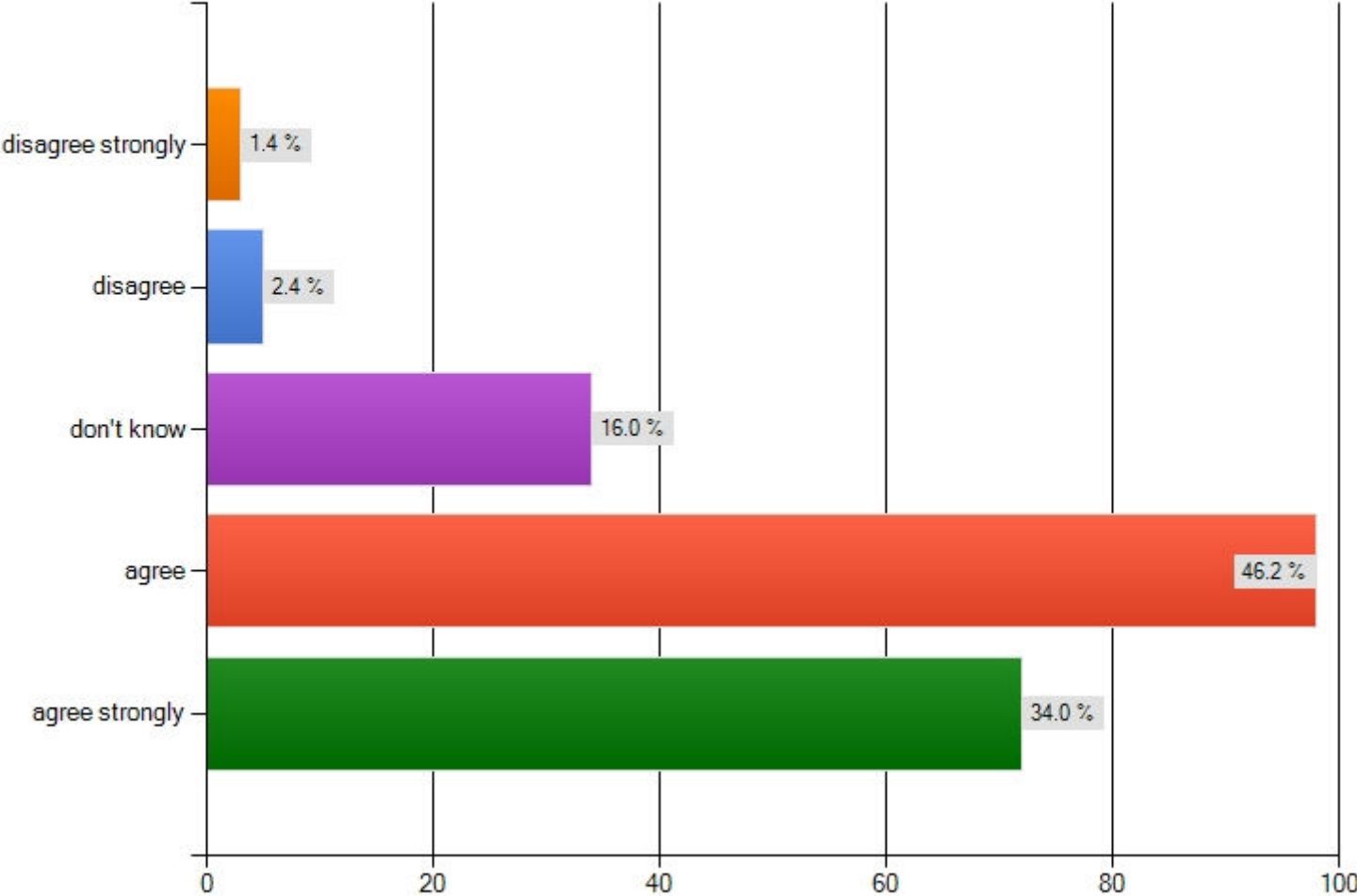
What could be done differently?

What could be done differently ? (Please tick any you think might be a good idea)



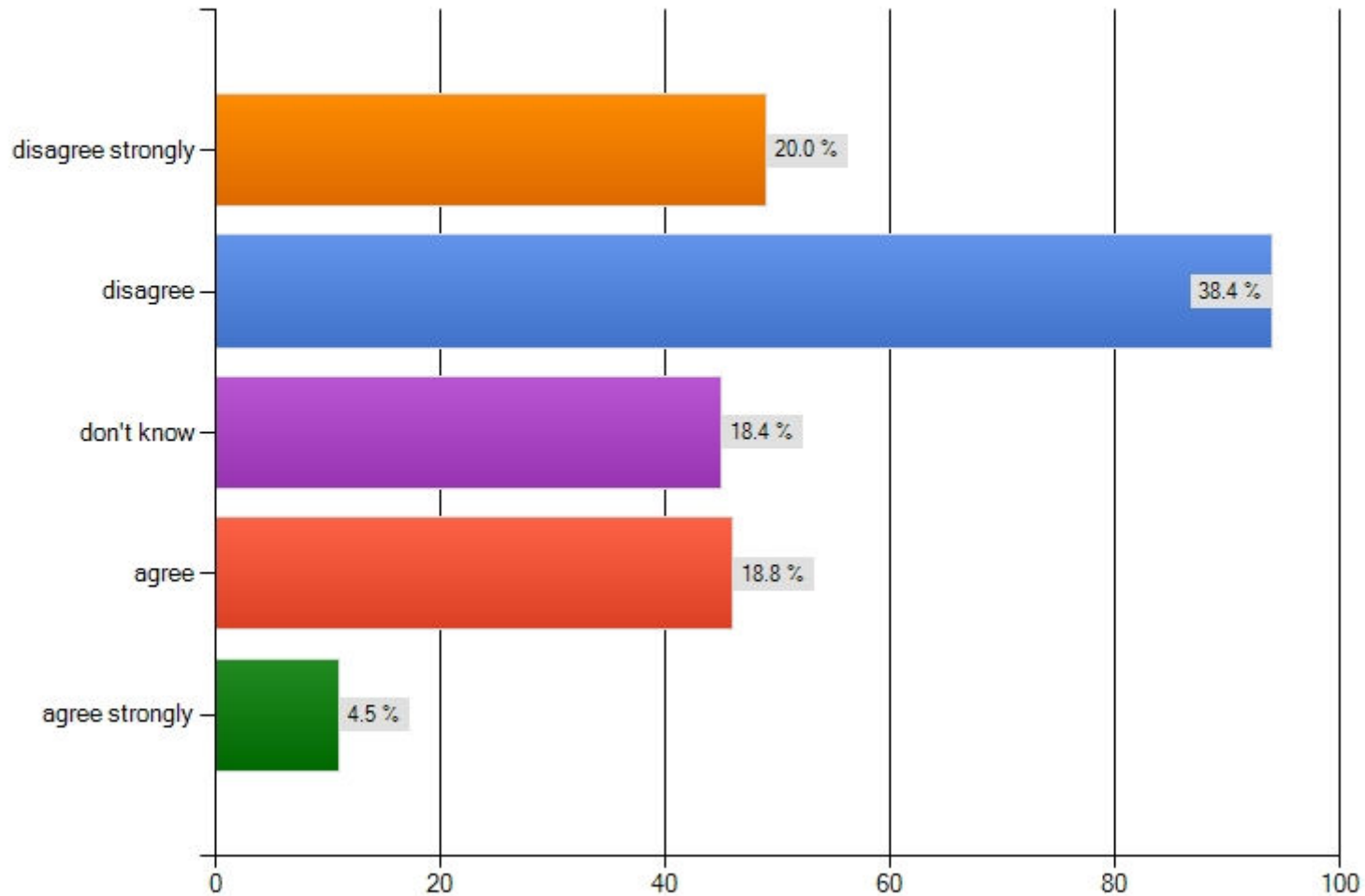
Should we make changes?

We should make changes to council assembly to help people become more willing and able to get involved.(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follows)



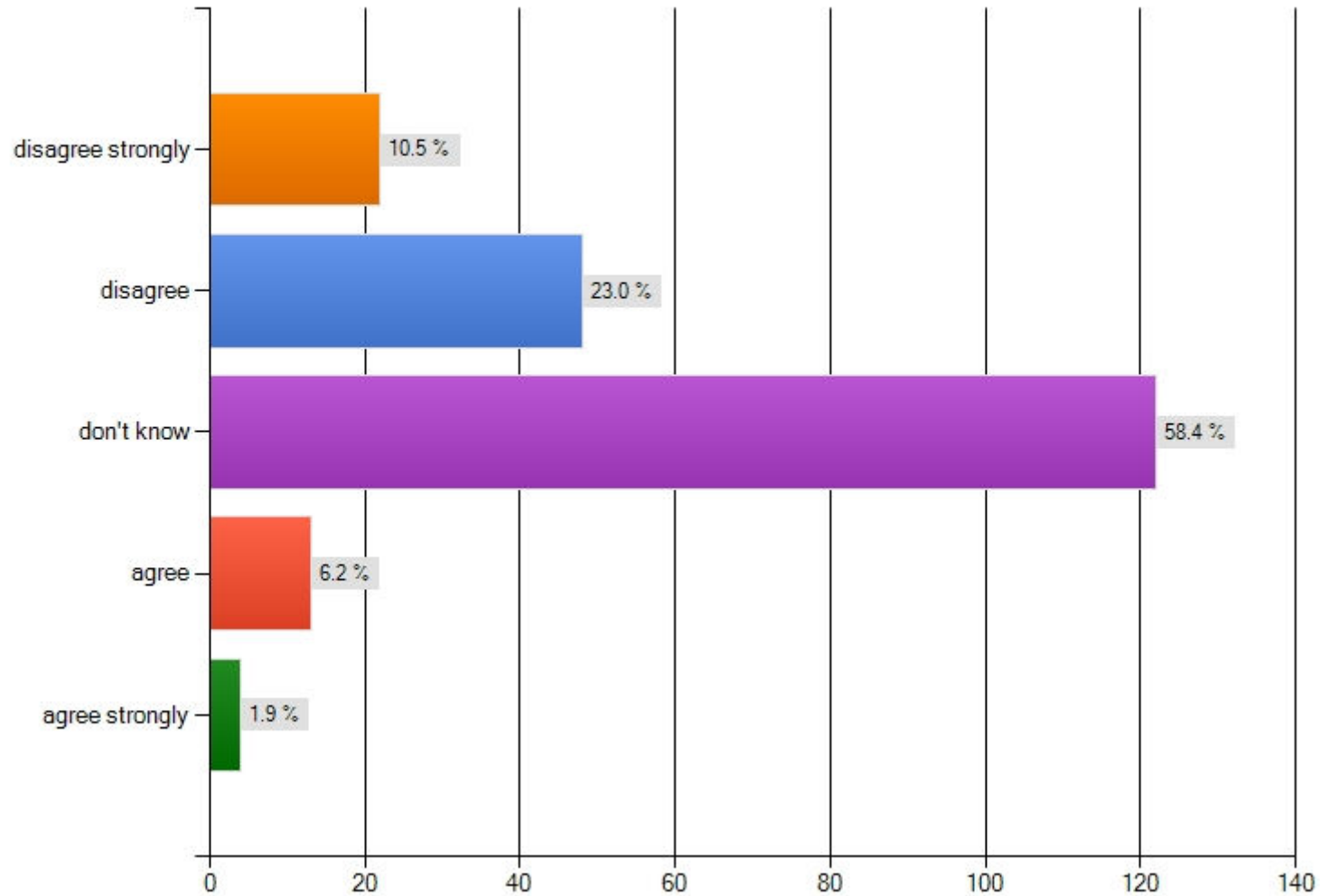
Is there enough information available?

I believe there is sufficient information and help available to enable me and other people to make the most of the above opportunities.(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follows)



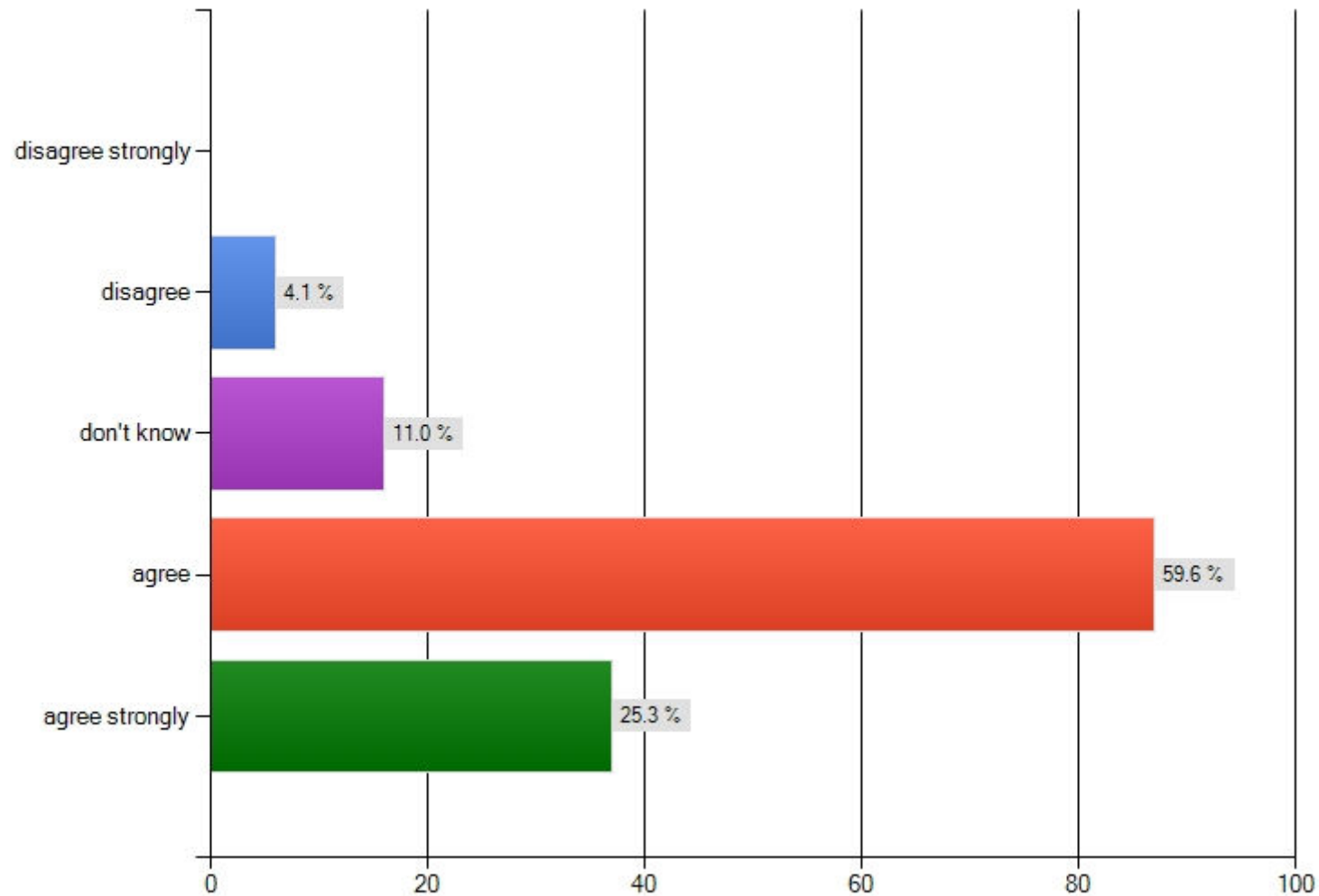
The current format works well...?

