London Borough of Merton

Report and recommendations arising from the scrutiny review of democratic engagement and electoral services.

April 2009

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Acknowledgements:

The Corporate Capacity Overview and Scrutiny Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review, through preparing information, attending meetings to answer questions and to all the people who took time to contact us with their comments and views.

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Foreword by the review chair

I was honoured to be asked to chair this review. As an elected member I consider democracy, in all its forms, to be vitally important and with an upcoming election in 2010 combined with the recognition that voter turnouts were failing, I agreed that the corporate capacity panel should establish a task group to review what the council does around democratic engagement and elections.

Both nationally and locally there is a focus on promoting democratic engagement at all levels and overall I have been impressed by the work undertaken by the council now and in recent years. Nonetheless, the group identified a number of areas where best practice could be learnt from or adopted to further improve the opportunities given to local people to influence decisions or encourage them to vote in elections.

Therefore, I have great pleasure in presenting this report and I hope that Cabinet accepts the task group's recommendations.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this review, both internally and externally; all evidence was greatly appreciated.

On behalf of the task group I would like to give particular thanks to Daniel Moore of the Scrutiny Team for his hard work throughout this review.

Councillor Mark Betteridge
Chair of the scrutiny review of democratic engagement and electoral services

Summary of recommendations

| Recommendation |
|---|
| **R1:** The council should link turnout data with the council's Geographic Information System (GIS) to further understand the electorate and undertake specific actions to raise turnouts. |
| **R2:** The council should ensure all polling stations include hearing loops where feasible. |
| **R3:** The council should run a specific communications campaign running up to the 2010 election. For example a Working life feature looking at a councillor from all parties. |
| **R4:** The council should suggest at a regional level that organisations such as London Councils to encourage a London-wide communications campaign to promote voting in the 2010 elections. |
| **R5:** The council should explain the role the role of public committees on agendas to help inform residents about the reason for the meeting. |
| **R6:** The council should briefly explaining the role of committees on the website to help inform residents about the reasons for the meeting |
| **R7:** The council should update and revise the decision-making handbook as a tool to promote the role of councillors to residents, officers and partners. |
| **R8:** The council needs to improve the amount and quality of information about decision-making processes on the council's website. |
| **R9:** The council should update the website (http://www.merton.gov.uk/councillors.htm) to include information on the role of a councillor and improve the links between different sections of the site. |
| **R10:** Councillors and the Mayor should consider producing short biographies or profiles and publishing them on the internet as a first step in making them more accessible to the public. |
| **R11:** The council should work to improve officer's understanding of councillors to support councillors undertake their role. For example, include councillors in corporate inductions, running training and increasing councillors profile in xChange. |
| **R12:** The role of democracy (both representative and participatory) should be detailed in consultation documents to promote democratic engagement. |
| **R13:** The profile of consultations should be raised by using technology such as RSS feeds. |
| **R14:** An RSS feed should be set up to increase the visibility of agendas and key decisions to residents, officers, members and partners. |
| **R15:** The council should link agendas and other participative methods to support and promote involvement from residents and partners. |
| **R16:** The council should work to develop a 'Get Involved in Merton' brand that would support the involvement work of everyone across the council and possibly partnership. |
| **R17:** The council should review the range of participative groups and how greater co-ordination can be facilitated. |
| **R18:** Merton's Youth Parliament and Children's Council should produce and present an annual report to either the Children and Young Peoples scrutiny panel or Commission (by means most suitable for the young-people) summarising the issues considered during the year. These reports will link into the work programming of the scrutiny function. |
| **R19:** The council should develop a year plan for schools and opportunities to work with young that can be used by the wider authority to actively engage with young people. |
| **R20:** There is a need to place a greater emphasis on decision-making and councillors at corporate inductions. |
| **R21:** The council should detail the role of participatory and representative democracy in publications to inform residents of how they can get involved. |
| **R22:** The council should establish a calendar of events/promotions and share it across the organisation so the council can identify early where and when democracy and involvement can be promoted. |

1   Introduction

1.1.   With a forthcoming election in 2010 combined with the recognition that voter turnouts were failing the Corporate Capacity Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to establish a task group to review what the council does around democratic engagement and elections.

1.2.   There are a number of significant national and local policies and priorities that aim to increase and enable democracy at a local level be it voting in elections or responding to a consultation. This report identifies what the council already does to meet these ambitions and also looks at best practice to suggest new ways that the council could promote democracy at a local level.

1.3.   Although the initial reason for undertaking a review was to focus on elections, it was recognised by the group that there must be a continued effort to engage and involve residents if the council wanted to see a rise in turnout every four years. Therefore, the group also decided to look at the work of the council in relation to participation in and promotion of democracy.

1.4.   This report outlines the task group's findings and recommendations based on the evidence presented to them during the course of the review.

2.   Background

2.1.   There has been a longstanding concern that interest in democracy, especially local democracy, is declining and has been evidenced by falling voter turnouts (figure 1) at elections and wider political disengagement[1].

Figure 1 - Turnout in general elections

Figure 1: General Election turnout 1945-2005
Source: House of Commons[22]
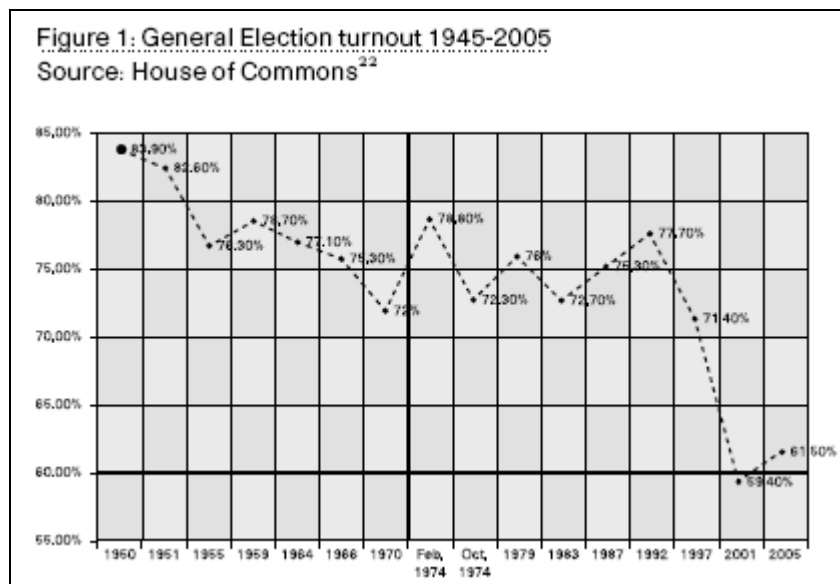
2.2.   In response to this a number of policies have been established that have prompted changes to both representative and participatory democracy. Through their White Papers[2], New Labour have successfully emphasised a need to restore democracy

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[1] Ashworth R, Copus C, Coulson A, (2004) *Local democratic renewal: an introduction.* Local government studies, Vol 30(4), pp 459-466.
[2] DETR (1998), Modern Local Government In Touch With People. London: The Stationary Office; DTLR (2001), Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services. London: The Stationary Office; http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/712089

and have placed an emphasis on improving the relationship between local authorities and communities. These policies include changes to council constitutions, proposals for electoral reform, new roles for non-executive councillors and importantly, a series of measures to increase participation.

2.3.   The 2006 White Paper set out 'new responsibilities for local authorities to give local citizens and communities a greater say over their lives… [and] propose new powers for citizens and their local councillors'[3]. More recently, the 2008 Communities in Control white paper introduced a number of key duties for local authorities in relation to democratic engagement. It extended the duty to involve and introduced the duty to promote democracy on councils. Further commitments to empower residents and promote democratic involvement.

