

This survey report presents findings on the range and extent of public participation initiatives being used across local government. It updates baseline research published in 1998 and shows that local government continues to push forward the agenda on public participation. Authorities clearly recognise the benefits of engaging the public and are increasingly trying to involve people in local decisions and developing service delivery.



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Public Participation in Local Government

A survey of local authorities

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Public Participation in
Local Government
A survey of local authorities

December 2002

Demelza Birch, Local and Regional Government Research Unit, ODPM
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London

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The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone 020 7944 4400
Web site www.odpm.gov.uk

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CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS	5
CHAPTER 1	7
Background and introduction to the research	
1.1 Background to the research	7
1.2 Objectives of the research	8
1.3 Research methodology	8
1.4 Structure of the report	9
1.5 Note of caution	9
CHAPTER 2	10
Use of different participation methods	
2.1 Analysis of respondents	10
2.2 Different forms of participation	10
2.3 Participation initiatives used during 2001	11
2.4 Developments in usage	13
2.5 Local authorities' plans to use initiatives in 2002	13
2.6 Trends in the take-up of participation	14
2.7 Number of times used	18
2.8 Target group for participation	19
2.9 Number of people involved by local government	20
2.10 Policy focus on participation	23
2.11 Corporate vs. departmental	24
2.12 Capacity to conduct participation exercises	25
CHAPTER 3	28
Factors influencing public participation approaches	
3.1 Type of authority	28
3.2 Rural vs. urban	32
3.3 Analysis by political control	33
CHAPTER 4	39
Issues in public participation	
4.1 Factors stimulating participation initiatives	39
4.2 The main purposes of participation initiatives	40
4.3 Benefits of public participation initiatives	41
4.4 The main problems with implementing participation initiatives	41
4.5 Disadvantages of participation initiatives	42
4.6 Circumstances or issues where the public should not be involved	43
4.7 Problems of involving particular social groups	44
4.8 Impact of participation initiatives on final decision-making	45

CHAPTER 5	47
Conclusions	
ANNEX A	50
Technical report	
ANNEX B	53
Questionnaire and guidelines	

KEY FINDINGS

- Local government continues to push forward the agenda on public participation - authorities clearly recognise the benefits of engaging the public and are increasingly trying to involve people in local decisions and developing service delivery. The average number of initiatives used by local authorities per year has increased from 9.1 in 1997 to 10.5 in 2001.
- Traditional approaches to public participation and those with a 'consumerist' nature are well-established across local government. In fact, service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes are almost universally used by local authorities. These approaches were used by 92% and 86% of authorities respectively in 2001.
- Trend data show that the take-up of consultation documents, public meetings, co-option/committee involvement and complaints/suggestions schemes have slowed significantly in the last few years, suggesting the use of these approaches may have reached their peak across local government.
- The survey reveals a marked increase in the take-up of some innovative and deliberative approaches, particularly interactive websites, citizens' panels and focus groups, since 1997. In contrast the use of referendums and citizens' juries is very unusual in local authorities – only 10% of authorities used referendums and 6% used citizens' juries to engage the public in 2001.
- The participation initiative used most regularly by local authorities appears to be area/neighbourhood forums, which seem to be used on average 15 times a year. Traditional approaches - public meetings, question and answer sessions and co-option to committees - are also used frequently (around once a month) by authorities to engage the public. As one would expect referendums are used on a one-off basis, most likely to engage the public on a key issue or decision.
- The scale of public involvement in local decision-making is sizeable. Roughly speaking the survey suggests that a total of around 8million people were involved by all 216 responding authorities in participation exercises during 2001. If this figure is aggregated up to represent **all** English local authorities, assuming non-respondents are not too dissimilar, it would imply that local government as a whole engaged approximately 14million people via participation and consultation initiatives during 2001. The survey suggests that the highest numbers of people are involved by local authorities via consultation documents.
- District and rural councils seem the least active across the participation initiatives addressed in this survey, especially the more innovative and resource-intensive approaches. District councils used on average 9.1 initiatives in 2001, compared with London boroughs who used 14 initiatives on average.
- There is less distinction between authorities with differing political control, although those controlled by Labour and Liberal Democrat parties have been the most active across the participation approaches addressed in this survey. Labour authorities used an average of 11.3 participation initiatives in 2001 and authorities with no overall control used 9.8. Generally speaking, the use of most of the traditional and consumer-oriented

approaches is consistently high across all authorities regardless of type or ruling party. There tend to be greater variations in relation to the more innovative approaches.