The council assembly works well in its current format.(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follows)



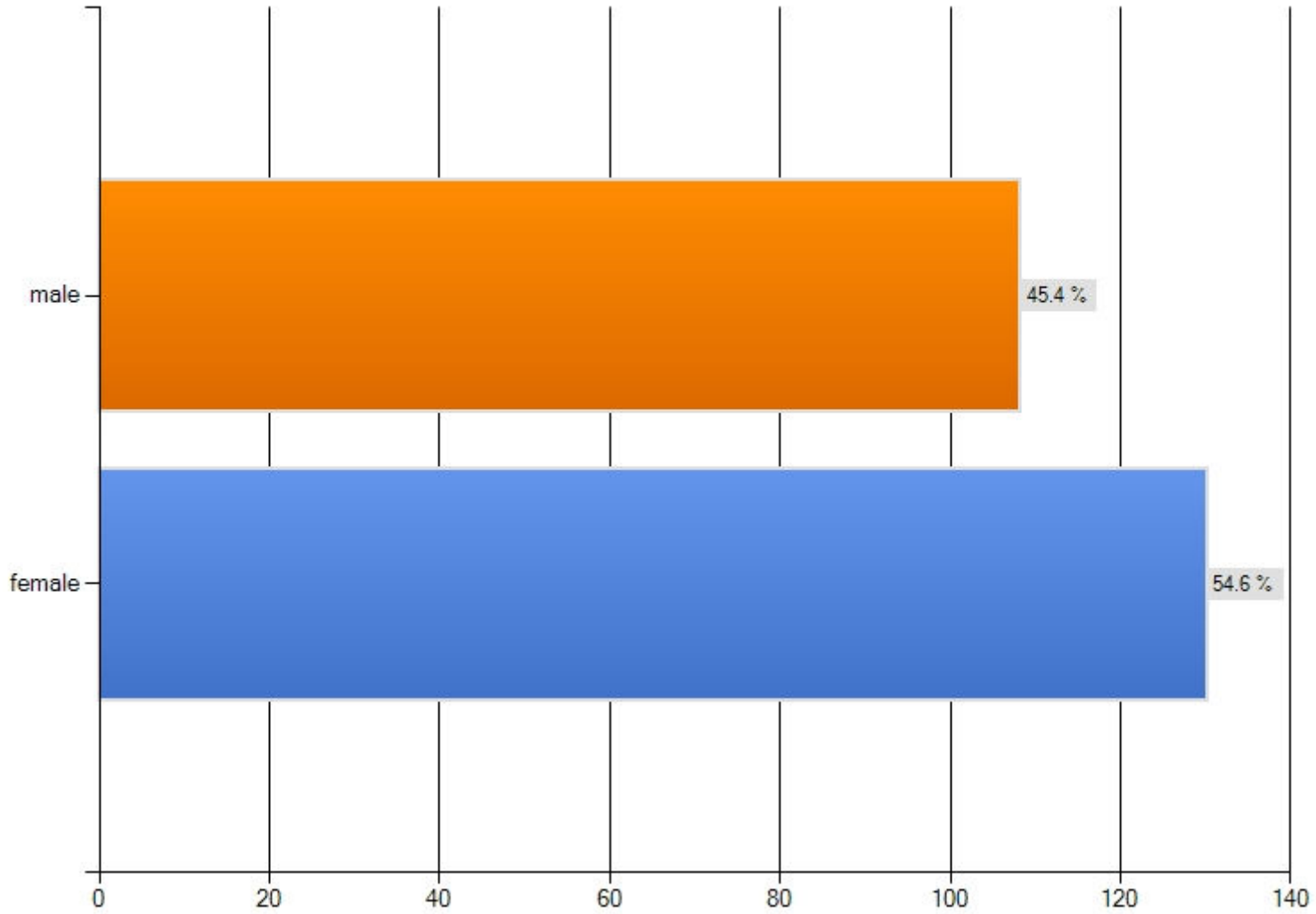
I would consider attending a Council Assembly meeting in future

I would consider attending a council assembly meeting in the future.(please check the box that best reflects your opinion about the statement that follows)



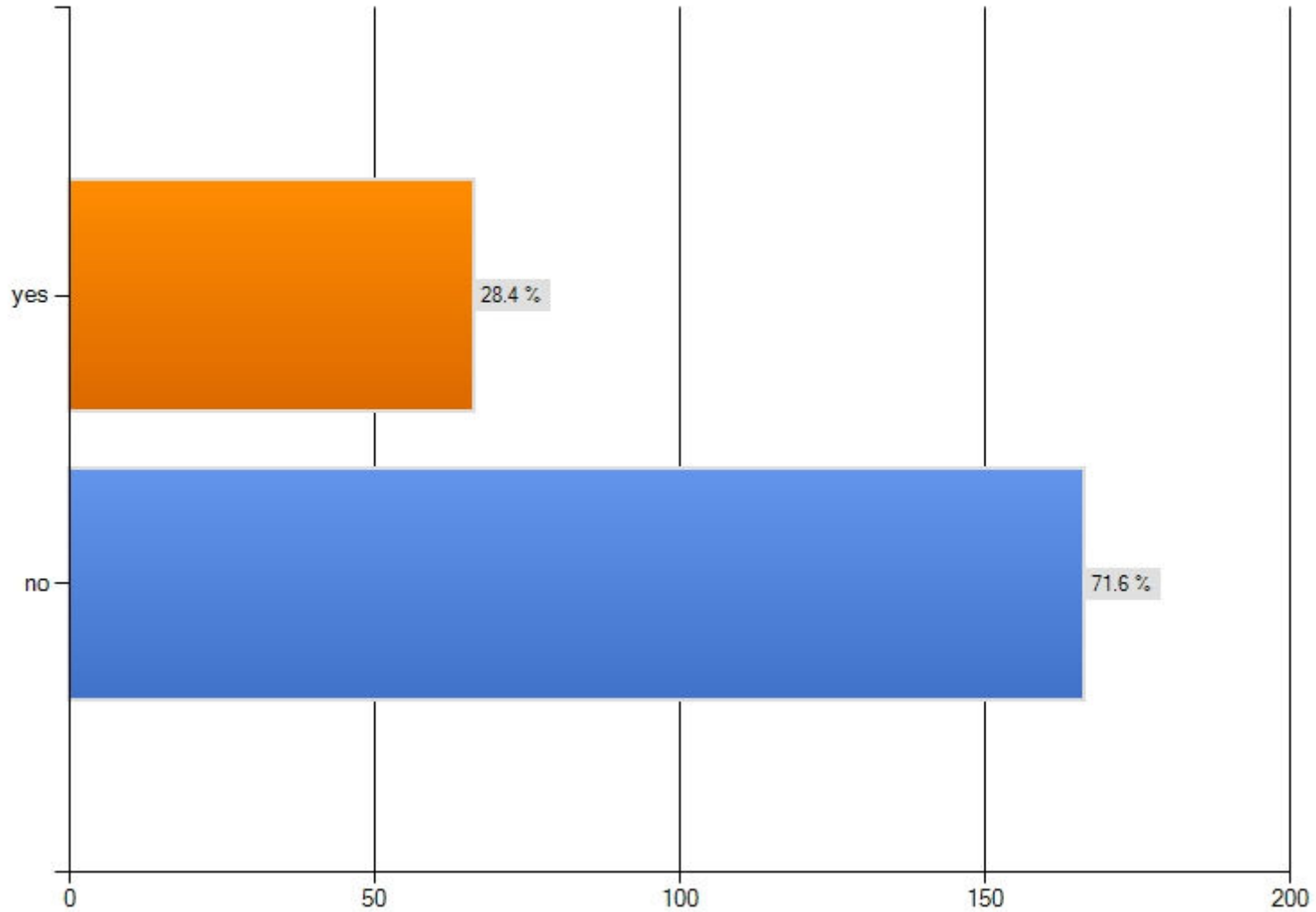
Gender

Are you male or female?



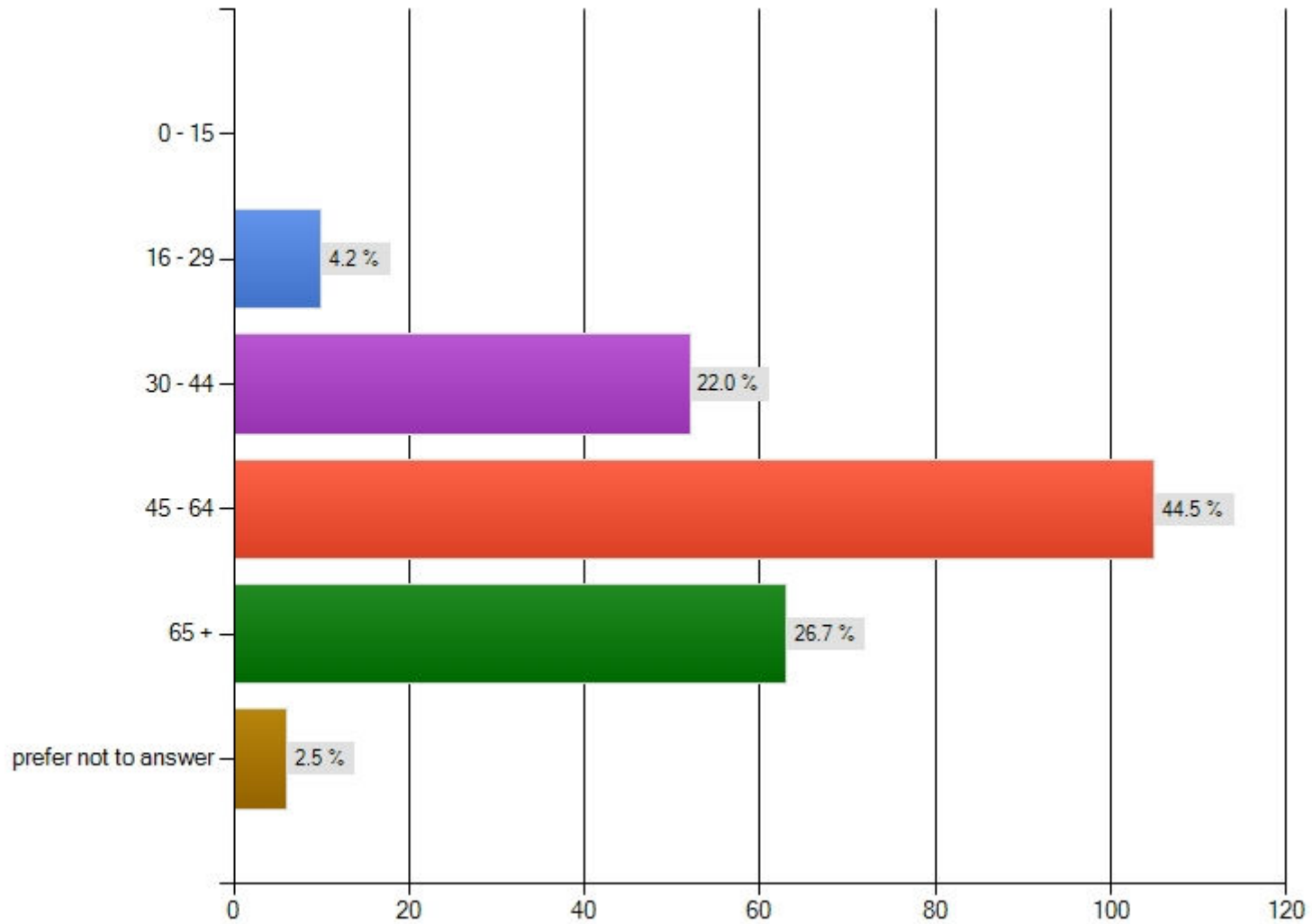
Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long term illness?



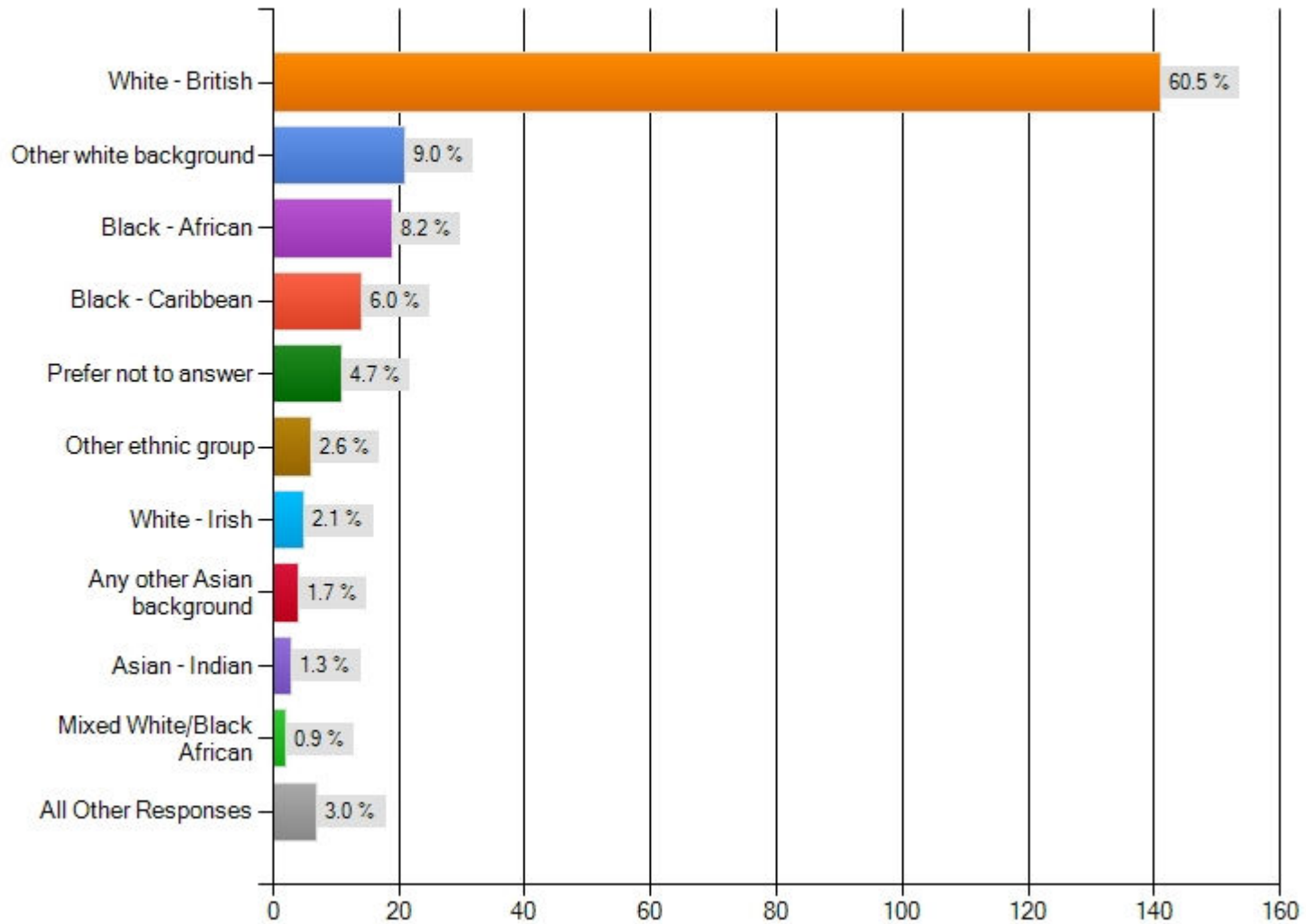
Age group

What is your age group?