2.4.   These duties were further extended in the fair rules paper[4] that stated an aim for citizen's to be involved in decision-making and be able to influence policy and express their views. Increasing levels of democracy will result in happier communities as people will feel the decisions taken by politicians will reflect their wishes. Consequently, the fair rules paper will extend the duty to involve to a wider range of local agencies, introduce a duty for councils to respond to petitions and realise their ambition to for participatory budgeting in every local authority by 2012.

2.5.   Most recently, the new Working Together policy paper[5] introduces an information revolution designed to put the power of information within easy reach so that people can exercise control and shape their services and means having the ability to feed back to services and share comments on issues with other service users.

2.6.   Overall, policies over the last then years have worked to develop the representative side of democracy through means such as developing the leadership role of councillors and the way decisions are made as well as promote participation through increasing levels of partnership working and duties to involve residents in decision-making.

Participation V Representation

2.7.   The last ten years has seen an increase in the levels of participation amongst residents. This increase in participation has raised questions about the role of representative democracy and how participatory methods fit with traditional representative methods.

2.8.   Greater public participation in decision-making is viewed as a means to improve the quality of decisions and also address the rising 'democratic deficit'. This means that enhanced public participation will contribute to a greater democratic legitimacy for elected local authorities, allowing them to develop their potential as community leaders within the context of partnership approaches to local service delivery'[6].

2.9.   It is also important to consider how to view and measure a healthy democracy as turnout at elections is not the only indication of how well a democratic system is working. As academics[7] argue there is a need for realism about turnout as it is not a test of how well a democratic system is working as totalitarian governments can have 99% turnouts.

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[3] Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006
[4] http://www.number10.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/fair-rules-for-strong-communities.pdf
[5] http://www.hmg.gov.uk/media/15556/workingtogether.pdf (P11)
[6] Lowndes, V and Sullivan, H (2004) Like a horse and carriage or a fish on a bicycle: how well do local partnerships and public participation go together? Local Government Studies, Vol 30(1), pp51-73.
[7] http://www.localgov.co.uk/index.cfm?method=news.detail&id=75159

2.10. However, councillors still have an important role in decision-making. As the Power Inquiry[8] summed up:

> 'We are clear that for all the enthusiasm we observed in relation to greater public involvement in decision-making, we do not believe that participation should be regarded as an alternative to representation. The vision that informs the recommendations … is a 'mixed economy' of participatory methods and a more open and responsive system of elected representation'.

2.11. More recently, academics[9] have discussed the relationship between both forms of democracy. Firstly, on many issues, citizens will express different views, which may well be opposed to each other. Rarely do the public agree on one clear view. Therefore, elected representatives are needed to reconcile these conflicting opinions and, if they cannot, to weigh the views and make a political judgment for which they are held accountable by voters. Secondly, to improve the link between participative methods to representative democracy there should be a focus on the interactions between representatives, i.e. the councillors, and the people participating.

2.12. Overall, as Professor Stein Ringen suggests, if a vote for the national legislature was the only thing tying people and governance together, governance would be distant and citizens' influence small. However, 'it is a function of local democracy to give citizens a reasoned feeling that they are included in the system of governance in the long period between elections'[10].

2.13. Considering this evidence, it is important to ensure that representative democracy and participatory methods sit together to improve it at as a whole. Consequently, the task group felt that it was important to look at ways of promoting engagement as well as considering specific issues around voting and elections.

Local policy and targets

2.14. The council works toward targets that form part of it's Business Plan and Local Area Agreement. Scrutiny has a role to monitor the performance of the council and this section presents the key measures that set this report in context and will support scrutiny in their future work.

2.15. The council's business plan (2009-2012 as presented to Council on 3 March 2009) has a number of targets relating to democratic involvement.

Priority	Planned Outcome	Performance measure	Baseline	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Increase public involvement in the democratic process in line with the new governance arrangements from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007	Increase public interest and involvement in the Scrutiny process	Number of members of the public involved in the work of overview and scrutiny	429 (09/08 ytd)	900	1000	1100
	Improve the quality of scrutiny work	Percentage of Councillors who agree that the scrutiny function is effective (local survey)	61% (2007/08 survey)	70%	70%	70%
	Development opportunities and support given to	Percentage of Councillors with an agreed personal development plan	55% (Quarter 2 08/09)	80%	20%	50%

[8] http://www.powerinquiry.org/
[9] http://www.localgov.co.uk/index.cfm?method=news.detail&id=75159
[10] http://www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/representingthefuture/

	Councillors as representatives of their local wards	Percentage of councillors who have attended development sessions	76.67% (Quarter 2 08/09)	75%	30%	35%
		Percentage of councillors who agree their learning and development is good in terms of relevance, convenience and quality	New measure so no baseline	50%	60%	70%
	Increase effectiveness of Community Forums	Average number of attendees at Community Forums	26 (YTD Nov 2008)	28	34	40
	Residents feel that the council listens and involves them in decision making	Percentage of Resident who feel that the council listens and involves them in decision making residents who feel that the council involve residents when making decisions	49% (Annual Residents Survey)	52%	54%	55%
Enable people over 50 to make a contribution	Recognise and value older people and ensure they have a say in matters that affect them	Percentage of people over 50 who feel they can influence decisions in their locality	TBC	53.5%	55%	56%
		Percentage of older people who feel that their local area is a place where different backgrounds get on well together	TBC	87%	88%	89%

The Local Area Agreement contains a number of priorities for the council and partners. The table below shows priorities and targets for 2008-11. The partnership is currently updating the LAA and will be agreeing new targets as appropriate.

Outcome	Indicators	Baseline	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Empower Local People to Have a Greater Choice and Influence Over Local Decision Making and a Greater Role in Public Service Delivery	**NI3** Civic participation in the local area	No baseline: likely to be carried out for first time in autumn 2008	Baseline to be established in 2008/09	Baseline + 2%	Baseline + 2%
	NI4 % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality	52% (2007 ARS)	54%	55%	56%
	NI7 Environment for a thriving third sector	No baseline: likely to be carried out for first time in autumn 2008	Baseline to be established in 2008/09	Baseline + 2%	Baseline +2%

2.16.   There are no performance targets relating to voting turnouts or the number of people on the electoral register. However, performance data is captured following each canvass and election; this is discussed in more detail below.

3. Evidence

3.1.   This section presents the evidence that was presented to the task group in response to questions about electoral turnout and registration and is included in the report to set the recommendations in context.
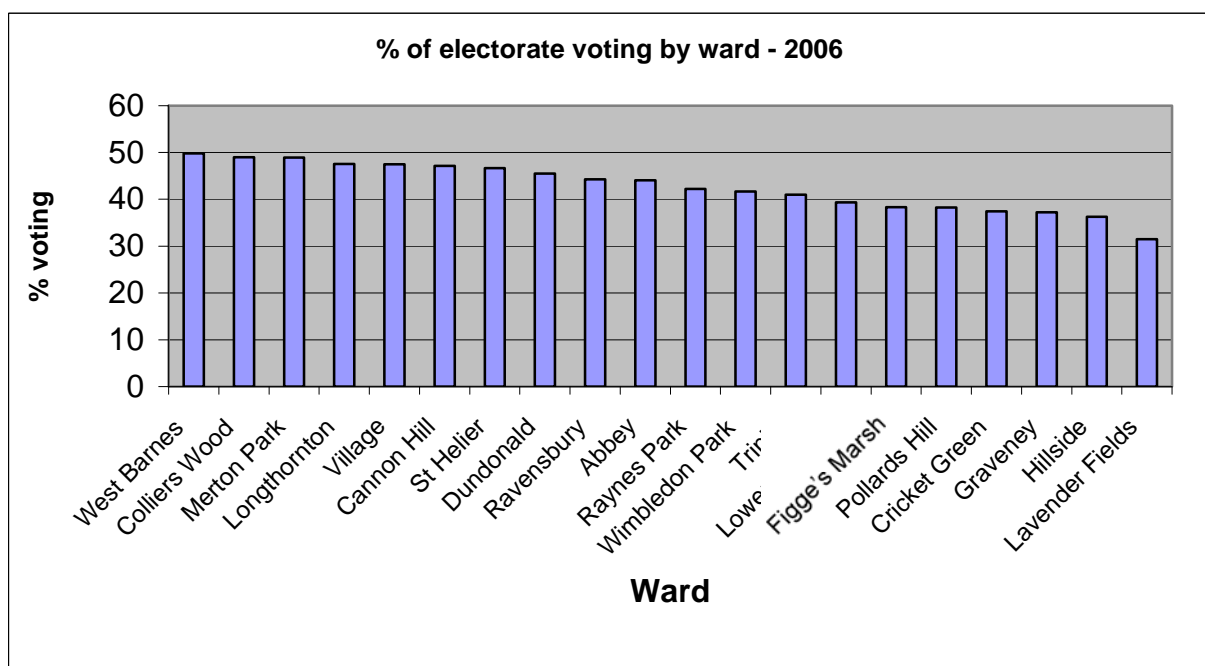
Turnout data for Merton