- Local authorities most often seek to engage the public on issues relating to service delivery/best value and to the environment or the local community. Also, but to a lesser extent, housing and crime/safety.
- Relatively few authorities contract-out participation exercises in whole or part. That said, the more resource-intensive and/or innovative approaches, such as citizens' juries, focus groups and opinion polls are likely to be contracted-out to some degree. Instead, almost all authorities (97%) work with other organisations on schemes to enhance public participation – in most cases authorities work with the police (89%), but also health authorities, voluntary/community organisations and other authorities.
- Local authorities clearly recognise the benefits of engaging the public, particularly in terms of improving service delivery and decision-making. And, a majority of authorities (70%) think that participation initiatives are 'often' or 'fairly' influential on final decision-making. Authorities do, however, have some concerns about the time and resources required, and about motivating all sections of the community to become involved.
- 56% of authorities are concerned that participation exercises may simply capture the views of dominant, but unrepresentative, groups. This is compounded by the fact that 44% of authorities report having experienced difficulties in engaging people from certain social groups – particularly, those from ethnic minorities and young people. However, it would appear that local authorities are seeking to address this issue by aiming certain participation exercises (e.g. forum-based initiatives, user management of services and co-option to committees) at specific citizen groups or neighbourhoods.

CHAPTER 1

Background and introduction to the research

1.1 Background to the research

The local government modernisation agenda, largely set out within the 1998 and 2001 local government White Papers, is intended to bring about improvements under key themes including efficiency, transparency and accountability. Aspects of the modernisation agenda relating to public participation, council decision-making and wider governance are considered to be a programme for the democratic renewal of local government. In practical terms, the last four years has seen the implementation of a range of policies and initiatives for local government, including new council constitutions, community planning, best value, local Public Service Agreements, Local Strategic Partnerships and local government finance reforms.

The future of local government is tied to its capacity as a community leader to work alongside other agencies and its citizens in order to achieve social and economic benefits. The local government modernisation agenda includes encouragement or requirements for local authorities to engage the public in realising this capacity. As the 2001 local government White Paper¹: *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* emphasises, ongoing public participation - at local elections and between - is vital to enhancing the democratic legitimacy of local government, the development of community leadership and in improving service delivery.

Local authorities have long had statutory responsibilities to consult and involve the public in relation to certain issues, such as land-use planning, through public meetings and consultation documents. Research commissioned by the Department in 1997 revealed that not only have local authorities been using such traditional methods, so called 'consumerist' approaches (service satisfactions surveys, complaints/suggestions schemes) have also become well-established in local government. Also, there were signs of local government looking to new and innovative ways of involving the public. This research is intended to gauge further developments in local government use of public participation approaches, particularly in the light of early implementation of modernisation policies and initiatives.

¹ Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services, TSO, 2001
<http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/sll/index.htm>

1.2 Objectives of the research

Underlying local government consultation and participation activity may be the expectation of certain related outcomes:

- A better relationship with the public in terms of enhancing the understanding, approval and legitimacy of the authority.
- Knowledge and information that will in turn improve service delivery by making it more responsive.
- Changes in decision-making reflected in shifts in policy, budgets or new commitments.

The Department is keen to understand how local government is seeking to involve citizens to achieve such outcomes and, as mentioned, in 1997 commissioned research² to obtain information on the nature and extent of public participation exercises in local government. This research provided baseline data - before the full implementation of the 1998 White Paper policies - and was used to inform the document 'Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation'.³

In 2002, the Department decided to conduct another survey of local authorities to establish how things have changed since the 1997 baseline research. The 2002 survey adapted the 1997 questionnaire – it used many of the same questions, but also included some additional questions to give greater depth to the information provided in the baseline survey. Where possible, this report draws comparisons between the 1997 survey results and this 2002 survey to give an indication of how things have changed in the last few years. (Unlike the 1997 research, no qualitative research has been conducted within this study.)