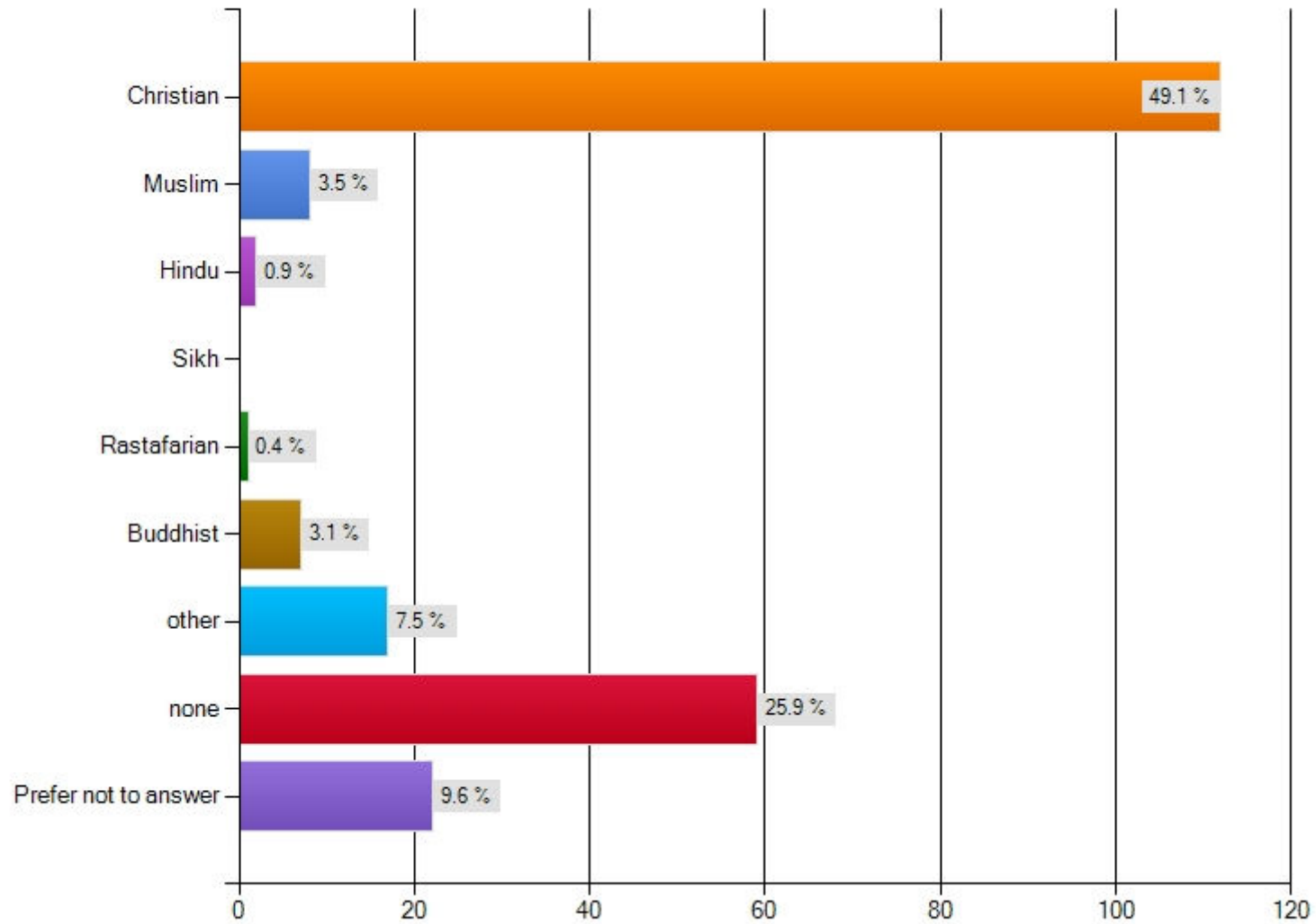
Ethnicity

What is your ethnic group?



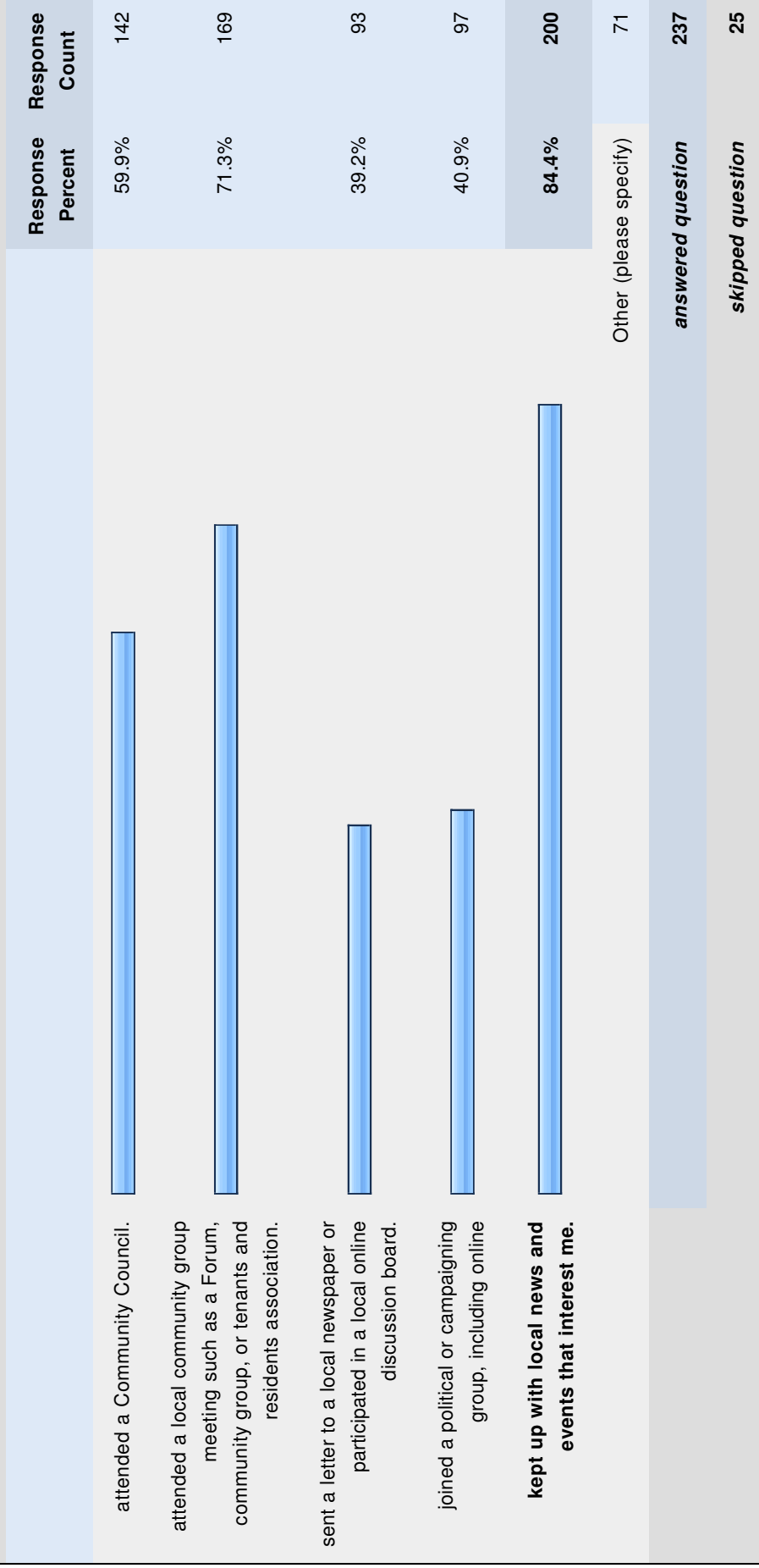
Religion

What is your religion or belief?



Southwark democracy commission survey

How active are you in your local community? Tell us about the different ways you have been involved in local activities and decision making. I have:



Other (please specify)		
1	Very Inactive	Jul 28, 2010 3:13 PM
2	helped up set up a local community group. helped set up public meetings made Fol requests	Jul 30, 2010 8:40 AM
3	Chair a TRA, support a local charity	Jul 31, 2010 1:28 PM

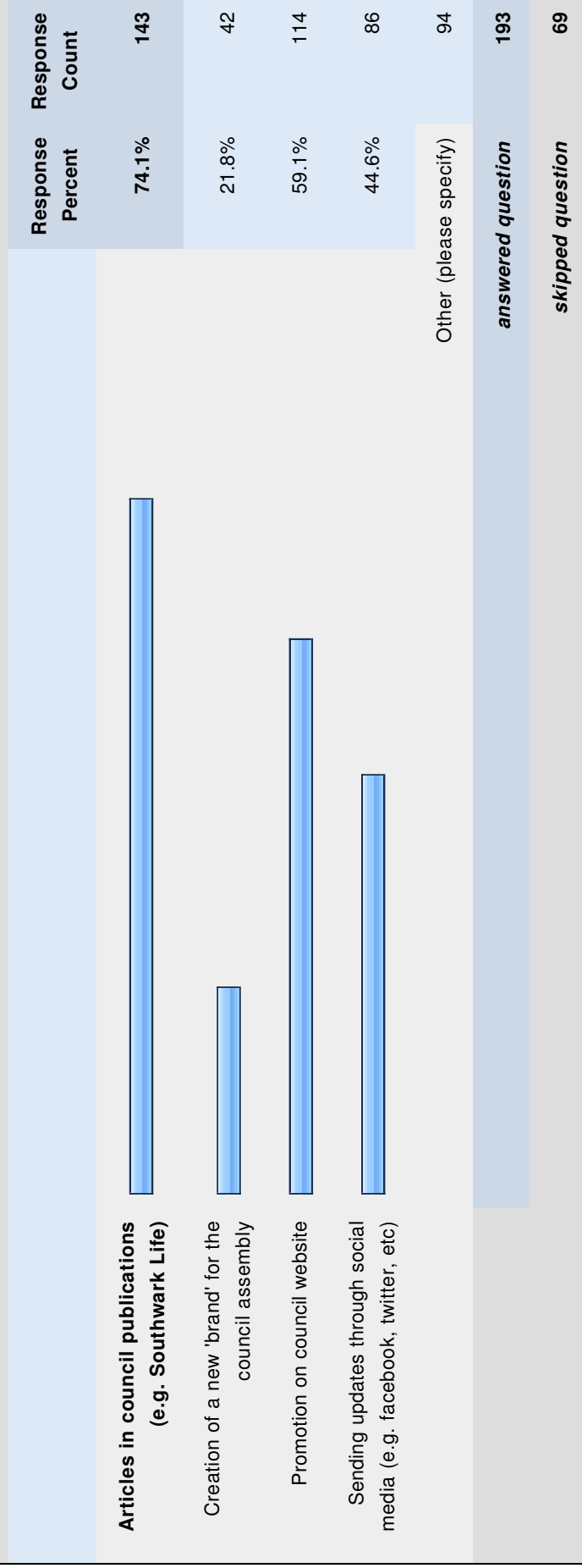
Other (please specify)		
4	written to MP - but never a councillor	Aug 2, 2010 12:52 PM
5	Served on - school governors' board, charity trustees' boards, statutory health forums/LINks Stood as local council candidate (x3) Made Planning objections and contributions, mainly on housing developments Voluntary work - Surrey Docks Farm	Aug 2, 2010 2:14 PM
6	School governor	Aug 2, 2010 2:54 PM
7	Attend Police Ward Panels	Aug 2, 2010 2:54 PM
8	Regularly converse with council about local issues.	Aug 2, 2010 6:37 PM
9	Communicated regularly with my local Councillor	Aug 2, 2010 6:53 PM
10	not active	Aug 4, 2010 2:09 PM
11	Run a community group and have put on BHM event. Also, have acted as a volunteer for local community eventt	Aug 8, 2010 6:54 AM
12	Active Streetleader, making regular reports and attending visual audits of my area.	Aug 8, 2010 5:04 PM
13	Also Chair of A patient's forum, and sit on 2 committees with NHS Southwark	Aug 12, 2010 1:51 PM
14	Involved in organising tenants and residents to host a community event	Aug 12, 2010 4:35 PM
15	Written to my MP and Councillor	Aug 12, 2010 5:26 PM
16	I am a member of Southern Rail Users Group (SRUG) campaigning for better train passenger services for south Londoners.	Aug 12, 2010 6:04 PM
17	I am a Streetleader	Aug 13, 2010 8:03 AM
18	Have been invited to speak at a council assembly meeting, but no date has been settled.	Aug 13, 2010 8:59 AM
19	Member of the Southwark Civic Association	Aug 13, 2010 11:59 AM
20	Police Ward Panel and SPCG	Aug 14, 2010 3:42 PM
21	I have been excluded from community politics by a vicious local hate campaign that was facilitated by Southwark Council officials.	Aug 16, 2010 9:01 AM
22	I am captain of a local tennis club. I am involved with dulwich helpline and with Penge citizens advice bureau.	Aug 17, 2010 6:24 PM
23	Contacted a local councillor	Aug 18, 2010 3:41 PM
24	Have and continue to take an active interest in local traffic management schemes, including making representations to the Council on matters needing improvement. Also active member of Friends of Dulwich Park	Aug 19, 2010 9:47 AM
25	I am a trade union official	Aug 20, 2010 10:23 AM
26	run a local community website, Dulwich OnView - www.dulwichonview.org.uk	Aug 20, 2010 4:41 PM
27	Worked with SLaM on a mental health training scheme: I am 81; and bi-polar 1	Aug 21, 2010 9:32 AM
28	Run Local Community Group for Children and Young People	Aug 22, 2010 9:56 AM
29	Member of The Herne Hill Society Chair of Ruskin Readers, adult literacy club	Aug 23, 2010 4:15 PM
30	21 years as secretary of the T&RA, 6.5 years setting up a TMO, secretary of the local police forum, treasurer of my church, etc. Very involved.	Aug 27, 2010 4:51 PM