3.2.   Following each election information is collected to record how many people who are registered to vote have actually turned out to vote on election day. Below is a range of data captured since 1994 and provides a comparison between different areas across the borough. Figure 2 shows the percentage of the population voting across the borough by political constituency in local elections since 1994. It shows that on the whole percentage turnout is consistently higher in Wimbledon than in Mitcham and Morden.

Figure 2
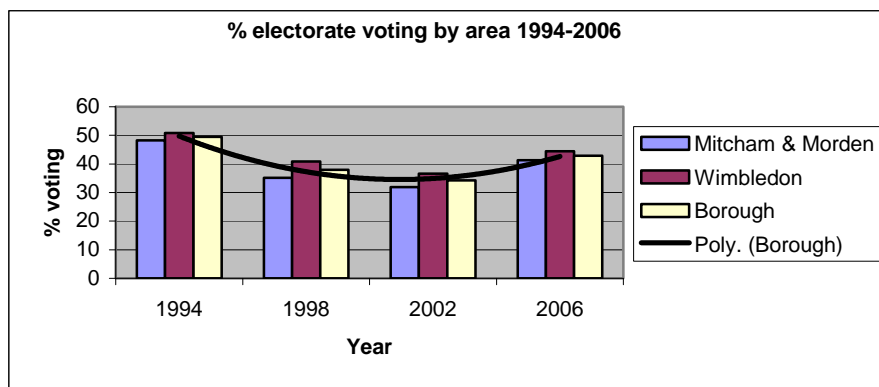
3.3.   Figure 3 provides a ward comparison for the entire borough. The highest turnout is in West Barnes and the lowest is in Lavender Fields. However, although the wards located in the east of the borough generally have lower turnouts wards such as Hillside in Wimbledon also experience low turnouts.

Figure 3

3.4.   There are also variations within wards in relation to turnout data. For example Cricket Green which has on average have the fourth lowest turnout in the borough has five polling districts. District EE has a turnout of 47.42 registered voters and is 14th highest, whereas district EC has 38.33 (50), ED has 35.73 (59), EB 33.23 (68) and EA, 32.73 (71). Similarly, Merton Park the third highest ward has a number of variations. District RB has 59.15 (1), RC 43.70 (26) and RA has 40.34 (46).

Figure 4

3.5.   Figure 5 provides both a borough comparison and a comparison with the turnout for London Mayoral elections 2008 in Merton and Wandsworth. From this perspective Merton compares favourably to its neighbours, furthermore given the budget and publicity provided for the Mayoral elections it shows the challenge that faces the council in raising turnouts by only a few percent.

Figure 5

Voter Registration

3.6.   There are two ways in which residents can register to vote[11]. Residents can register all year round through a rolling registration and at the end of August each year the registration form is delivered to all homes in the borough through a process known as the annual canvass.

3.7.   Comparative figures are shown for the end of the canvass period and the publication of the new registers of electors:

	Dec 2007	Dec 2008	Change
Electorate figures comparison			
Mitcham & Morden	71235	72044	+809
Wimbledon	68998	69751	+753
Borough	140233	141795	+1562
Percentage returns comparison			
Mitcham & Morden	96.54%	96.93%	+0.39%
Wimbledon	97.38%	97.76%	+0.38%
Borough	96.96%	97.35%	+0.39%
Number of properties comparison			
Mitcham & Morden	39587	39914	+327
Wimbledon	40235	40611	+376
Borough	79822	80822	+703

3.8.   Compared to London as a whole Merton has the third highest rate of return:

Figure 6
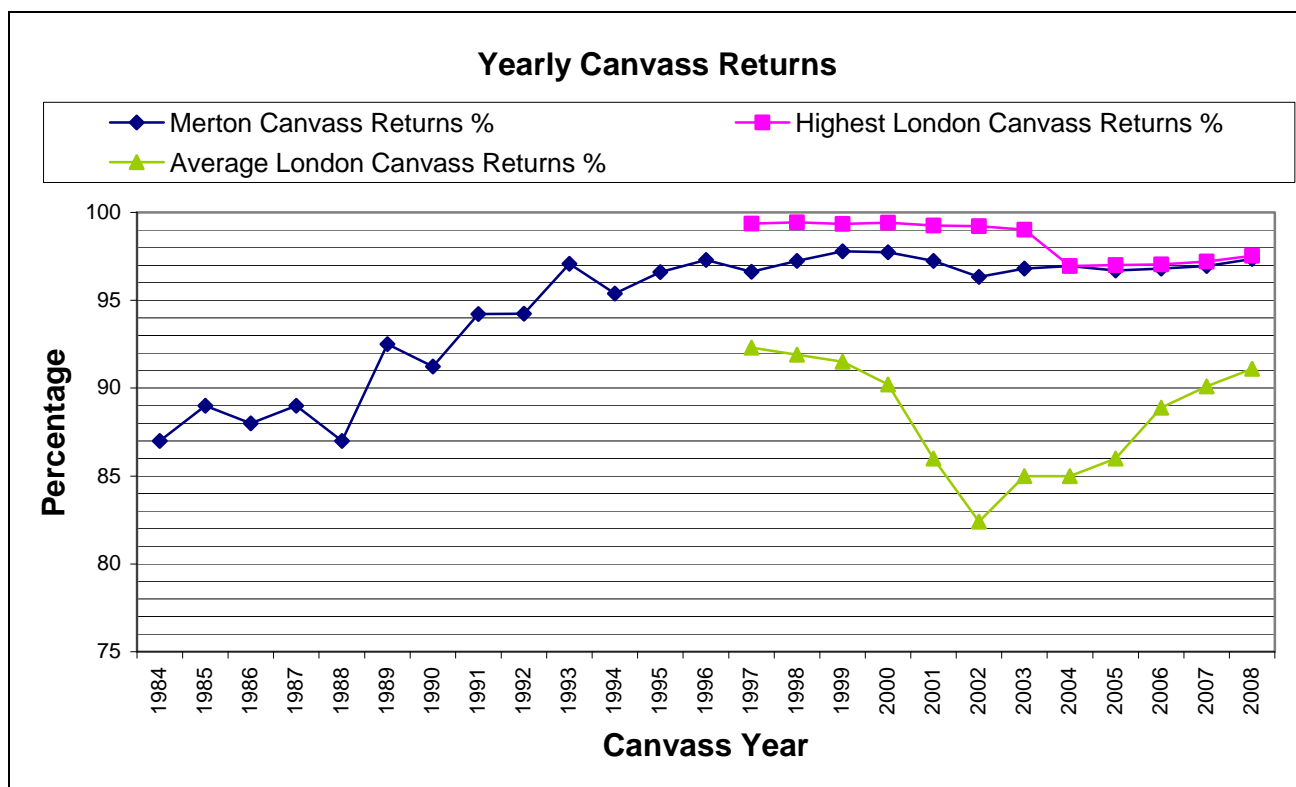
3.9.   All areas not subject to a supplementary canvass were sent a final, third reminder. There was an initial check on the council tax empty property list and a final check on council tax records for all non-responding properties. These checks enabled us to confirm 977 voids; the first check has also enabled us to inform council tax about possible incorrect discounts where we had received a return showing occupiers. Returns would have been around 93.7 per cent without all these measures and there would have been 2,500 less electors. The local performance indicator target for the current year is 96.75 per cent.

3.10.   The task group ask about turnover of the electoral register for both the annual canvass and 'rolling' registration periods. The number of changes to the register of electors in 2008 (2 January alterations notices to 1 December revised register publication) were: additions 25,777; deletions 24,342

3.11.   Despite a high return rate the council has identified increasing difficulties in reaching people to register them. The reasons include apathy, lack of knowledge, low levels of engagement with politics or the wider community, security entry systems, homes in multiple occupation, short stays and high mobility, sub-letting and sharing, and simply not wanting to be on official records. Additionally, there is a disparity between people registering to vote and then actually turning out to vote on polling day.

4.   Promoting democratic engagement

4.1.   This section reviews the work of the council in promoting both representative and participatory democracy. It also identifies the links that exist between them and the importance of developing a strong relationship that will mutually benefit each other.

4.2.   The group make a number of recommendations that vary in scope. Many of the recommendations are quite specific and may not instantly bring about a large tangible change however, these changes will bring about a level of consistency and clarity across the organisation. It is also important to note that the group also recognise a number of recommendations assume a certain level of participation and technical ability.

Promoting representative democracy

4.3.   There is a wide range of support provided nationally to help promote involvement in representative democracy be it standing as a councillor or voting in an election.

Registering to vote/promoting elections

4.4.   The Electoral Commission play a key part in promoting the importance of voting and view their main role as ensuring integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. The Do Politics Centre[12] was set up by the Electoral Commission to promote democracy and increase voter awareness and registration through the sharing of information and specific support. On the site there are a number of case studies ranging in scope.

4.5.   As detailed above there are two main ways the Council enables residents to vote. Residents can register continuously through rolling registration and every year contacts every household through the annual canvass. However, although the Council is successful at ensuring a high percentage of residents to register despite little promotion alongside this to increase numbers first, new techniques need to be found to reach the remaining six percent and second, further promotion needs to be undertaken to increase voter turnout.

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[12] http://www.dopolitics.org.uk/

4.6.   This data can direct electoral services to target certain areas with low turnouts – and data by polling district can help even further. For example Birmingham City Council 'have used customer insight and citizen segmentation, to analyse voting turnouts by constituency, wards and individual polling stations for 2008. The Council has identified key areas where apparently low and high voting turnouts occurred and analysed the socio-demographic make up of the local areas to see whether there were an correlations in these differences. The yellow dots on the map (Figure 7) represent polling stations with low turnout. Each colour on the map represents a different segment of the local population. In response Birmingham are now looking for ways to increase participation across the city in future elections by targeting particular parts of the city'[13].

Figure 7
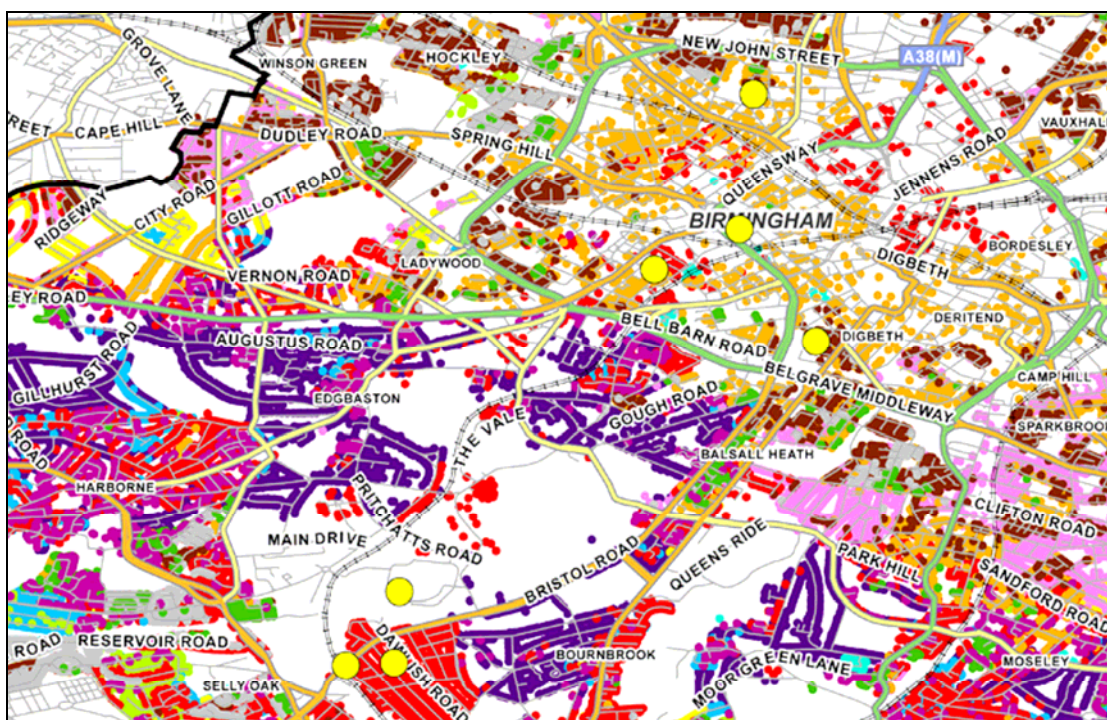
4.7.   The Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations (JCC) suggested that polling cards should include other languages such as Urdu[14]. In response officers informed the group that although this would be desirable the council does not have the power to amend polling cards. However, they ensure that when residents are sent information about voting alternative languages are available and there is also support for other languages in poling stations.

4.8.   In relation to this organisations such as Operation Black Vote[15] work to increase the political voice and representation of African, Asian, Caribbean and other ethnic minorities in the UK. They attempt to increase the number of Black people registering to vote and increase their participation by running specific campaigns – although there is a charge for their services. However, by combining the two initiatives as an example, if data shows that there is a high concentration of Black residents around polling stations with a low turnout then specific campaigns focusing on certain

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[13]

http://www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/UserFiles/File/LGA%20and%20IDeA%20customer%20insight%20guidance%20for%20councils.pdf
[14] http://www.merton.gov.uk/committee.htm?view=event&event_id=2570
[15] http://www.obv.org.uk/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

demographics can support an increase in voter turnout. Additionally, officers across the council have a range of experience of undertaking outreach in different communities and their knowledge could be shared accordingly.

4.9.   In addition, speaking with the Chair of the Faith Forum for London[16] the group were told about the developing trend of people aligning themselves with a faith over and above other identities such as area or race. The group felt that it was important to raise the idea of linking with faith groups to spread the importance of participation and voting.

> **Recommendation 1:** The council should link turnout data with the council's Geographic Information System (GIS) to further understand the electorate and undertake specific actions to raise turnouts.

4.10.   It is important to note that Electoral Services are governed by a number of regulations. For example, during the annual canvass no other promotional information can be included on the forms. Electoral Services primarily promote an individual election using a 'voter participation circular' that is delivered to all households a couple of months before polling day. This tells households the date of the election, the last date that they can register, the last date they can apply for a postal vote, show who is registered (and whether they have a current postal vote), and has an application form on the reverse for anyone not included. The cost for this in 2008 was around £23,000. Any other activity promoting voting is minimal and includes, for example, joining with surrounding boroughs in paying for advertising in student guides. Electoral Services are also currently working on linking voter registration forms with council tax to share data and explore ways to promote voter registration.