Other (please specify)		
31	elected member of Education security committee	Aug 29, 2010 6:24 PM
32	As a leaseholder and resident I face strong opposition from the TRA chairman	Aug 31, 2010 12:46 PM
33	I am a trustee of two local charities.	Sep 1, 2010 7:33 AM
34	Dulwich Society's Tree Committee	Sep 1, 2010 8:54 AM
35	Lots of things.	Sep 1, 2010 9:01 AM
36	All council meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 9:07 AM
37	Was member of the Southwark Alliance for some years etc.	Sep 1, 2010 9:23 AM
38	Written to politicians.	Sep 1, 2010 9:53 AM
39	Visiting older people.	Sep 1, 2010 10:07 AM
40	Editor of Peckham Society News for over 20 years. Written a lot of local history books.	Sep 1, 2010 10:11 AM
41	None	Sep 1, 2010 10:29 AM
42	Trustee / board member for various local charities and groups.	Sep 1, 2010 10:47 AM
43	Member of South Bermondsey Ward Panel (Community Police).	Sep 1, 2010 10:52 AM
44	I am a street leader for Sutherland Walk SE17.	Sep 1, 2010 10:55 AM
45	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 11:06 AM
46	All other council meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 11:09 AM
47	Cossall TRA committee member.	Sep 1, 2010 11:58 AM
48	Working in local hospitals.	Sep 1, 2010 12:06 PM
49	Co-founded SE5 Forum for Camberwell Member of Residents Association Committee Member of So Camberwell SNT panel	Sep 1, 2010 12:11 PM
50	Independent candidate (May 2010) for Newington Ward.	Sep 1, 2010 12:17 PM
51	Sent letters and emails to local councillors about issues I felt they needed to address.	Sep 1, 2010 12:26 PM
52	Emails to council.	Sep 1, 2010 12:30 PM
53	School governor	Sep 1, 2010 12:38 PM
54	1) Wrote to Boris Johnson regarding crime on buses ie pickpockets. 2) Wrote to Gordon Brown stating concern of lack of council houses, libraries, demolishing council housing and reluctantly replacing with so-called affordable housing.	Sep 1, 2010 12:43 PM
55	Honoured ctiz, Southwark Millenium Fellow Union of Youth.	Sep 1, 2010 1:06 PM
56	TA chair	Sep 1, 2010 1:17 PM
57	Executive member of local groups.	Sep 1, 2010 1:33 PM
58	Campaigned for disabled and elderly.	Sep 1, 2010 1:36 PM
59	Chair of the Crystal Palace Community Association.	Sep 1, 2010 2:59 PM
60	Volunteer in the community.	Sep 2, 2010 8:49 AM

Other (please specify)		
61	Surrey Docks Farm Volunteer	Sep 3, 2010 12:09 PM
62	I am a Director for the site I live on - jointly responsible for the freehold.	Sep 3, 2010 12:13 PM
63	Member of Friends of the Earth. Re-established our local Neighbourhood Watch. Attended recycling and environmental events. Attended the Dulwich Estate public meeting, organised by Dulwich Going Greener.	Sep 3, 2010 12:34 PM
64	Chair SCCF many years.	Sep 3, 2010 1:03 PM
65	Chair of Residents Association. Chair of Governors	Sep 9, 2010 3:36 PM
66	I've attended social enterprise courses.	Sep 10, 2010 8:42 AM
67	Active in helping the elderly.	Sep 10, 2010 8:57 AM
68	Performed in 2 site specific theatre performances in Southwark involving community participation.	Sep 10, 2010 8:59 AM
69	Co-ordinator / facilitator of free English class for French minorities.	Sep 10, 2010 9:21 AM
70	Member of local church.	Sep 10, 2010 9:24 AM
71	Management Committee - Surrey Docks Farm Friends of Galleywall Nature Reserve	Sep 10, 2010 2:06 PM

Southwark democracy commission survey

We would like to find out the best way of letting people know about the council assembly and how it works. Which of the following do you think would work? Do you have any other ideas for promoting council assembly?



Other (please specify)	
1	workshops to let people know how the whole council works and the part they can take part in the decision process
2	Attending tenants and residents' meetings and engaging with them. Attending as many community group meetings as possible and being part of that community - some Voluntary Sector organisations and phantom 'umbrella' groups the council seems to rely on for feedback are many times removed from those communities.
	Jul 30, 2010 8:44 AM
	Aug 2, 2010 9:49 AM

Other (please specify)		
3	We sell off all the town halls & store all the mayor's kit & voting stuff etc somewhere in Tooley St. The council meetings are then held in a different part of the borough each time, in any large, suitable building - eg schools, church halls, community halls etc. this would enable greater participation through: meetings being held near to where all the population lives on a revolving basis meetings are held in buildings people are already familiar with & therefore feel less intimidated times of meetings could also vary to suit each venue & to encourage wider participation there are probably lots of other potential benefits, but I've used up all my creativity!	Aug 2, 2010 12:54 PM
4	visiting local groups to discuss (childrens centres, day centres etc)	Aug 2, 2010 1:46 PM
5	monthly email. Southwark Life just ends up in the bin -sorry recycling box!	Aug 2, 2010 1:52 PM
6	Giving it a purpose other than a 'rubber stamp'. All the rest of the tickboxes are a waste of money and time, if it remains a rubber-stamping exercise, with a few long-winded political speeches, a bit of barnstorming to no great effect, and rigid, ruthless voting control.	Aug 2, 2010 2:17 PM
7	Two of these seem good. Southwark Life not - I've lived in the borough for ten years, and only had it delivered twice. What you should do is put agandas and minutes for these meetings on their own RSS feed, so folk can see what's coming up a week in advance. Early Wednesday evening may be fine for people with public-sector jobs, but it's the middle of rush-hour for most of us.	Aug 2, 2010 2:18 PM
8	News items in the local press	Aug 2, 2010 2:55 PM
9	The online East Dulwich Forum is very popular.	Aug 2, 2010 2:56 PM
10	Emails to people who have attended council assembly meetings or who have expressed an interest in council assemblies	Aug 2, 2010 2:58 PM
11	Local forums (that's how I found out it even existed!).	Aug 2, 2010 3:22 PM
12	Please no "new brands" We have the council corporate style - use it! Keep things simple!	Aug 2, 2010 5:18 PM
13	Whatever is don should be done at minimum cost. I do not support council funded publications promoting council activities	Aug 2, 2010 5:50 PM
14	A newsletter - hard-copy or email.	Aug 2, 2010 6:38 PM
15	Have a regular Newsletter deliverable by email	Aug 2, 2010 6:54 PM
16	Email/text messages	Aug 4, 2010 5:41 PM
17	what is meant by 'new brand'?	Aug 4, 2010 7:28 PM
18	Feeding through existing community fora e.g.Community Coucils, community meetings, showcases at local libraries etc	Aug 8, 2010 6:55 AM
19	Utilise busy council places ie public libraries and 'one stop shops' to promote the assembly through posters and leaflets. Also, an awarness could be raised at local tenants and residents association through either advertising or a council representative speaker.	Aug 8, 2010 9:43 AM
20	Advertise in local press and at Community Councils.	Aug 8, 2010 5:15 PM
21	Look to reach people through existing networks rather than re-inventing the wheel. Tailor the information so that it is of interest to people - relate it to their day-to-day lives.	Aug 12, 2010 2:30 PM
22	Sending updates in the email newsletter.	Aug 12, 2010 2:37 PM
23	Workign more closely with tenant associations to promote ideas and interests from local people	Aug 12, 2010 3:01 PM

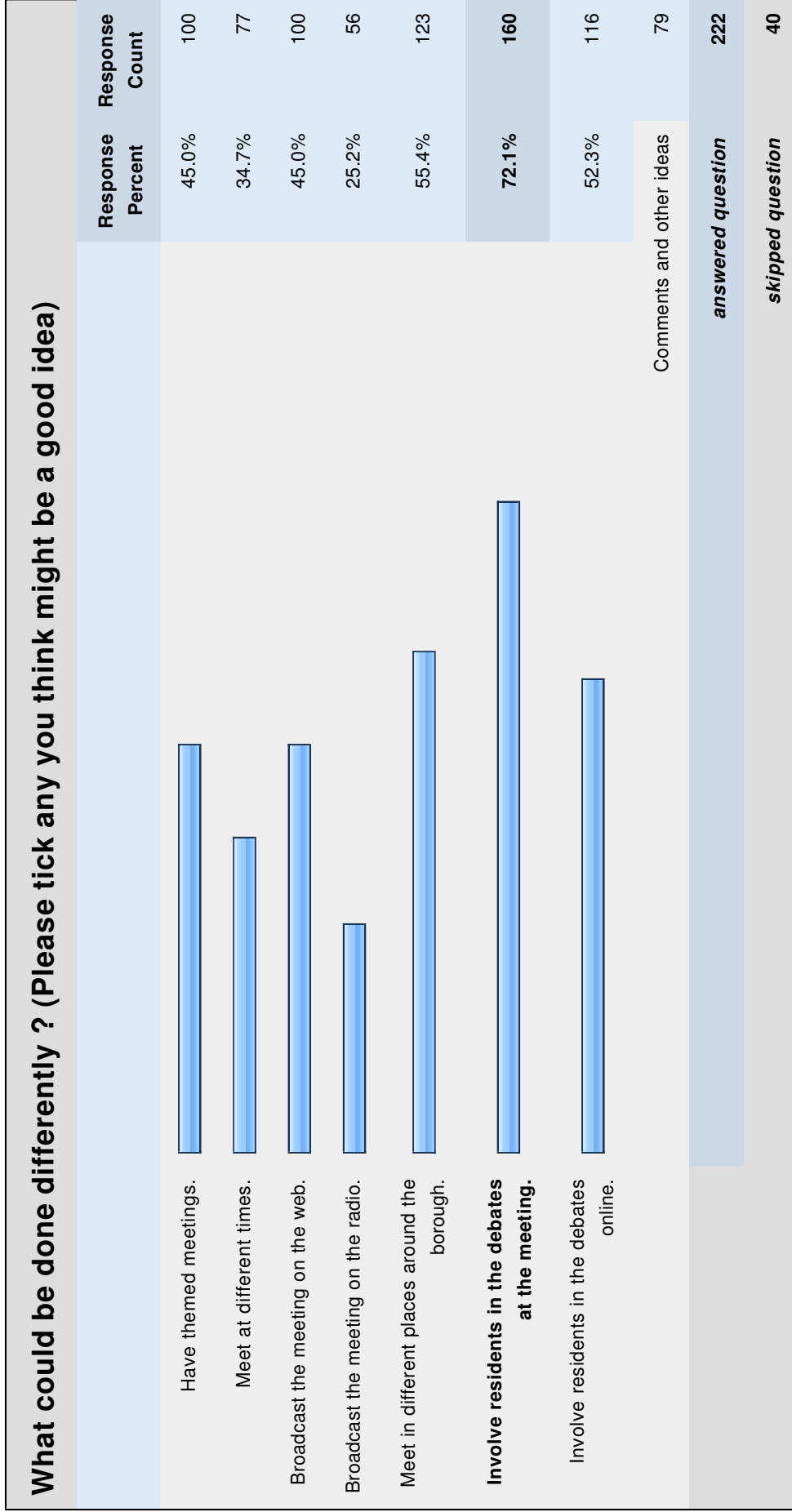
Other (please specify)		
24	Send flyers to all who pay council tax, with brief explanation, an date of next assembly	Aug 12, 2010 4:25 PM
25	Ensuring that whatever information comes out about the assembly is not too jargonistic.	Aug 12, 2010 4:37 PM
26	Face to face outreach to promote the assembly, attending community events and generally getting out and about where people go	Aug 12, 2010 5:27 PM
27	Announcements in local press with, perhaps, a specific recognisable regular Council Assembly article.	Aug 12, 2010 6:07 PM
28	promot through tenants & residents associations	Aug 12, 2010 9:48 PM
29	Council publications such as Southwark Life are a waste of our money. Use local independent print media such as Southwark News and SLP and popular online forums such as SE1 and Urban75.	Aug 16, 2010 9:04 AM
30	Regular newsletters and an annual report highlighting public involvement in decision making	Aug 16, 2010 11:03 AM
31	* Local Radio * Local question time * Most important impact of Council works is improving the quality of life of Southwark residents, and it should take precedent over the political correctness.	Aug 16, 2010 12:41 PM
32	Have 'meet the assembly' sessions in visible, easily accessible places such as dulwich park, goose green or local pubs.	Aug 17, 2010 6:28 PM
33	Suggest you set up a voluntary email mailing list system to let interested people know what issues are coming up in the council assembly meetings	Aug 19, 2010 9:52 AM
34	A dedicated but simple leaflet/pamphlet to be posted and left to take, in libraries, doctor's surgeries, community centres, leisure centres etc. and any places in Southwark, where people tend to gather/attend.	Aug 20, 2010 8:56 AM
35	Place advertisements in local press clearly stating the agenda and decisions to be made in plenty of time for the meeting	Aug 20, 2010 10:25 AM
36	Tell people what it is for - in plain english and what decisions it does and does not make and how people can best influence these decisions and find out about them before they are presented with a "fait accompli"	Aug 20, 2010 11:29 AM
37	Sending out emails to all interested, with Minutes of meetings, or perhaps summaries of main decisions taken	Aug 20, 2010 7:10 PM
38	It will also be very helpful if some attempts are made to look at how to train some other communities to get involved and be active in these meetings	Aug 22, 2010 9:58 AM
39	Tryb promoting, with good relevant and (attractive to the media) active stories to tell to South London Press, Evening Standard, BBC London	Aug 25, 2010 11:56 AM
40	public libraries (perhaps using posters)	Aug 26, 2010 11:47 AM
41	Promotion at community council	Aug 27, 2010 10:41 AM
42	Put up posters in libraries. People who read books would be interested in attending as they have enquiring minds.	Aug 27, 2010 4:53 PM
43	Posters, noticeboards, distribution lists ...	Aug 28, 2010 12:23 PM
44	not all people read southwark life, or twitter. consider the disability act 2005, learning disabilities, dyslexia, use radio to promote and leaflet to doors, all political councillors should promote the service based on residents voting for them. We need to be involved and aware what the council is doing for the borough therefore it is in their interest to use all forms of media to inform residents.	Aug 29, 2010 6:28 PM
45	Email updates to community contacts eg TRAs.	Aug 30, 2010 4:51 PM
46	Build a database of local people who are interested.	Aug 30, 2010 5:43 PM

Other (please specify)		
47	Local paper Southwark News	Aug 31, 2010 4:14 PM
48	Personal visits	Aug 31, 2010 4:19 PM
49	Articles in the local press; direct contact with local voluntary organisations	Sep 1, 2010 7:36 AM
50	Large signs at key areas eg Bermondsey Tube.	Sep 1, 2010 8:48 AM
51	Setting dates of Assembly and keeping to them.	Sep 1, 2010 8:59 AM
52	Meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 9:08 AM
53	Southwark News. South London Press.	Sep 1, 2010 10:12 AM
54	None	Sep 1, 2010 10:30 AM
55	Community notice boards eg Surrey Quays. Community Council.	Sep 1, 2010 10:38 AM
56	Local newspapers.	Sep 1, 2010 10:44 AM
57	Informing rather than promoting. Please be careful not to miss out those with no internet etc. It's no good having day-long meetings - people don't want to give up that much time when they're desperate for lunch and / or company.	Sep 1, 2010 10:48 AM
58	Make it an item at the Community Councils.	Sep 1, 2010 10:53 AM
59	Stickers on Southwark's wheelie bins.	Sep 1, 2010 10:56 AM
60	Through T&RA meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 11:09 AM
61	Email distribution lists SE5 Forum for Camberwell website Councillors encouraging their constituents to attend	Sep 1, 2010 12:12 PM
62	Unless more public involved, rest is pointless.	Sep 1, 2010 12:17 PM
63	Have one or two single online links, and guarantee a meaningful response within 48 hours.	Sep 1, 2010 12:28 PM
64	By creating activities for people to get the awareness.	Sep 1, 2010 12:39 PM
65	Not Southwark Life, only used to present council through rosie spectacles when Liberal council was in control - always used as a Conservative Con or Condem. Use Southwark News as a supplement.	Sep 1, 2010 12:45 PM
66	SE1 newsletter.	Sep 1, 2010 12:52 PM
67	Sending updates through TRAs, schools, organisations and local businesses.	Sep 1, 2010 1:21 PM
68	Southwark News. Sputh London Press.	Sep 1, 2010 1:28 PM
69	Ensure those affected are informed.	Sep 1, 2010 1:37 PM
70	Identify and notify organisations and representative groups directly. Many will be listed on the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)	Sep 1, 2010 3:01 PM
71	I think that this question put the cart before the horse. I do not think that this is an issue of presentation but content. At present what goes on in Council Assembly is unlikely to be of that much interest to the majority of citizens in Southwark as it is largely devoted to party positioning. Until that issue is addressed as to the purpose of the assembly there is not much point in promoting it to a wider audience.	Sep 1, 2010 3:28 PM
72	Send out publications in time as I received this on 17.8.10 too late to attend Peckham library.	Sep 2, 2010 8:45 AM

Other (please specify)		
73	Local tv advertisement.	Sep 2, 2010 8:49 AM
74	Notice in local libraries.	Sep 3, 2010 10:43 AM
75	Unbridged communication gaps between the Council Assembly and the people of Southwark.	Sep 3, 2010 10:49 AM
76	Local papers eg Southwark News.	Sep 3, 2010 12:10 PM
77	Direct email - give people the opportunity to sign up, maybe when sending out Council Tax renewals?	Sep 3, 2010 12:14 PM
78	We are strongly against using council website and social media because many groups of people would be excluded eg pensioners.	Sep 3, 2010 12:35 PM
79	Booklets promoting & community councils	Sep 3, 2010 12:46 PM
80	Direct mailings like this one.	Sep 3, 2010 12:48 PM
81	Email. I am an email person. This should be active accessible and instant.	Sep 3, 2010 1:06 PM
82	Background briefing in Southwark News? Council newspaper?	Sep 3, 2010 1:21 PM
83	Local press	Sep 9, 2010 3:43 PM
84	Via local voluntary groups.	Sep 9, 2010 3:50 PM
85	By emails.	Sep 9, 2010 4:12 PM
86	Local press release!	Sep 10, 2010 8:42 AM
87	Hold them in places like schools, community groups. Invite people personally to attend on a rota basis.	Sep 10, 2010 8:49 AM
88	Email Address	Sep 10, 2010 8:54 AM
89	Informing by local leafletting.	Sep 10, 2010 8:57 AM
90	More informal meetings / events with incentive eg refreshments, one on one meetings with officers and councillors.	Sep 10, 2010 9:00 AM
91	Local papers, eg Southwark News.	Sep 10, 2010 9:15 AM
92	Sending letters to residents in their houses by post.	Sep 10, 2010 9:21 AM
93	Adverts in Southwark News; Posters in parks where lots of people go; posters in public buildings; interviews with people who felt it a good thing (if it isn't seen to make a difference, seen to be listening, it won't last)	Sep 10, 2010 11:02 AM
94	Brand - sounds like nonsense. More residents involved in running Southwark Life - editing committee - stories - news etc Too many LAZY + USELESS councillors - they could do much more!	Sep 10, 2010 1:43 PM

Southwark democracy commission survey

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Comments and other ideas		
1	As long as it is a whipped political meeting attendance is pointless.	Jul 28, 2010 3:50 PM
2	publish the agenda to assembly and community council meetings ahead of event, not all agenda items can be known at publication but it will give a basis for public discussion and feedback prior to meeting. publish meeting minutes within time limit, three days?, this gives everyone a chance to find out what happened and those who attended the opportunity to have altered any part they disagree with	Jul 30, 2010 8:55 AM
3	I STRONGLY support the idea of meeting in other places around the Borough. You could use Community Council locations	Jul 31, 2010 1:32 PM

Comments and other ideas		
4	see suggestion re selling off town halls earlier in survey	Aug 2, 2010 12:57 PM
5	Council assemblies have never been magnets for public attendance. If the aim is to make them a 'draw', there will be no interest in a powerless talking shop, from the public, or the media, which once did bother to attend these events, not least because they had some civic dignity and gravitas, they represented something important about local life, until and unless there are some real decisions made at these meetings. If a decision is going to be made at an assembly there should be pre-publicity about that: like an important or finely-balanced vote in the House of Commons. If an issue was raised by the public via a Petition or Deputation, which clearly commanded great and genuine support - not falsified or co-erced - and it was within the Council's powers to do something about it, it should be flagged up in advance and given a decent time-slot, not two minutes up front, to be sniffily dismissed by some spotty barrister wannabee politico as an affront on his intellectual prowess, as in 'how dare the plebs question my right to govern them'.	Aug 2, 2010 2:34 PM
6	Persuade us you will listen, and not just be reactive. Otherwise what is the point of us coming to hear you all speak about what you are going to do anyway. Public consultation is an oxymoron. The council does what it wants whether we like it or not. persuade us this is not true and we will come.	Aug 2, 2010 3:00 PM
7	Publicise meetings and agenda via website, local forums (eg: East Dulwich Forum), local press,	Aug 2, 2010 5:53 PM
8	Have councillors interviewed on LBC &/or BBC London	Aug 2, 2010 6:59 PM
9	Seperate official council business out from meetings where residents can actually participate and put forward their views on important local issues.	Aug 12, 2010 2:39 PM
10	Use local tenant halls and community council venues for these meetings	Aug 12, 2010 3:08 PM
	Attend community council evenings to discuss the local developments and what is interesting them	
11	A roadshow could be a way of engaging local people. I'm not sure if it is possible (or legal?) to set aside a certain amount of the agenda to deal specifically with issues in that one community council area. Doing so might ensure that local people might come along. Like me, if I come to a general meeting, a lot of the discussion might have no direct relevance to me.	Aug 12, 2010 4:49 PM
12	Free refreshments always go down well eg tea, coffee, biscuits, (you may do this already).	Aug 12, 2010 5:02 PM
13	Have sandwich and coffee/tea break for Councillors to meet those sitting in gallery.	Aug 12, 2010 6:13 PM
14	Give residents a chance to send in "requests / questions / issues" beforehand, keep the meeting "short and sweet"	Aug 12, 2010 6:53 PM
15	Abolish cabinet government and have the council run by all the councillors.	Aug 14, 2010 1:05 PM
16	Live updating online and discussion via a web forum; swift preparation and publication of minutes online.	Aug 16, 2010 9:11 AM
17	In my experience, people prefer to meet at the same venue, and going somewhere like Peckham Town Hall, or Tooley Street does bring them closer to the Council. That said, if you meet in different places around the borough, you will attract new faces from that particular locality.	Aug 16, 2010 11:45 AM
18	Keep meetings to time ie. Less than 1.30 hours. Chairperson needs to stop rambling talkers and keep to agenda. Short comments from residents should be taken.	Aug 17, 2010 6:38 PM
19	There are live conferencing internet arrangements available for use with meetings, including allowing discussion/question contributions (usually through a moderator) . My professional institution (I Civil Engineers) uses it very successfully for lectures and similar, and I think it could easily be adapted for council meetings.	Aug 19, 2010 9:58 AM
20	Please see my suggestions in section 4.	Aug 20, 2010 9:21 AM

Comments and other ideas		
21	Meetings should take place outside of a normal working day. Support should be provided in the form of an "independent friend" to encourage deputations. More general participation in council business should be through consultation stages leading up to the production of reports and recommendations.	Aug 20, 2010 10:33 AM
22	make the decisions including the people not separately from them and then pretend to listen. If you don't want to be influenced - don't ask the questions	Aug 20, 2010 11:32 AM
23	I just need to experience some procedure that will explain how my involvement could possibly contribute to anything!	Aug 21, 2010 9:47 AM
24	Some of the meetings I have attended in the past have gone on until the early hours of the morning. This makes them inaccessible for most residents who have either to work the next day or have caring responsibilities etc.	Aug 24, 2010 7:44 AM
25	T&RA's heavily involve elderly people who don't use the web, Facebook or Twitter so don't exclude them by using such things. The assembly does not meet at the Town Hall, it meets at the old town hall in Peckham. You have to be clear what you mean if people are not to miss out or have a wasted journey.	Aug 27, 2010 5:01 PM
26	all is applicable for decemocracy	Aug 29, 2010 6:32 PM
27	Regular date (eg 2nd Tues of month), time and location helps. If you have an issue you want to address, you can anticipate assembly meetings and plan for them.	Aug 30, 2010 4:55 PM
28	A "webinar" available live AND as a download/podcast accompanied by written content would be very helpful, allowing me to select the parts of the event that are of particular interest to me. I assume this would also allow for direct feedback online.	Aug 30, 2010 5:46 PM
29	Create a news letter/email for recipients who wish to sign up/be kept notified.	Aug 31, 2010 12:49 PM
30	Never been to one so don't know.	Aug 31, 2010 4:14 PM
31	Home visits	Aug 31, 2010 4:20 PM
32	Thyere has been a tendency for political points scoring at these meetings to the detriment of the debates for a resident point of view	Sep 1, 2010 7:43 AM
33	Don't know.	Sep 1, 2010 8:41 AM
34	Council Assembly meetings are just that and although the public can attend it should be a Council Assembly meeting. Encouraging the public to participate will only extend matters / meetings further. Community group meetings are the place for community participation.	Sep 1, 2010 8:46 AM
35	Move the debates to a public gallery you can see proceedings from. The venue should be near a tube / railway station.	Sep 1, 2010 8:52 AM
36	Find ways of linking issues that are of significance to local neighbourhoods all the way through to the council level - Community Council - Cabinet - Scrutiny - Assembly. Help people make the link from the very local to the borough-wide issues, and vice versa.	Sep 1, 2010 9:06 AM
37	As above. Assembly hall where many people can attend.	Sep 1, 2010 10:00 AM
38	Making meetings more informal.	Sep 1, 2010 10:09 AM
39	None	Sep 1, 2010 10:31 AM
40	Success will depend on resulting action and responsiveness, not resistance, of councillors.	Sep 1, 2010 10:40 AM
41	I have ticked involving residents in the debates, but this needs to be done very carefully! I wide range of representative people must feel able to do this, rather than a few same old individuals droning on about their pet subjects.	Sep 1, 2010 10:51 AM
42	Sounds like the local Community Council to me.	Sep 1, 2010 10:54 AM

Comments and other ideas		
43	Publish agenda in communal residents' noticeboards and on Southwark's network of wheelie bins.	Sep 1, 2010 10:58 AM
44	- although this excludes those with no internet access.	Sep 1, 2010 11:05 AM
45	Clearer principles eg evidence. Clear willingness to respond / be open.	Sep 1, 2010 12:08 PM
46	I do not think people can be bothered to attend Assembly meetings as there is a feeling that the Assembly does what it likes/does not make the effort to explain issues/provides no feedback to groups who have petitioned, etc. It feels like an insiders club.	Sep 1, 2010 12:15 PM
47	Meetings in the 7 Community Councils areas.	Sep 1, 2010 12:19 PM
48	Is not everybody have access.	Sep 1, 2010 12:40 PM
49	And listen to the residents. Penalise councillors who don't attend meetings who wonder if their salary has been paid in.	Sep 1, 2010 12:47 PM
50	Have some meetings in the day-time.	Sep 1, 2010 12:50 PM
51	Have the meeting on the web for a prolonged period of time so people can see what happened.	Sep 1, 2010 12:53 PM
52	Sat mornings for those at work.	Sep 1, 2010 1:18 PM
53	Initial reminder before the day through local shops, betting shops, schools, voluntary organisations. More grass root publicity.	Sep 1, 2010 1:24 PM
54	Inform through local press and tenants meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 1:39 PM
55	Meet in the daytime for pensioners. Meet in different places around the borough to help elderly get around. Attend tenants association meetings.	Sep 1, 2010 1:42 PM
56	Local items of concern/interest could be topic based	Sep 1, 2010 3:07 PM
57	There are a number of issues here. There is the issue of the meetings being interesting. I think that interesting will mean more broadly "of concern or interest to people in Southwark" - that I think is an issue of the content/topics of the subjects being discussed and the way the meeting handles them (ie how long the debate goes on for and how long people speak for and whether what they say has any relevance to the topic being discussed). Secondly there is the issue of how easy it is to take part. Here the big question is whether it is a forum for Councillors or the the broader citizenry.	Sep 1, 2010 3:40 PM
58	It could be done earlier, the town hall has more space and is easily more accessible.	Sep 2, 2010 8:48 AM
59	Meet in main local libraries.	Sep 3, 2010 10:45 AM
60	7 times a year in the evening is not at all adequate to serve the community that one belongs to or will live to serve. This should be reviewed as this might have long been established in the 'dark ages' but modern world should promote constancy or constant attention which will give council Members more public recognition and appreciations for services being rendered.	Sep 3, 2010 10:54 AM
61	Provide light refreshments - this often gets people out.	Sep 3, 2010 12:16 PM
62	- Reduce jargon - Demonstrate to people that their suggestions and concerns will be taken seriously and acted on. eg by publicising examples where issues have been resolved.	Sep 3, 2010 12:40 PM
63	Put out news not just about that fact that it is meeting, but also about what it is discussing. People are interested in specific topics, not meetings for the sake of meetings.	Sep 3, 2010 12:50 PM