4.11.   Speaking the Disabled Go! Forum the task group were happy with the opportunities for people with disabilities to vote. For example, many utilised a postal vote if they required help using the ballot paper although would like to attend a polling station if possible. There is generally good access to polling stations with lowered desks for wheelchair users. Visually impaired members of the forum agreed that there was good support at polling stations if needed and they also make provision for mailings and registrations as they do so for other mail. They only improvement they suggested was to ensure that all polling stations included hearing loops where possible.

> **Recommendation 2:** The council should ensure all polling stations include hearing loops where feasible.

4.12.   My Merton is a key medium the council uses to communicate with residents in the borough. There is often a campaign around election times however; the group felt that the magazine could have a greater Councillor presence from all parties. For example, the group suggested that there is a working life feature that focuses on a councillor.

4.13.   Additionally, the group had been impressed by the features in the London Paper surrounding the London Mayoral Election promoting the importance of registering and actually voting. As all London Borough's share the 2010 date for elections there is a good case to lobby a regional organisation to run a pan-London campaign promoting the local elections.

> **Recommendation 3:** The council should run a specific communications campaign running up to the 2010 election. For example a Working life feature looking at a councillor from all parties.

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[16] http://www.londoncivicforum.org.uk/news.asp?sid=9&id=378

> **Recommendation 4:** The council should suggest at a regional level that organisations such as London Councils to encourage a London-wide communications campaign to promote voting in the 2010 elections.

4.14.   The council and partners run or facilitate a number of events across the borough such as the Mitcham Carnival or the recent Action in Merton Day organised by Safer Merton. However, information about many of these events are sometimes limited and isn't easily shared across the organisation. Many of these events could incorporate a presence from the council in relation to promoting democracy. Equally, promotional activities could centre around historical events. For example, Barnsley used suffragette day to raise the awareness of voting amongst women[17].

Celebrating the role of councillors

4.15.   To increase interest in local representative democracy it is important to raise and celebrate the role of councillors. It is important and the power of councillors to make decisions in their representative capacity should be celebrated. If residents know how decisions are made then firstly, they will know what happens when they get involved and that secondly, councillors are usually responsible for making the decisions that will ultimately impact on them.

4.16.   The group felt that promoting the role of councillors will serve two goals:
  - It will increase the number of residents who are interested in becoming councillors and;
  - support an increase in voter turnout if people understand what the role of a councillor is.

4.17.   Councillors are key decision makers and the decisions that they make will have an impact on residents living in the borough. There are a range of committees with different responsibilities of taking different decisions, it is important to ensure residents and officers are aware of the role of each meeting.

4.18.   For example, a Cabinet agenda[18] has little detail about the role of the meeting when in fact it is the meeting where key decisions are taken. Likewise, an agenda for the General Purposes Committee[19] has little detail about its role and assumes a level of understanding from residents. Comparatively, an Overview and Scrutiny agenda[20] includes a brief outline about the role of scrutiny at Merton and the Standards Committee has details about its role on the website[21]. Further, the role of committees, especially Cabinet could be explained in more detail on the website.[22]

> **Recommendation 5:** The council should explain the role of public committees on agendas to help inform residents about the reason for the meeting.
>
> **Recommendation 6:** The council should briefly explaining the role of committees

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[17] http://www.dopolitics.org.uk/case-studies-index/case-studies/a-c/barnsley-metropolitian-district-council-suffragette-day

[18] Example from 9 February 2009: http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-reports/_8000-8999/8047.pdf

[19] Example from 21 January 2009: http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-reports/_8000-8999/8008.pdf

[20] Example from O&S Commission 6 November 2008:
http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-scrutinyreports/179.pdf

[21] http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee/standards-committee.htm

[22] http://www.merton.gov.uk/committee.htm for an example of more information visit:
http://committeepapers.barnet.gov.uk/democracy/meetings/meetinglist1mth.asp?intSubSectionID=2&intSectionID=2&meetingtype=cabinet

on the website to help inform residents about the reasons for the meeting

4.19.   It is also important to explain how the council makes decisions incorporating the role of the partnership and participatory methods. As discussed councillors are elected into their position to take decisions based on evidence presented to them, it is important therefore to, as the Councillor's Commission stated 'celebrate the role of the elected member'. Currently, the website[23] has very little detail about how decisions at the council are made and an out-of-date decision-making handbook is in circulation. This should be revised and updated so officers across the organisation can link to it to ensure consistency and clarity in relation to decision-making processes.

> **Recommendation 7:** The council should update and revise the decision-making handbook as a tool to promote the role of councillors to residents, officers and partners.
>
> **Recommendation 8:** The council needs to improve the amount and quality of information about decision-making processes on the council's website

4.20.   The councillors section on the website also has little information about the role of a councillor, what a councillor does and the information provided on the site. There should at least be an introductory paragraph and also a link to information on voting, how to get involved and how to become a councillor. Similarly, there is little information about who councillors are and for example what made them want to become a councillor. As such the group felt that it was important to raise the profile of all members across the council. There are a number of ways to do this, from a simple profile on the council's website to more 'interactive' such as individual blogs[24]. For example two Merton councillors have short profiles on the Internet as part of the 'Be a Councillor' Campaign.[25]

> **Recommendation 9:** The council should update the website (http://www.merton.gov.uk/councillors.htm) to include information on the role of a councillor and improve the links between different sections of the site.
>
> **Recommendation 10:** Councillors and the Mayor should consider producing short biographies or profiles and publishing them on the internet as a first step in making them more accessible to the public.

4.21.   The role of all councillors is forever evolving with an increasing number of new duties and tools such as Councillor Call for Action at their disposal. However, it is important that ward members are supplied with the information needed to effectively undertake their role and have a presence in the communities that they represent. The group were informed by the member services manager that he is currently undertaking a piece of work looking at how officers update members and will be reporting later in the year.

4.22.   This is linked to an understanding by officers the role that councillors play both in relation to decision-making and across the borough. The group felt that to support this members should have a greater presence in staff corporate inductions and further learning and development events could be set up to both outline and celebrate councillors; roles.

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[23] http://www.merton.gov.uk/how_we_make_decisions.htm
[24] For example see the Leader of Barnet Council's blog: http://leaderlistens.com/
[25] http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk/meetthem/krystalmiller.htm and http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk/meetthem/zeniajamison.htm

> **Recommendation 11:** The council should work to improve officer's understanding of councillors to support councillors undertake their role. For example, include councillors in corporate inductions, running training and increasing councillors profile in xChange.

4.23.   The group discussed some of the barriers to becoming a councillor faced by people from different groups. The Disabled Go! Forum stated that there are lots of things a disabled person needs to consider such as how can visually impaired people deal with the amount of papers and minutes councillors have to read, access to buildings and also whether payments with affect their benefits. Further, they felt that that the council and councillors are not aware of disability issues and this is therefore a barrier in itself.

4.24.   Finally, the group discussed the issue of the council communicating with ward councillors what activities were taking place in their locality so they could have a presence alongside Cabinet members and officers. The Council are currently producing a report looking at the current systems for updating ward councillors with information on local activities.

Increasing Participatory Democracy

4.25.   As detailed above, participative methods have increased over the last ten years and further initiatives such as the Duty to Involve and the Duty to Promote Democracy will have an impact on what the organisation does. As the scope of this paper is to primarily consider representative democracy this section will only outline some of the participative measures that currently exist and attempt and where possible identify where participative methods can help improve representative democracy.

4.26.   It is also important to note that the group were informed of some of the challenges facing participative methods such as giving voice to a vocal minority. Equally, the group are aware of the opportunities and challenges presented by web-based engagement however, it was felt that as technology is improving using such techniques could open the council to a new audience.