Comments and other ideas		
64	<p>Themed meetings are essential. Officer presentations are meaningless. Online debates sound ok. I haven't the skill. I think local CC could have a 'public conversation' time. The Your Shout approach is just too in-house and formality. They key way to help this would be to share in the round rather than front to back and inevitably party political. Have a 'speak to your ward councillor' 15 mins in different areas if this might help establish another way of engagement.</p>	Sep 3, 2010 1:17 PM
65	Increase number of meetings.	Sep 3, 2010 1:24 PM
66	Planning Committee needs to meet earlier in the day. I have been to said meetings until the early hours of the day, when both councillors and public are nodding off!	Sep 9, 2010 3:43 PM
67	Meeting dates to be put in council publications for residents not on-line to remember to attend and observe.	Sep 9, 2010 3:48 PM
68	Make it eye-catching.	Sep 9, 2010 4:06 PM
69	Many older people still use Tele-text / Ceefax to get info. There are community / network sections on these sites that could be used. There are many excellent community websites that could advertise these meetings like SE1.com	Sep 10, 2010 8:46 AM
70	Not everyone listens to the radio. Not everybody is on-line.	Sep 10, 2010 8:52 AM
71	Email.	Sep 10, 2010 8:55 AM
72	Let the input of the residents at the meetings be made manifest in decision making.	Sep 10, 2010 9:23 AM
73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overview and Scrutiny Reports to go to Full Council / Assembly - Community Councils to be able to refer major issues to Full Council / Assembly - Assembly to receive 'green papers.' 	Sep 10, 2010 9:26 AM
74	Have some informal meetings - to meet Councillors in an unpressured, unthreatening situations.	Sep 10, 2010 11:02 AM
75	<p>Themes should not replace urgent issues. Meet next to major transport hub. Too many councillors FAIL AND NEGLECT to represent the views of all their constituents. It is VERY IMPORTANT to have more direct channels of communication - bottom to top. ROTHERHITHE IS TERRIBLE!</p>	Sep 10, 2010 1:48 PM
76	Meet at London Bridge.	Sep 10, 2010 1:51 PM
77	Local school newsletter.	Sep 10, 2010 2:27 PM
78	Walk about and make yourself / your function known. Get community development workers more involved.	Sep 10, 2010 2:38 PM
79	Leaflets. Not everybody has computer.	Sep 10, 2010 2:40 PM

Southwark democracy commission survey

If you have some experience of the council assembly please tell us here what you think doesn't work well.	
	Response Count
	61
answered question	
61	
skipped question	
201	

	Response Text	
1	N/A	Jul 28, 2010 2:54 PM
2	n/a	Jul 28, 2010 3:16 PM
3	In a fairly recent planning meeting for a development in the Downton SE16 area, a vote was tied, so the chair had a casting vote leading to a planning decision in favour of developers which was clearly not popular with the public.	Jul 29, 2010 11:21 AM
4	I have observed such antics as I mention above. I was made to feel small-fry and a wretched nuisance when I brought my question to the floor of the Council. Some so-called 'executive' Councillors were arrogantly contemptuous and dismissive, and I took away an abiding hatred of two of those individual councillors for the rest of my life for trying to humiliate and abuse me in such an unnerving public event. They are despicable, and all Councillors should be sternly required not to treat members of the public in such a disgusting fashion, if you want to justify yourselves.	Aug 2, 2010 2:34 PM
5	Being made to feel I was inferior, told that I did not have a voice.	Aug 2, 2010 3:00 PM
6	Boring, waste of time, you all know how you're going to vote so the debates are irrelevant and change nothing. You might as well stay at home and vote electronically.	Aug 5, 2010 12:52 AM
7	lack of information	Aug 5, 2010 4:42 AM
8	Public gallery at Townhall is not 'user friendly' for residents attending CA.	Aug 8, 2010 5:40 PM
9	I haven't been to a Southwark meeting but elsewhere, there are processes through which residents can get involved (deputations, petitions etc) that come across as merely playing lip service to public engagement. This can be damaging to the democratic process, discouraging people further from bothering to get involved.	Aug 12, 2010 2:39 PM
10	Meeting in the same place all the time Not listening too local voices enough	Aug 12, 2010 3:08 PM
11	I have no direct experience of the assembly but as an ordinary citizen the image of it is slightly remote, austere and procedural. I get this impression primarily from having read minutes of meetings. Very, very dry...	Aug 12, 2010 4:49 PM

Response Text		
12	items of concern to many people are sometimes "sidelined" in favour of councillors interests	Aug 12, 2010 5:42 PM
13	I have never heard of the council assembly outside of Gerald's invitation, and I would consider myself relatively "switched on." It should be easy to access the agenda for the meetings, know which officials are attending, and perhaps a primer on what a newcomer should expect.	Aug 13, 2010 9:05 AM
14	not everyone can meet in the evenings have you thought of a Saturday time slot?	Aug 14, 2010 3:23 PM
15	It seems that the tendering for the Elephant regeneration has not been well handled.	Aug 16, 2010 9:11 AM
16	Please see my comments in Section 4.	Aug 20, 2010 9:21 AM
17	There must be some flexibility in the meetings	Aug 22, 2010 10:04 AM
18	Too much flunkery and formality at the start of the meetings. Reams of paperwork for those attending mean that it can be difficult to follow the meeting. Papers need to be more easily accessible and less legalistic so people can follow proceedings.	Aug 24, 2010 7:44 AM
19	The format is dry and crusty and ever-so-boring. Some meetings used to go on past midnight. The councillors talk in gobbledegook. The councillors hurl insults across the floor at each other. There's too much point scoring and ego trips and not enough discussion on an even level. Opposing parties don't want to agree anything on principle and people up in the gallery walk out or fall asleep.	Aug 27, 2010 5:01 PM
20	This needs to be promote from the begining, what is purpose, aims and objective, can residents make a different to discussion and influence changes, if so, how?	Aug 29, 2010 6:32 PM
21	See above from the public gallery there is little or no feeling of involvement, more a feeling of exclusion	Sep 1, 2010 7:43 AM
22	See previous page. Many Members need microphone training.	Sep 1, 2010 8:52 AM
23	Too much wasted time ie proceedings etc.	Sep 1, 2010 9:00 AM
24	Discussions.	Sep 1, 2010 9:13 AM
25	Not enough public space. Papers not available easily except if you have contacts.	Sep 1, 2010 9:25 AM
26	Public gallery	Sep 1, 2010 10:00 AM
27	A Lib Dem Councillor failed to answer a question I had gone to the Town Hall to ask. I was far from pleased and haven't been to the Council Assembly since that experience.	Sep 1, 2010 10:14 AM
28	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 10:21 AM
29	None	Sep 1, 2010 10:31 AM
30	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 10:58 AM
31	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 11:08 AM
32	When you pay a blind eye.	Sep 1, 2010 12:00 PM
33	Introductions are extremely poor. Members should wear name badges describing their role. Council toggles just don't do it. AV is poor or non existent. Members appear to use the time before the meeting to catch up with their chums rather than get round the room and meet people.	Sep 1, 2010 12:15 PM

Response Text		
34	Completely out of touch.	Sep 1, 2010 12:19 PM
35	I don't know.	Sep 1, 2010 12:40 PM
36	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 12:53 PM
37	Council unclear objectives.	Sep 1, 2010 1:24 PM
38	The public can't ask questions.	Sep 1, 2010 1:35 PM
39	Shouting and violence in the gallery.	Sep 1, 2010 1:39 PM
40	Dictating telling people what to do.	Sep 1, 2010 1:42 PM
41	Please see above.	Sep 1, 2010 3:40 PM
42	When a meeting is cancelled at a moments notice. The council assembly seems to already have a decision made and to communicate a different reply to different groups.	Sep 2, 2010 8:48 AM
43	N/A	Sep 2, 2010 8:51 AM
44	Questions and deputaation been determine by an unelected officer.	Sep 2, 2010 6:03 PM
45	You must know that each assembly period is with different type of mission that may wish to carry out or that people will expect from the assembly.	Sep 3, 2010 10:54 AM
46	N / A	Sep 3, 2010 12:16 PM
47	No experience	Sep 3, 2010 12:40 PM
48	The Council Assembly has the weakness of its strengths. Involving non-council people may be brilliant or disastrous. Party whips can remove creativity and co-operation / consensus.	Sep 3, 2010 1:24 PM
49	process of action take to long no direct decision and waste alotof time on bureaucracy	Sep 3, 2010 3:37 PM
50	N/A	Sep 5, 2010 3:06 PM
51	The labour councillors are very insulting towards the lib dems and the tories. I have to leave when they start making rude remarks to their fellow members.	Sep 7, 2010 4:28 PM
52	Venue. No decision-making - all agreed before the meeting.	Sep 9, 2010 3:39 PM
53	Matters arising.	Sep 9, 2010 3:43 PM
54	No experience	Sep 9, 2010 3:45 PM
55	Councillors vote on political lines.	Sep 9, 2010 3:53 PM
56	Not enough involvement from the public.	Sep 9, 2010 3:56 PM
57	N/A	Sep 9, 2010 4:10 PM
58	Questions - too political point-scoring. Debates - too pre-determined result.	Sep 10, 2010 9:08 AM
59	Lots of people are scared of big meetings - so small events to give feedback to relevant councillors would be good as well. Democracy doesn't just involve big meetings. It means getting feedback from bottom to top and top to bottom - in different formats and ways.	Sep 10, 2010 11:02 AM
60	Decisions already made. Public gallery is very bad. Too slow paced. Better to go to Cabinet.	Sep 10, 2010 1:48 PM

Response Text	
61	<p>The Council Assembly seems to me a very imperfect way of involving residents in council decisions and making the council more responsive to their concerns. No doubt the format could be improved but it stills seems to me a gathering that is too large and too formal.</p> <p>The Community Councils established by the previous administration seem to me a better mechanism for interaction between council and citizens because they are smaller, local and informal.</p> <p>I very much hope that the attempt to revive the Assembly is NOT a prelude to abolishing the Community Councils.</p>
	Sep 10, 2010 1:59 PM

Southwark democracy commission survey

If you have some experience of the council assembly please tell us here what you think works well.	
	Response Count
	49
	answered question
	49
	skipped question
	213

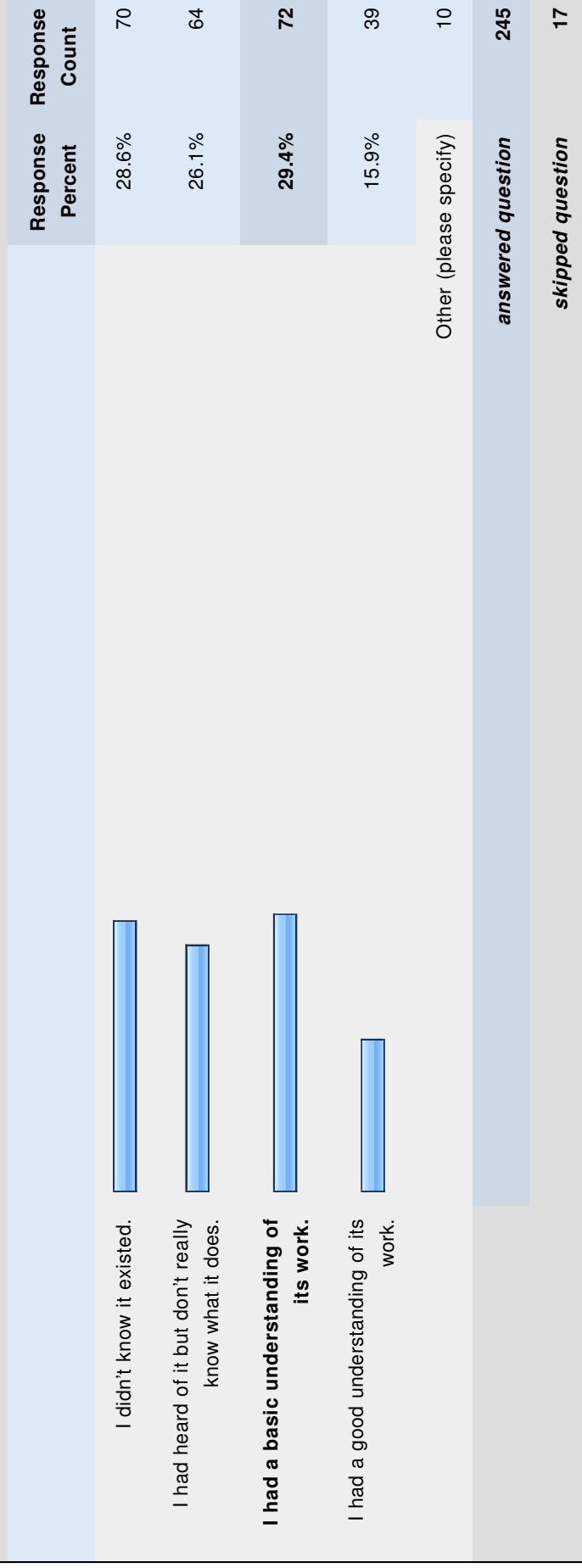
	Response Text	
1	N/A	Jul 28, 2010 2:54 PM
2	n/a	Jul 28, 2010 3:16 PM
3	people still want to be councilors. there is a limited opportunity to take part	Jul 30, 2010 8:55 AM
4	I think I may have said sufficient already. The one good thing that can be said for the Assembly is that it does, usually, get all the Councillors, and a lot of the Big-Cheese fat-cat super-salary Officers to attend, so it is an opportunity to demonstrate how out-of-line Council decisions are with some local feelings, and how ignorant and feeble many Councillors are in the face of the fat-cat super-salary Officer Chiefs. One can cause discomfort to those with their noses deep in the trough - but the moment soon passes and they are back in obscurity, with their hands on the real levers of power, and cash.	Aug 2, 2010 2:34 PM
5	I was allowed to be there!	Aug 2, 2010 3:00 PM
6	reminder phone calls	Aug 5, 2010 4:42 AM
7	Opportunity to see democracy in action. Experience either +ve or -ve allows people to modulate views & actions at other times, such as interactions with Cllrs at surgeries or Community Councils.	Aug 8, 2010 5:40 PM
8	Gerald Gohler has made an effort to bring me in to speak about an important topic, and seems to be sincere about bringing in relevant topics to the meetings.	Aug 13, 2010 9:05 AM
9	It will be OK if the communities are requested to submit their questions or concerns to the Assembly in advance and seek answers during these meetings	Aug 22, 2010 10:04 AM
10	Agree with the ability of backbench councillors to be able to address the meeting and not just cabinet members.	Aug 24, 2010 7:44 AM
11	Our T&RA took 2 deputations to the old town hall in Peckham. Other than that we did not attend.	Aug 27, 2010 5:01 PM
12	I was not aware of this assembly it needs to be promoted.	Aug 29, 2010 6:32 PM
13	Works well when residents contact councillors and petition the Council. Does not work well from the vantage point of the public gallery because of the limited view of the proceedings	Sep 1, 2010 7:43 AM