4.27.   There are many options for local authorities to involve residents and other stakeholders in decision-making; for example, Citizen Juries, Deliberative Polling, Online Consultations, and Co-productions, all of which have positive and negative aspects. Over the past year the council has begun to promote getting involved in the work of the council. A My Merton article titled 'I don't do politics'[26] provided residents with information on how to get in touch with a councillor, stand as a councillor, attending local meetings and register for elections. The Council's website has a page[27] dedicated to 'getting involved' that provides a list of ways to get involved in decision-making and democracy at Merton and includes:

- Community Forums
- Attending public meetings (including scrutiny)
- Consultations
- Resident associations
- Resident panel

4.28.   There are many other ways that people participate in Merton. For example, there are many service user groups as part of the Local Strategic Partnership[28] (LSP), forums

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[26] October/November 2008 Edition: http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/mymerton.htm
[27] www.merton.gov.uk/getinvolved
[28] http://www.mertonpartnership.org/mp-home.htm

such as the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Forum[29] as well as the local INVOLVE network and CEN Representatives[30]. In addition to this departments and teams across the organisation have various ways of gauging residents and service users opinions both in a democratic and service delivery sense. Given the remit of the review this report has focussed on some of the more over-arching techniques and forums that relate directly to increasing participation in a democratic sense.

4.29.   Alongside these more over-arching participative methods many services across the Council undertake various forms of involvement using different techniques that reflect the issues under consideration.

Community Forums

4.30.   The 2007 scrutiny review of Neighbourhood Governance outlined the introduction of community forums to replace area forums and made a number of recommendations accordingly[31].

4.31.   Community Forums are based around the five town centres in Merton and there has been considerable work done to promote and publicise them. There is no direct budget for them, but officer support is provided. Promotion of community forums has included posters on notice boards in parks, libraries, schools and online; through town centre managers; via residents associations promoting them in newsletters and using the original area forum distribution lists. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission are monitoring the progress of the forums.

4.32.   The scrutiny review of neighbourhood governance supported the need for devolved budgets and funding for community forums. The task group agreed that if the council is serious in making community forums a successful way method for residents to influence decision-making they would have to have a level of decision-making powers and also spending power. In response the group were informed that although the council has not agreed to devolve budgets to community forums at this stage they have agreed to support them by providing £5000 growth in the 2009/10 budget.

Consultations

4.33.   Consultations are a key way to involve the public in shaping the decisions taken by the council and is now considered a key part of the decision-making process. All departments consult on a number of issues and these consultations are logged on a central database owned by the stronger communities team. Members of the public are also able to register for consultations.

4.34.   However, variations across the council still exist and further effort needs to be made to ensure consistency especially as we move towards our new duties and officers explained plans to address this.

4.35.   The group also felt that there was also sometimes a disconnect with consultations and the decision-making process. For example, who would be responsible for taking the decision following consultations was not explained and additionally, consultation documents were a good way to inform residents about other ways they could get involved to influence decisions.

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[29] http://www.merton.gov.uk/lgbt
[30] http://www.mvsc.co.uk/involve
[31] http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutinypublications.htm

4.36.   Finally, the group felt that more people could be made aware of consultations across the organisation and suggested that, similar to agenda's and key decisions, consultations could benefit from the development of an RSS feed[32]. For example, Info4Local provides a feed for consultations affecting local government[33].

> **Recommendation 12:** The role of democracy (both representative and participatory) should be detailed in consultation documents to promote democratic engagement.
>
> **Recommendation 13:** The profile of consultations should be raised by using technology such as RSS feeds.

Public meetings

4.37.   The majority of formal meetings at the council are open to the public and in many of them the public can speak at the chair's discretion. Agendas are circulated to councillors, the press and co-optees. It is also possible to sign up for email alerts when a specific agenda is published.

4.38.   Many of the recommendations outlined earlier in the report such as explaining the role of committees on agendas relate directly to this section. However, the group felt that it was important to raise the profile of these meetings and the role of councillors across the organisation. It was felt that it was important to make both agendas and key decisions more visible both internally and externally. Looking at the council's website the group felt that agendas and key decisions should have a presence similar to press releases on the internet in order to provide this information direct to residents and partners without them having to search for it. Similarly, officers and partners can utilise this service to keep up-to-date with decisions. Technology such as RSS can support the promotion of public meetings or similarly, Toronto Council have been using Twitter to keep residents informed of public meetings[34].

> **Recommendation 14:** An RSS feed should be set up to increase the visibility of agendas and key decisions to residents, officers, members and partners.

4.39.   Taking this idea further, the group suggested that links could be made between agendas and wider participative methods as public meetings may not be the best medium for residents to get involved. At a simple level, agendas could include information on other participative methods or a link to the 'get involved' pages of the website. At a more technical level there could be a way to submit comments on agenda items before meetings to help inform the discussions and decisions taken at meetings.

> **Recommendation 15:** The council should link agendas and other participative methods to support and promote involvement from residents and partners.

4.40.   The scrutiny review of neighbourhood government recommended that Cabinet should consider how they could widen access to the public to observe and participate at meetings of Cabinet. In response, Cabinet stated[35]:

'Cabinet is a decision-making body and it would not expect to make any decisions on which there has not already been full and appropriate consultation. As a decision-making body Cabinet does not consider that Cabinet meetings are a good forum for

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[32] Info4Local provides an explanation of RSS feeds: http://www.info4local.gov.uk/rss-cover-page/
[33] http://www.info4local.gov.uk/rss-cover-page/rss-downloads/#itemsBySubject
[34] http://twitter.com/TorontoCouncil (feed accessed 11 March 2009)
[35] http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=event&event_id=2755

promoting further public participation, although such participation is allowed at the Chair's discretion. Cabinet also considers that there are multiple other mechanisms for public participation, for example at Area Forums, via Overview & Scrutiny and at Full Council … Nonetheless, Cabinet does consider that improving the 'visibility' of Cabinet, both the meetings and the members themselves, is an important mechanism for enhancing local democracy, and will consider the means for doing so, for example, via sessions at the Area Forums'.

4.41.   Nonetheless, Cabinet meetings can still be observed and thought can still be given about how to make members more accessible so recommendations five and six outlined earlier in the report should apply.

4.42.   An existing way that residents, business and ratepayers have been able to ask questions at a council meeting is to raise issues at full council meetings by putting forward questions[36]. This offers residents a good opportunity to directly ask questions of all councillors, the group felt that although this was positive there counld be more interaction on a continuous baisis. For example, one of the Ministry of Justice's Building Democracy Fund[37] projects is Yoosk.com[38]. This concept is still under-development and is initially focused on a large council (Birmingham), a national government organisation and Parliament[39], nonetheless, this is another interesting development and elements such as asking direct questions online of councillors, senior officers, and partners could be developed at a local level.

Residents panel

4.43.   The Residents' Panel[40] is made up of local people who have agreed to be consulted regularly by Merton Council about services and local matters, for example local education, refuse collection, crime and community safety, or disability issues. The people on the panel come from all parts of Merton, and include young and older people, men and women, and disabled people.

4.44.   However, this panel is currently underused but the group were informed by officers that the structure and remit of the panel is being reviewed and will be changed to reflect the policy developments outlined earlier in the report.

Petitions

4.45.   The Communities in Control White Paper includes a duty to respond to petitions and if the response is not deemed adequate the issue can be referred to overview and scrutiny who can prompt a debate at full council. Additionally, it five percent of the borough's population sign the petition this can also prompt a debate at council.

4.46.   The group felt this new duty was a positive step and would support the role of councillors both in support of petitions or presenting their views in a debate. The group were informed that further discussion is needed to agree where the management of this will sit within the organisation.

Other forms of participation

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[36] http://www.merton.gov.uk/getinvolved#ask
[37] http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/announcement061108a.htm
[38] http://www.yoosk.com/
[39] http://www.buildingdemocracy.co.uk/fund/2009/03/getting-down-to-the-nitty-gritty-of-what-yoosk-is-for.html
[40] http://www.merton.gov.uk/residentspanel.htm

4.47.   There are increasing initiatives to involve different communities in shaping services. For example the LGBT forum[41] is growing and provides a platform for LGBT people to engage with the Council and other relevant agencies on matters of interest or concern to them.

4.48.   Outside the council there are a number of other groups that form a key part of invovlement. For example, as part of the Merton Partnership there are a range of service user groups that help support residents with different needs shape the services they access. Also, the local third sector is vibrant with many organisations holding knowledge and experience that can help shape the council's policies and services. Community Engagement Network (CEN) representatives work as a link between the council and the sector which for part of the wider INVOLVE[42] network. Likewise Merton Connected[43] is a website run by Merton Vountary Service Council (MVSC) that acts as a directory for the organisations operating in Merton and is a resource the council and partners can use to support their work.

4.49.   Many service user groups are regularly consulted; for example, in relation to the business plan target outlined above in 2007 the council held a consultation on issues that older people thought important led to the Celebrating Age Strategy[44] that picked up all the themes that arose from 500 returns on 2000 mail outs. The strategy is supported by an action plan including actions such as for transport: making all council controlled bus-stops compatible with DDA requirements for buses. Similarly, the Housing Strategy was also formed through consultation and there is an Older People's Housing Strategy Forum that runs quarterly where they monitor the Housing Strategy and have also agreed to monitor the Older Peoples Action Plan. There are also a lot of smaller examples where individual services engage with older people. The Older People's Partnership comprises Merton Seniors Forum, Age Concern, as well as other statutory or third sector agencies and members of Merton Seniors Forum often attend Scrutiny Panels and public meetings where there is an interest. Ultimately there is a commitment to encourage services to engage with older people as a particular client group when introducing new services or changes. These are examples of how older people can influence decisions made by the council through participation. Many of the recommendations linking representative and participatory democracy will be applicable.

4.50.   Similarly, disabled people are often consulted. However, the forum spoken to by the task group felt that the council needs to start seeing disability as a corporate issue rather than a departmental one. For example disability groups often fall within social care but they could be managed by other departments/thematic groups where appropriate. This group felt that this will links with the need to improve consistency discussed below.

Improving consistency

4.51.   With the forthcoming Duty to Involve there will be increasing need to demonstrate how we inform, consult and involve residents in the work of the council. Although, there are many good examples of how the council has informed, consulted and involved residents, the group felt that improved co-ordination is needed.

4.52.   To achieve this the council is currently in the initial stages of developing an Involvement strategy which will attempt to bring consistency to involvement and engagement across the organisation and ensure that a much more professional

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[41] http://www.merton.gov.uk/lgbt
[42] http://www.mertonconnected.com/club_homepage.asp?clubid=16550
[43] http://www.mertonconnected.com/
[44] http://www.merton.gov.uk/over-50s-strategy.htm

approach is adopted by the council. Despite this the group wanted to raise a number of points arising from their research.

4.53.   Branding is a key way to coordinate activity across an organisation as everyone will benefit from a consistent message. The group suggested that a 'Get Involved in Merton' brand or similar could be established to include all forms on involvement and democratic engagement. The group were presented with an example from Portsmouth Council who having been chosen to participate in the Home Office's Civic Pioneer programme produced a community involvement directory[45] that was 'designed to inspire others to involve local people and communities in the decisions which affect them'. Although this specific example may not be appropriate for Merton the group felt that Merton could learn from this example.

> **Recommendation 16:** The council should work to develop a 'Get Involved in Merton' brand that would support the involvement work of everyone across the council and possibly partnership.

4.54.   The group, having spoken with various groups across the council, felt that there was a slight disconnect between these groups and little co-ordination between them and the issues discussed were often specific to the department that supports them. Consequently, the group agreed that the council should consider reviewing the range of participative groups and how greater co-ordination can be facilitated.

> **Recommendation 17:** The council should review the range of participative groups and how greater co-ordination can be facilitated.

5.   Young people and democratic engagement

5.1.   The group felt that it was essential to promote democracy to young people, as it is important that these principles are demonstrated to people at an early age and agreed that it was important to pay specific attention to this age group.

5.2.   In March 2006 the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel completed a review of youth engagement and services available for young people[46]. All recommendations were agreed by Cabinet and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel received an update on the progress of the action plan in October 2008[47]. This report demonstrated that Merton is improving its involvement of young people, as the national survey of school's highlights:
   • That Merton pupils feel they have a say locally (15% above 2006/7, 2% above 2007/8).
   • That they have been asked specifically about giving their views to a school council (4% above 2007/8) and given their views to a youth parliament (3% above 2007/8).
   • However Merton was 2% worse than the national average for not listened to at all in your local area (2007/8).

5.3.   The scrutiny task group also recommended that the council should adopt the Hear by Right standard to assess and improve practice and policy in relation to young people. Following its agreement by Cabinet, the council has undertaken an audit of existing involvement of young people in service planning and delivery, and identifying opportunities to strengthen this activity.

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[45] http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/yourcouncil/10003.html
[46] http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/scrutiny/scrutinypublications.htm
[47] http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=event&event_id=2818

5.4.   The group felt that the citizenship agenda was important to promote representative democracy by teaching issues such as the importance of voting and getting involved in communities. The National Curriculum[48] details the importance of a citizenship curriculum: *'Citizenship equips students with the knowledge and skills needed for effective and democratic participation. It helps students to become informed, critical, active citizens who have the confidence and conviction to work collaboratively, take action and try to make a difference'.* Additionally, its importance was noted by the Councillor Commission and in the government's response who commissioned the Youth Citizenship Commission to consider what citizenship means to young people and how best to encourage it. Following a discussion with officers the task group were impressed with the work being undertaken but also recognised the challenges faced as citizenship is considered to be a lower priority than other subjects and unless more investment was made then progress, given a current lack of resources, will inevitably be slow.

5.5.   There are a number of initiatives in Merton that promote the principles of representative democracy to young people in both primary and secondary school. Aimed at secondary school pupils the Youth Parliament[49] is facilitated by the council, Primary school children also have Merton's Children's Council which meet three times a year and include elected representatives from the individual school council's across the borough. Both groups consider issues that affect them from school issues through to issues around the environment and crime. To ensure they get accurate information officers and councillors attend meetings to ask questions. However, the task group felt that this arena was disconnected from the actual decision-making of the council and wanted to ensure that young people can shape policy and hold services to account. As such they recommended that in the first instance scrutiny should receive an annual report from both the Youth Parliament and Children's Council that outlines the issues they have considered throughout the year and suggest any topics for scrutiny to consider as part of their annual work programme. In addition it is hoped that this will allow the young people to conduct a formal scrutiny meeting on an issue they can influence.

> **Recommendation 18:** Merton's Youth Parliament and Children's Council should produce and present an annual report to either the Children and Young Peoples scrutiny panel or Commission (by means most suitable for the young-people) summarising the issues considered during the year. These reports will link into the work programming of the scrutiny function.

5.6.   As part of the Children's Trust there is a Children and Young People's participation group that co-ordinates involvement across the CYP partnership. However, as with a number of other participation groups in other areas of the partnership there is a lack of awareness of wider groups and how their groups can support other policy makers across the council. The councillors agreed that work to meet recommendation 17 would respond to this issue.

5.7.   Many of the officers the group spoke to described the commitment councillors have to working with schools and young people. However, the group wanted to stress the importance of such a councillor presence at these events and wanted to encourage as many councillors as possible to commit to working with young people when the opportunities arise.

5.8.   Linking the principles of representative and participatory democracy the Cabinet have recently dedicated money in the 2009/10 budget to establish a Youth Mayor for Merton. It is yet to be decided how the role of a Youth Mayor will be shaped and the

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[48] http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/citizenship/index.aspx
[49] http://www.merton.gov.uk/community/youngpeople/youthparliament.htm

powers that they will be given in relation to the activities of the council. Ultimately, the group agree that this is a good policy but also that there are many challenges as well as opportunities.