Response Text		
14	None.	Sep 1, 2010 8:46 AM
15	The timing ie evenings.	Sep 1, 2010 8:52 AM
16	Nothing works particularly well.	Sep 1, 2010 9:00 AM
17	Information.	Sep 1, 2010 9:13 AM
18	At Town Hall in the middle of the borough.	Sep 1, 2010 9:25 AM
19	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 10:21 AM
20	None	Sep 1, 2010 10:31 AM
21	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 10:58 AM
22	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 11:08 AM
23	Involving T&RA committees.	Sep 1, 2010 11:11 AM
24	To get things done.	Sep 1, 2010 12:00 PM
25	I do not know what it is supposed to do so could not comment as to whether it does it well or not.	Sep 1, 2010 12:15 PM
26	The stitch ups.	Sep 1, 2010 12:19 PM
27	I don't know.	Sep 1, 2010 12:40 PM
28	N/A	Sep 1, 2010 12:53 PM
29	Good grass root publicity. Clear grammar's at the assembly meeting, translations, clear objectives.	Sep 1, 2010 1:24 PM
30	Only that CA is meeting.	Sep 1, 2010 1:35 PM
31	Presentation of our topic to be discussed.	Sep 1, 2010 1:39 PM
32	More publicity.	Sep 1, 2010 1:42 PM
33	My view is that the Council Assembly is a depressing affair where the two main parties do not work towards the general benefit of the borough but adopt positions that will allow them to gain small emotional benefits in their fight against one another. The reality is that they are not that far apart on most issues and although members often work on a co-operative basis in committees and at a local level in community council, this disappears completely in the public forum of the council assembly and opportunities for consensus and the solutions that may go with them are lost.	Sep 1, 2010 3:40 PM
34	If the two groups communicate well it would work but alas the left hand never seems to know what the right hand is doing.	Sep 2, 2010 8:48 AM
35	N/A	Sep 2, 2010 8:51 AM
36	The principle of a tenant or groups to ask questions and make deputations.	Sep 2, 2010 6:03 PM
37	Although I have not got Council Assembly experience but I am seasoned civil servant of many (about 35) years experience in administration.	Sep 3, 2010 10:54 AM
38	N / A	Sep 3, 2010 12:16 PM
39	No experience	Sep 3, 2010 12:40 PM
40	N/A	Sep 5, 2010 3:06 PM
41	The whole experience is useful and productive.	Sep 7, 2010 4:28 PM
42	Deputations and petitions.	Sep 9, 2010 3:43 PM
43	No experience	Sep 9, 2010 3:45 PM

Response Text	
44	N/A
45	Putting names to faces!!
46	Nothing.
47	The various workshops.
48	You have to have large meetings - but these don't answer everything. Maybe smaller topic based discussions round the borough - or topic based events with some discussion.
49	NOT MUCH AT ALL.
	Sep 9, 2010 4:10 PM
	Sep 10, 2010 8:46 AM
	Sep 10, 2010 9:08 AM
	Sep 10, 2010 9:23 AM
	Sep 10, 2010 11:02 AM
	Sep 10, 2010 1:48 PM

Southwark democracy commission survey

Tell us what you already knew about the council assembly before completing this survey.



Other (please specify)	
1	My understanding is in between "basic" and "good", due to repeated reforms of its structure and governance over the last 15 years.
2	new-to-me
3	Only because of my work in another borough
4	Not sure whether this is another name for Southwark Council or an offshoot.
5	Meetings are not explained and promoted, for example in the local press
6	I have lead deputations before council.
7	None
8	No public input was surprise.
9	Council Assembly set up by Act of Parliament in form of a Delegation of Duty to oversee every local government council.
10	Deliver leaflets to residents.
	Aug 2, 2010 2:17 PM
	Aug 5, 2010 4:36 AM
	Aug 18, 2010 3:41 PM
	Aug 23, 2010 4:23 PM
	Sep 1, 2010 7:36 AM
	Sep 1, 2010 8:59 AM
	Sep 1, 2010 10:30 AM
	Sep 1, 2010 12:17 PM
	Sep 3, 2010 10:49 AM
	Sep 9, 2010 4:05 PM

Workshop 2: Involving People in Debates and Decision Making

1. Framework

- 1.1. It was apparent from the earlier part of the conference that many people present attended Community Council meetings and were questioning why so much attention was being given to the role of the Council Assembly. A theme which evolved was that it was more important to develop first the role of Community Councils. It should be “bottom up” rather than “top down”.
- 1.2. I, therefore, felt it important that the workshop addressed this issue and I sought to structure our time into two components:
 - (a) The relationship between Community Councils and the Council Assembly and
 - (b) The role the Council Assembly could play.

2. Relationship between Community Councils and the Council Assembly

- 2.1. Issues identified around Community Councils included:
 - (a) Many Community Council agendas have gone stale. They need a re-launch.
 - (b) Local people need to be able to influence what items are on the agenda.
 - (c) Meetings often seem like a tick box exercise.
 - (d) Senior Officers do not take these meetings seriously enough
- 2.2. What was evident, however, was that when there was an opportunity for Community Councils to make decisions as opposed to just being informed of what was happening, this made a real difference to people’s perception of the value of the meeting.
- 2.3. The example was given of the “Cleaner, Greener, Safer” agenda where some funding allocations were involved. This, it was felt, gave real meaning and purpose to the Community Council meetings.
- 2.4. The workshop included the Cabinet Member for Finance and this prompted a very positive discussion around the Cabinet’s intention to share with Community Councils some of the emerging budget issues to provide them with the opportunity to feed in their views prior to final decisions needing to be taken.

2.5. Considerations

Flowing from the discussion I would suggest that the following could be purposefully explored:

- (a) A re-launch of the Community Councils' agendas by focussing more on a few key issues where influence can be made rather than "padding" them with items essentially for information.
- (b) A greater use of Community Councils in using them to help shape impending policy/budget decisions. I believe the Leader of the Council has already intimated that he would like to have some discussion in the Council Assembly on emerging budget issues prior to firm decisions having to be taken in January/February 2011. It would be really good if this Assembly discussion could be informed by issues coming through from the Community Councils. Whilst difficult and unpalatable budget decisions are inevitably going to have to be taken it is important that local people see that this is not being done in isolation to priorities expressed at Community Council meetings. This principle of Community Councils being used as an early sounding board for policy/budget decisions could then be developed further.
- (c) The Local Government Act 2000 expressly places the legal accountability for key decisions with the Cabinet. The "Cleaner, Greener and Safer" agenda has however demonstrated how Executives have delegated such decisions to more local bodies such as Community Councils. From comments made these are, for local residents, the most worthwhile meetings to attend. The possibility of further delegations should also be explored. I sought in the workshop to explain that this is not as simple as it might seem. With legal accountability remaining with the Cabinet/Cabinet Member it is not easy to "let go" and let decisions be taken by another body, particularly if most of the Councillors on that body are from a different political group. But, there is undoubtedly scope for more delegation and some checks and balances can be put in place here.

3. Role of Council Assembly

- 3.1. You would be hard pressed to find any Council that is really satisfied with the role of their Council Meetings. Whereas, if asked, and they knew anything about the workings of their Council, most people would say that they would expect the monthly meeting of all their Councillors (ie the

Council Meeting) to be the place where decisions affecting their lives are taken, in reality, practically all decisions are now made by the Cabinet. So, not surprisingly the question is asked, "What is the role of the Council Assembly meeting?".

3.2. What is right for one Council is not necessarily right for another, but, I do believe from the discussion which took place in the workshop, there was a reasonable consensus that two particular developments could make a real difference. One was around a more active role in considering Overview and Scrutiny reports and the other was in debating emerging policy/budget proposals at a "Green Paper" stage.

3.3. Considerations

(a) Overview and Scrutiny is the opportunity for non-executive Councillors (ie: all but the maximum of 10 in the Cabinet) to look at issues in some detail and make recommendations for improvements/changes. Personally, whilst I believe the ability to "call-in" a decision can be useful on occasions, scrutiny is much more effective when it has the opportunity to help shape policy formulation.

Scrutiny reports should come to the Council Assembly for debate and endorsement of the recommendations made. When a report has been prepared, together with partners, or particular community groups/interests (eg young people) those people should also have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The intention would be both to raise the profile of the issue examined and to give those people who have contributed to the review the opportunity to express their views.

Whilst recommendations for action will invariably be with the Cabinet/Cabinet Member to take forward, the endorsement of the Council Assembly should be seen as providing the endorsement and commitment of the whole Council to take the matters forward. The implementation of the recommendations should then also be tracked with the Council Assembly being advised of any non-compliance.

(b) Considering Policy/Budget Issues at "Green Paper" Stage.

This would be building on the intention, already expressed by the Leader of the Council, to have a discussion on emerging budget issues prior to final decisions having to be taken.

A frequent criticism of the Local Government Act 2000 is that while it was intended to provide more transparency and accountability on who takes decisions, quite often it has worked in the opposite direction with only a few Members really involved in decision taking. The meeting of the Council Assembly is an opportunity to redress this balance. Without raising false expectations about the powers of the

Council Assembly it can become the means to ensuring that the development of certain policy frameworks can be done in a more open an engaging manner.

4. And Finally

- 4.1. The workshop was oversubscribed, which must be an indication of the interest in these issues. Hopefully this note brings out the salient points from a very lively discussion.

Perhaps I could just finish this note by including the comments I made at the start of the workshop. I started my career with Southwark Council as a graduate trainee in 1973. Looking back I think I was quite confident in my abilities but I was quite taken aback to be told that one of my first jobs was to be Committee Clerk for the Council Meeting. I had no previous experience of this kind of work and from my studies understood this meeting to be the pinnacle of a Council's governance arrangements. "Don't worry", I was told, "the Council Meeting rarely lasts more than one and a half hours and what happens is essentially all pre-determined in the Political Group meeting." So issues around the role of the Council Assembly meeting aren't exactly new!!

John Cade
University of Birmingham

Southwark Democracy Commission.

Saturday 4 September 2010

Influential Active Citizens Workshop 3.

Influential Active Citizens-How do we enable people to get involved in debates and decisions and in turn enable the council to be influenced and respond appropriately?

Facilitated by Aisha Bryant. Active Citizens Hub. Note taker. Grace Semakula

How can we influence the Council?

There was a discussion about other mechanisms and how peoples could get their voice heard and listened too in the public arena... Some people felt that this idea could start with the community councils. However, people mentioned that maybe in the future that their could be an elected chair of the community council. Local people also raised a point that they would like to form a committee, set up to shape and plan the agenda for their community council meeting.

What is the mechanism? Practical suggestions

The meeting said that they would benefit from officers giving them a list of topics and suggestions for discussion at the committee meeting. However, it would be up to the people to decide which item they would like to have on the community council agenda. Noted. It was important to note that people from the group said that there were a number of other community mechanisms in place for community involvement and participation, ie t&ra's Communities of interest, faith, sport etc

How can people communicate?

There were a number of suggestions from the workshop about how people communicate information. These were by email, local noticeboards, sports centres, Tesco, Libraries etc. There was also a concern that people felt that they didn't understand the role of the community councils. Those present said that they would like to have education and training about community councils. They also expressed a need to have a pre-meet before and after with the community council officer.

How can we influence?

Recommendations:

A lively discussion took place around how the community could influence the council.

- Do we need to replace the community councils with another layer?
- We all need to be made aware of the Sustainable Communities Act
- To have the expertise of a lawyer to explain all the laws i.e. Southwark Forward Plan, White Paper, Section 106, etc
- To have the opportunity to shadow council officers
- The Council must go to the people, not the other way round

- Some community council meetings have good leadership. It is important to have a good uniform of leadership across the board

Practical recommendations:

- Interface between the Council and the People
- Should be involved in Agenda planning
- There should be facilitations in place at meetings, whose role it is to speak up on behalf of the community.
- Regular Training to be provided, for confidence building, speaking out, council structures, public speaking etc

How can we influence the Elected Officers?

- By networking and communication
- The conference needs to dialogue more with local people
- Ongoing feedback
- Facilitators in place at each community council meeting
- Can the Council go back to the Committee System?
- Accountability is important, with a mid-term appraisal
- Young people need to be informed of the Council structures

Cafe Conversations
Making Debate and Discussions Accessible for Disabled People
4 September 2010
Facilitator: Lisa-Marie Bowles

Participants agreed to look at 3 stages:

1. Understanding process of democratic structures e.g. Council Assembly and Community Councils
2. How to make this information accessible
3. How to make participation accessible

Summary points of discussion and post its:

- **Ensure suitable accessible venues for consultation** - Participants especially those with hearing impairments found it difficult to contribute and hear due to open plan area and noise levels and could not hear facilitator or each other clearly. For one participant it exacerbated his condition (Further correspondence will be sent separately giving the participants the opportunity to add to their suggestions.) People need to know what facilities are available in advance of the meetings e.g. public transport, blue badge parking facilities, disabled toilets – ensure keys are not required to toilets, lift accessibility. Participant cited example of recently attending Council environment consultation on recycling last week where there were no disabled parking facilities and had to walk a considerable distance in rain on crutches and then wait outside the main entrance because officer said door had been locked “to keep the heat in.” Need disabled parking facilities close to venue.
- **Explain rules of the game** – it is difficult to make suggestions without knowing the rules and procedures of the democratic structures. Some participants requested to know what the role of the Scrutiny Committee was and how it linked to other structures. They felt they could not contribute meaningfully without full information.
- **Use Plain English** – all reports and explanations need to use plain English
- **Need timely documents in advance in accessible format – documents and consultation on-line** - can use IT for disabled people e.g. audio text for blind/partially sighted/hearing impairments.
- **Access to IT and printed documents** – not all people have access to the website or computers especially older people. The internet can be accessed in libraries and at pensioners centres or voluntary and community sector organisations. However, in libraries the PCs are only available for restricted time periods. Hours could be extended to book PCs for disabled people e.g. 2 hr slots, and staff could be provided to assist disabled people navigate and use IT in libraries. Some people require printed documents or documents in braille. 70% of blind people are unemployed and cannot afford access to IT or printer paper.

Request for more opportunities to acquire or buy refurbished second hand IT for disabled people.

- **Equalities Training for Council Officers** – officers often request disabled people to put requirements in writing but this isn't always possible or easy to do for people with disabilities and can take time and delay the process. A CD or audiotext would be useful on the first day of launch of consultation.

Involving older people

Points raised during cafe conversation:

- Hold 1 council meeting in the afternoon a year because pensioners tend not to turn up if meetings are held late
- Have themed meetings for older people
- Councillors not listening enough; councillors must listen to one person at a time
- Look at holding meetings at Swanmead Estate
- Cater more for people with disabilities – including wheelchair users
- Improve transport arrangements, to allow people to get to and from meetings
- Have meetings at Housing Neighbourhood Offices, to encourage people who would not otherwise attend because meeting venue is too far a distance to travel
- Meeting venues should be well-known e.g. libraries, tenants association halls, shopping Centres.
- Council could be better at translating languages
- Have a trained facilitator at meetings

How should we hold debates and make decisions

Points raised during cafe conversation:

Training for Members on doing presentations and chairing meetings

Tackling apathy- people need to see real outcomes of meetings

Management of meetings are poor- only the vociferous contribute so must be a mechanism for those who don't want to verbalise their opinions.

First speaker rights at meetings to those who haven't spoken before.

Change format have themed meetings

Have informal social opportunities before meeting for people to meet Members

Meetings should be simpler and accessible to those with poor numeracy and literacy rates

Change and alternate venues- go to where people are such as day centres

Meetings are more for people in the know – must reach beyond this

Agendas need more explanation and background information on their sources

At the moment- people are too far away from the Assembly meeting as the Council Chamber is currently set up

Use incentives such as food for people to come along to meetings

Publicise meetings better through use of email groups and posters

Use innovative methods at meetings to involve people such as interactive voting buttons

CAFE CONVERSATION

What should the assembly debate and decide?

Around 12 people participated in this cafe conversation. They introduced themselves as Southwark residents from Bermondsey, Dulwich, Bankside and Camberwell areas. A lively discussion was held; majority of the participant contributed the following points;

1. The assembly should discuss:
 - the reports from Scrutiny Committees
 - proposals and issues from the community councils – but how do you decide the ‘threshold’?
2. Focus on issues which the council can do something about or which affect the residents of Southwark
3. Assembly needs to discuss issues which are relevant to the public in Southwark, e.g. Regeneration, Housing, Youth and Older peoples issues and not ‘wastes its time’ on ‘political point scoring’
4. Needs to be a mature honest debate about the issues of resource allocation, especially in a period of budget reduction – more facts and figures.

At some point during the conversation, a couple of people felt that the topic is rather daft as the elected councillors actually only have the decision making powers and topics of debate cannot necessarily be influenced by the public. An Alternative topic was offered and agreed.

What decisions could be devolved from the assembly?

Participants’ suggestions were:

- Cleaner, greener, safer budgets
- Local planning decisions
- S106 spend

General comments;

- Make better use of the Community Councils – eight forums are better than one.
- People / residents want to be consulted before decisions are made, and the key to that knows in advance what’s coming up for decision.
- Need to publicise Community Councils better to attract new attendees – not the internet/email, other ways are needed.

Involving new/ BME communities

- Language needs are also accessibility needs
- 70% white participation/ response to some surveys – why is the minority so invisible?
- Financial, & other support and training should be offered to minority groups; training; meetings and consultation; and translation
- Members of the minority groups should be actively encouraged to take part in TRA (REPA); share expertise; fact find, research; get involved; volunteer
- Use of jargon – to be explained, carefully, bearing in mind that the explanations are being made to non-English speakers
- The cross-section of ethnicities has changed, including “White – other” nationalities such as Latin-American and Albanian on one local estate.
- Explain what the procedures are, e.g. for the Council Assembly
- Formal documents should be translated also, e.g. Rent statements
- Evidence, i.e. monitoring from supported groups, helps to safeguard financial and other support
- There should be impact assessments made before withdrawing support from groups
- Forums for BME consultation should be borough-wide and independent
- There should be citizenship classes more widely on offer
- The support given by faith groups should be acknowledged and included
- There should be service mapping based on Census demographics

Helen Laker 04.09.10

Southwark Democracy Commission Proposed Future Legislation/ Government Programmes

This paper sets out the key measures that the new government has announced that may have some impact on the work of local government and specifically the democracy commission. In most cases the information that is available to date is not detailed and in particular where new legislation is required may take some time to reach implementation. The Decentralisation & Localism Bill, for example, has a proposed timetable of publication in November 2010 with the intention that the Bill is passed by November 2011.

1. The Decentralisation & Localism Bill

The Queen's Speech in May 2010 set out the details of its Decentralisation and Localism Bill. The intended timetable for the Bill is:

- Summer 2010 Consultation on those aspects that require consultation
- November 2010 Publication of the Bill
- November 2011 Bill passed.

The stated purpose and benefits of the Bill were set out as follows:

The Bill would devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions.

The main benefits are said to be:

- Empowering local people.
- Freeing local government from central and regional control.
- Giving local communities a real share in local growth.
- A more efficient and more local planning system.

The main elements announced in the Queen's Speech were:

- Abolish Regional Spatial Strategies to replace them with new "fast-track and democratically accountable" processes for major infrastructure projects.
- Return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils.
- Abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and replace it with an efficient and democratically accountable system that provides a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects.
- New powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.
- Abolish the Standards Board regime.
- Give councils a general power of competence.
- Require public bodies to publish online the job titles of every member of staff and the salaries and expenses of senior officials.
- Give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases.
- Greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups.

- Create Local Enterprise Partnerships (to replace Regional Development Agencies) – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities to promote local economic development.
- Form plans to deliver a genuine and lasting Olympic legacy.
- Outright abolition of Home Improvement Packs.
- Create new trusts that would make it simpler for communities to provide homes for local people.
- A review of the Housing Revenue Account.

There is little more detail on these elements as yet with the exception of areas where consultation has taken place. These are unlikely to impact on the work of the democracy commission and are:

- The proposed power to instigate referendums to veto excessive council tax increases.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships.

2. The Coalition Agreement

More indicators of the government's intentions in relation to communities and local government are set out in the Coalition agreement (*The Coalition: our programme for government*) as follows:

The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.

- We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups. This will include a review of local government finance.
- We will rapidly abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils, including giving councils new powers to stop 'garden grabbing'.
- In the longer term, we will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live, based on the principles set out in the Conservative Party publication *Open Source Planning*.
- We will abolish the unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission and replace it with an efficient and democratically accountable system that provides a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects.
- We will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities.
- We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other environmental protections, and create a new designation – similar to SSSIs – to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities.
- We will abolish the Government Office for London and consider the case for abolishing the remaining Government Offices.

- We will provide more protection against aggressive bailiffs and unreasonable charging orders, ensure that courts have the power to insist that repossession is always a last resort, and ban orders for sale on unsecured debts of less than £25,000.
- We will explore a range of measures to bring empty homes into use.
- We will promote shared ownership schemes and help social tenants and others to own or part-own their home.
- We will promote 'Home on the Farm' schemes that encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing.
- We will create new trusts that will make it simpler for communities to provide homes for local people.
- We will phase out the ring-fencing of grants to local government and review the unfair Housing Revenue Account.
- We will freeze Council Tax in England for at least one year, and seek to freeze it for a further year, in partnership with local authorities.
- We will create directly elected mayors in the 12 largest English cities, subject to confirmatory referendums and full scrutiny by elected councillors.
- We will give councils a general power of competence.
- We will ban the use of powers in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) by councils, unless they are signed off by a magistrate and required for stopping serious crime.
- We will allow councils to return to the committee system, should they wish to.
- We will abolish the Standards Board regime.
- We will stop the restructuring of councils in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon, and stop plans to force the regionalisation of the fire service.
- We will impose tougher rules to stop unfair competition by local authority newspapers.
- We will introduce new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.
- We will implement the Sustainable Communities Act, so that citizens know how taxpayers' money is spent in their area and have a greater say over how it is spent.
- We will cut local government inspection and abolish the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- We will require continuous improvements to the energy efficiency of new housing.
- We will provide incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses.
- We will review the effectiveness of the raising of the stamp duty threshold for first-time buyers.
- We will give councillors the power to vote on large salary packages for unelected council officials.

3. Other bills in the Queen's Speech with implications for local government include:

Freedom (Great Repeal) Bill

The Freedom (Great Repeal) Bill will further regulate the use of CCTV and restrict the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIPA) Act by councils. It will also amend the Data Protection Act to limit the storage of internet and email records without good reason.

Local Government Bill

The Local Government Bill will block the creation of unitary councils in Exeter and Norwich.

Public Bodies (Reform) Bill

The government has outlined the details of the Public Bodies (Reform) Bill which it says will increase the transparency of decision-making and save £1bn per year by reducing the number of quangos and transferring their powers to local authorities or government departments.

The Bill is intended to provide Ministers with greater powers to abolish, merge or transfer the functions of quangos. It will also introduce new three-yearly reviews of whether quangos are necessary, using the test: 'Is the function technical; does it need to be politically impartial; and do facts need to be determined transparently?'

According to the government's figures, there are 766 non-departmental public bodies in England and Wales, which employ 110,000 staff and spend £46bn per year.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill is intended to make the police service more accountable to local people, create a dedicated Border Police Force and develop new measures to tackle alcohol-related violence and disorder.

The main details from the Queen's Speech are unchanged from those in the coalition government's policy document and include:

- The creation of new directly-elected roles to hold the police to account and ensure that local policing activities meet the needs of the local community, help build confidence in the system and bring communities and the police together.
- Amendments to health and safety laws so that they do not stand in the way of "common sense" policing.
- The creation of a dedicated Border Police Force, as part of a refocused Serious Organised Crime Agency, to enhance national security, improve immigration controls, and crack down on the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs.
- Increasing the levels of collaboration between police forces to deal with serious crime and deliver better value for money.
- An overhaul of the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police much stronger powers to remove licenses from, or refuse to grant licenses to, any premises that are causing problems. This will also ban the sale of alcohol below cost price and allow councils to charge more for late-night licenses to pay for additional policing.

- New powers for councils to shut down shops or bars persistently selling to children and an increase in the maximum fine for selling to children to £20,000.

Public Health Bill

Amongst a variety of measures to reform the National Health Service will be the creation of a new public health service, led by the Department of Health, which is intended to weight health funding towards the most disadvantaged areas through the payment of a health premium and make it a requirement of local NHS organisations to improve the health of their residents, in conjunction with local authorities, voluntary organisations and local business to deliver this. Budgets will held at local level and local NHS organisations will be paid according the outcomes they achieve.

Academies Bill

The Queen's Speech included the long-trailed Bill to make it easier for schools to gain academy status and leave local authority control.

The bill will:

- enable the Secretary of State to issue an “academy order” requiring the local authority to cease to maintain the school.
- remove the requirement to consult the local authority before opening an academy, thus simplifying and accelerating the process.
- require the consent of any existing (mainly church) foundations before a school applies to become an academy.
- deem academy trusts to be “exempt charities”.
- enable primary and special schools to become academies as well as secondary schools.
- ensure there is no change of religious character in the conversion process.
- retain the existing legal requirement for funding agreements to last at least seven years (the agreement can still provide for intervention or termination, if the academy fails).
- provide schools with the freedoms to deliver an excellent education in the way they see fit, within a broad framework where they are clearly accountable for the outcomes they deliver.
- enable all maintained schools to apply to become an Academy with schools judged ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted being pre-approved.
- Prevent the expansion of selective schools, although schools which already select or partially select pupils will be able to continue to do so.

4. Non-legislative items

Social enterprise and mutuals

The promised expansion of the role of the third sector and co-operatives does need legislation. The project will be co-ordinated by the Cabinet Office Minister, Francis Maude, who will work with the Minister for Civil Society, Treasury Ministers and government departments to identify where social enterprise, charities and co-operatives can have an enhanced role in public services.

Efforts will include opening up public services markets to allow social enterprise, charities and co-operatives to bid to run public services and an initiative to identify and

remove barriers to involvement. Public sector workers will be given a new right to form employee-owned co-operatives and bid to take over the services they deliver. The first measures to implement this policy are expected to be in place by the autumn.

Social care

The government is to establish an independent commission to examine funding for long-term care, with the brief to ensure that there is a fair partnership between the state and the individual. The commission will report within a year.

In the meantime, the government will “take steps” to ensure that all councils offer personal budgets to older and disabled people, to encourage more preventative support to be provided and to enable more joint working between health and social services teams to allow more people to remain living at home.

5 Communities and Local Government Draft Structural Reform Plan

Each government department has been asked to produce what is known as a structural reform plan. These set out what each department will do to implement the governments programme. The Department for Communities and Local Government published its plan in July 2010 and this includes the following objectives that are relevant to the work of the democracy commission:

1. Make localism and the Big Society part of everyday life – by decentralising power as far as possible

Decentralise power as far as possible through the Localism Bill:

- (a) give councils a general power of competence;
- (b) abolish the Standards Board;
- (c) give communities powers to save local facilities threatened with closure;
- (d) give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services

1.2 Identify and implement measures to allow councils to return to the committee system, should they wish to, as part of the Localism Bill

1.3 Abolish the Government Office for London (GOL), consider the case for abolishing remaining Government Offices and work with BIS to scrap Regional Development Agencies. Work with local authorities and business to promote Shadow Local Enterprise Partnerships to accelerate the transition of functions from RDAs
 Consider abolition of remaining Government Offices as part of the Spending Review
 Terminate RDA functions (regional planning and housing functions)
 Transfer RDA functions (Business Link, Tourism, etc) to other bodies as appropriate
 Complete RDA and GOL projects (stand-alone ongoing major developments)
 Dispose of RDA and GOL assets (real estate assets, offices, etc)

Trust people to take control of the decisions that affect them by devolving power closer to neighbourhoods, increasing citizen participation, promoting community ownership, lifting inspection burdens on councils and removing regional government

Milestones set out in this document are:

Oct 2010	Clarify retention or abolition of remaining Government Offices
Nov 2011	Localism Bill passed
Apr 2012	Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices for London dissolved

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