5.9.   Local Democracy Week is aimed at promoting democracy to young people and the council often puts on a limited range of events[50]. The group felt that there is much more potential to use this week and that the council should ensure they are prepared to take advantage of this opportunity.

5.10.   Witnesses informed the group that officers often overlook the importance of giving schools sufficient notice of events for them to build it into their plans for the school term. The group felt that this could be better communicated to officers who dont work directly with schools.

> **Recommendation 19:** The council should develop a year plan for schools and opportunities to work with young that can be used by the wider authority to actively engage with young people.

6.   Developing a link between participatory and representative democracy

6.1.   As discussed earlier in the report, increasing levels of participation is not an alternative to representative democracy. It is therefore important that participatory activities ensure they have a clear relationship with representative democracy to promote the role of councillors. The group felt that this link was not as strong as it could be and required a more proactive approach. Furthermore, the importance and principles of democracy and the role of councillors needs to be understood across the whole organisation.

6.2.   Many of the recommendations throughout this paper already support this link, such as improving the way we explain decision-making structures and promote the role of councillors at participation events.

> **Recommendation 20**: There is a need to place a greater emphasis on decision-making and councillors at corporate inductions.

6.3.   In order to link participation and representative democracy the group felt there the council could do more to explain how decisions are made and how residents could influence the decisions being taken. A key way would be to publicise the role of democracy in council publications such as the Business Plan or other strategies. This would inform residents how they could help shape future policies or ask questions of current policies.

> **Recommendation 21:** The council should detail the role of participatory and representative democracy in publications to inform residents of how they can get involved.

6.4.   Throughout this report the group have returned to the importance of using the various events to promote democratic participation. As a whole the council should ensure that it has a presence at events to support this and departments should have the ability to use events to support wider initiatives. An example from the building democracy fund, detailed below, is by Bold Creative who have developed a 'Tagwagon' as part of the building democracy fund made an appearance at a two day 'Festival of Talent' at the

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[50] http://www.merton.gov.uk/localdemocracyweek.htm

Museum of Childhood[51]. Although this is on a larger scale with a large amount of funding the idea of combining events and consultation is still relevant and the idea of being able to 'Tag' ideas is engaging.

> **Recommendation 22:** The council should establish a calendar of events/promotions and share it across the organisation so the council can identify early where and when democracy and involvement can be promoted.

7. Innovations in democratic engagement

7.1. There are many new and innovative projects that aim to promote democracy in every sense. Recently the government's Building Democracy Innovation Fund[52] has funded nine projects to run pilots that promote democratic engagement. Each project enables and assists people to discuss public issues and to influence government and local policy making in innovative ways. Some of these focus on a specific demographic but all aim to allow people to influence decisions made by central and local government. Merton can work to identify learning from such projects and apply these principles at a local level.

Project	Description
Yoosk.com:	An online question time linking the public with local and central government. (Run by Thumbsize Ltd.)
UK Feedback	An online forum for feedback about public services
LocalEyes: The 'Voice'	A web-based consultation tool to enable defined groups to have their say in decision making. (Run by The Shire Initiative.)
All Hansard on TheyWorkForYou.com	To add the pre-2001 Hansard data to www.TheyWorkForYou.com and build exploratory tools. (Run by MySociety.)
Policy Slam	Inclusive debate events to get the public and policy makers interacting.
Tagwagon	A converted campervan to take technology direct to local communities to map and record their opinions. The project works with disadvantaged young people in East London. (Run by Bold Creative.)
Empowering the blind citizen	Providing training and tools to enable blind and partially sighted people to participate in e-democracy. (Run by Screenreader.net Community Interest Company.)
Cambridge Parliament High Support Needs Committee	To establish a committee to represent the views of over 1,000 people with high support needs in Cambridgeshire. (Run by Speaking Up.)

7.2. The group felt that although many of these initiatives required a large amount of investment that may be beyond Merton's resources many of the aspects of these projects could be adopted in various ways.

7.3. Throughout the report the group has presented a number of examples from these projects as evidence to support its recommendations. In particular, the group thought that some of the concepts behind 'Tag Wagon' such as its mobility and a 'Tag' board

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[51] http://www.buildingdemocracy.co.uk/fund/2009/02/tagwagon-gets-on-the-trail-for-talent.html
[52] http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/announcement061108a.htm

were interesting ways to encourage participation from local people that could be put into practice on a smaller scale in Merton. Similarly, a system similar to Yoosk.com could offer a new way that residents and communities can ask councillors, or other people across the council or partnership questions relating to accountability and the decisions they are making.

8.   Conclusions

8.1.   The task group agreed that the council is currently undertaking a range of successful pieces of work but also that there is room for improvement. The recommendations reflect this a propose a number of changes that will hopefully work to improve the opportunities and information provided to residents.

8.2.   In relation to promoting electoral registration and voting the group recognised the challenges faced by the council. However, they agreed that by developing a more sophisticated link between elections and local data will increase our understanding of the electorate and take any action that is necessary. Additionally, raising the profile and role of councillors in relation to decision-making will also support their representative role in the borough.

8.3.   The group have made a number of small recommendations in relation to participatory democracy that will form a base upon which the council will be able to do more. For example, if the Council is encouraging residents to attend public meetings then there is a need to explain what the purposes of these meetings are for otherwise people are still unlikely to attend or know how to contribute.

8.4.   The group wanted to have a particular focus on promoting democracy to young people as they felt it was essential to promote democracy to people at an early age to encourage participation in later life.

8.5.   Importantly, the group also identified a need for greater co-ordination and hope that the involvement strategy will address this. However, they agreed that the council should develop a 'get involved' brand that will support participation across the entire organisation and possibly partnership.

8.6.   Overall, the task group are delighted to submit this report to Cabinet and hope that they will adopt the recommendations and learn from the examples presented to bring about improvements in this exciting area of work.

Request for document translation

Scrutiny review of democratic engagement and electoral services

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☐ **Albanian**
Nëse ju nevojitet ndonjë pjesë e këtij dokumenti e shpjeguar në ghuhën amtare ju lutemi shenojeni kutinë dhe na kontaktoni duke na shkruar ose telefononi duke përdorur detajet e mëposhtme.

☐ **Bengali**
এই দলিলে কোনো অংশ আপনার নিজ ভাষার সুযোগ চাহিলে, দয়া করে বাক্সটিক (বক্স) টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং নিচে দেয়া বা লেখা করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন। নিচে আমাদের বিবরণ দেয়া হয়েছে।

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Caso você necessite qualquer parte deste documento explicada em seu idioma, favor assinalar a quadrícula respectiva e contatar-nos por escrito ou por telefone usando as informações para contato aqui fornecidas.

☐ **Somali**
Haddii aad u baahan tahay in qayb dukumeentigan ka mid ah laguugu sharxo luqaddaada, fadlan sax ku calaamadee sanduuqa oo nagula soo xiriir warqad ama telefoon adigoo isticmaalaya macluumaadka halkan hoose ku yaalla.

☐ **Spanish**
Si desea que alguna parte de este documento se traduzca en su idioma, le rogamos marque la casilla correspondiente y que nos contacte bien por escrito o telefónicamente utilizando nuestra información de contacto que encontrará más abajo.

☐ **Tamil**
இந்தப் பத்திரத்தில் எந்த பகுதி உங்கள் மொழியில் விளக்கப்பட வேண்டுமானால், அதற்குரிய கட்டத்தில் குறியிட்டு, கீழே கொடுக்கப்பட்ட விவரங்களை உபயோகித்து எங்களுடன் எழுத்து மூலமோ அல்லது தொலைபேசி மூலமோ எங்களைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும்.

☐ **Urdu**
اگر آپ اس دستاویز کے کسی حصے کا ترجمہ اپنی زبان میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو دیئے گئے خانے میں نشان لگائیں اور ہم سے اس درج ذیل رابطے پر یا تو تحریری طور پر یا پھر ٹیلیفون کے ذریعے رابطہ کریں۔

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