1.3 Research methodology

A postal survey of all local authorities in England was conducted between March and July 2002. The survey process was managed by McCallum Layton, with questionnaire design and reporting conducted by the Department's Local and Regional Government Research Unit.

The survey questionnaire (attached at Appendix A) sought information on the range and extent of public participation initiatives being used by local authorities. As such it covered a whole variety of approaches that local authorities may use to enhance public participation, including those that...

- Seek the views of the citizen;
- Increase involvement in decision-making;
- Enable the electorate to determine or influence policy on a specific issue;

2 Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government – a research report, DETR, 1998
<http://www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/research/particip.htm>

3 Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government, DETR, 1998
<http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/epplg/index>

- Provide a scrutiny role for the citizen;
- Open up the authority.

The survey also obtained information on who and how often authorities consult; the sorts of issues they consult on; and, the perceived benefits of, and obstacles to, involving the public.

216 local authorities responded to the survey – that is a response rate of 55%. The profile of respondents was broadly representative of English local government in terms of local authority type. For more detail on the survey process and response rates, please refer to the technical note at Annex A.

1.4 Structure of the report

The survey findings are presented in three chapters:

- The approach to public participation currently used by local authorities, together with information on trends in the take-up of the different methods.
- The different factors that might influence an authority's approach to public participation, e.g. type of authority, political control.
- A discussion of the benefits and challenges associated with conducting participation exercises to involve the public.

1.5 Note of caution

It is important to note that some respondents found section C of the questionnaire difficult to complete – refer to the questionnaire at Annex B. Consequently, total responses to the questions in this section were somewhat lower than the rest of the questionnaire. Where response to a question was low, absolute numbers are provided as well as, or instead of, percentages.

CHAPTER 2

Use of different participation methods

2.1 Analysis of respondents

Before looking in detail at the survey results, it would be useful to consider the types of local authority officer that completed the questionnaire, as the responses given will be influenced by respondents' own experiences and perceptions. Table 1 below gives a broad indication of the range of respondents to the survey.

Table 1 Role of respondent in the authority	
Role	% of all respondents
Policy officer	30%
CEO/corporate	25%
Communications/Public Relations	15%
Research/consultation	14%
Service delivery	5%
Community liaison	4%
Other	12%

Base: 216 responding authorities

Table 1 shows that a majority of respondents perform a policy or corporate role within their authority. This also suggests that participation and consultation tend to be managed at the corporate level.

2.2 Different forms of participation

There are a variety of legal requirements for local authorities to consult with the public, most of which are the responsibility of individual service areas. This questionnaire is designed to cover both statutory and voluntary consultation.

The survey questionnaire provided a list of nineteen different approaches to engaging the public – from traditional methods such as public meetings and consultation documents, to the more innovative approaches like visioning exercises⁴ and interactive websites. Authorities were asked a range of questions relating to each form of public participation.

⁴ Visioning exercises: a range of methods (including focus groups), may be used within a visioning exercise, the purpose of which is to establish the 'vision' participants have of the future and the kind of future they would like to create. Visioning may be used to inform broad strategy for a locality, or may have a more specific focus (as in environmental consultations for Local Agenda 21).

For the purpose of the analysis, the different forms of participation have been divided into four categories:

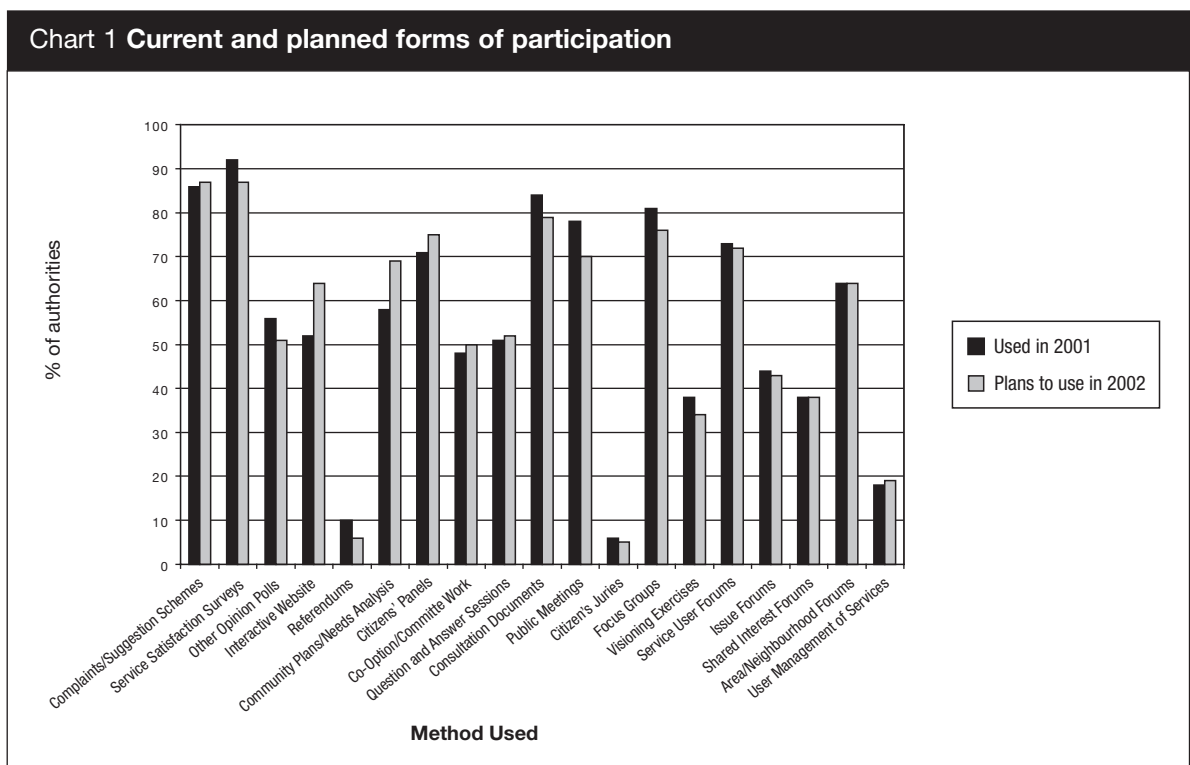
- The more **traditional** forms (eg public meetings, consultation documents, co-option to committees and question and answer sessions) that have been used by local authorities for some time.
- Those which are primarily **customer-oriented** (eg service satisfaction surveys, complaints/suggestions schemes) – most often used in relation to service delivery.
- **Innovative** methods (eg interactive websites, citizens' panels, focus groups and referendums) that tend to represent the newer research techniques.
- Innovative approaches which encourage citizens to **deliberate** over issues (eg citizens' juries, community plans/needs analysis, visioning exercises and issue forums).

2.3 Participation initiatives used during 2001

As found in the 1997 survey, a wide variety of approaches for engaging the public were used across local authorities in 2001. Service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes remain the most popular ways of seeking the public's views, with 92% and 86% of authorities respectively having used these approaches in 2001. More traditional approaches, such as consultation documents and public meetings are similarly popular, with 181 authorities (84%) and 169 authorities (78%) having used these in 2001 respectively. For more details please refer to Table 2 and Chart 1.

Table 2 Did your authority use this method in 2001? Does your authority have specific plans to use each method in 2002?				
Form of Public Participation	Used in 2001		Plans to use in 2002	
	No.	%	No.	%
Service Satisfaction Surveys	199	92	187	87
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	185	86	187	87
Consultation Documents	181	84	171	79
Focus Groups	175	81	164	76
Public Meetings	169	78	152	70
Service User Forums	158	73	155	72
Citizens' Panels	153	71	162	75
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	138	64	139	64
Community Plans/Needs Analysis	126	58	148	69
Other Opinion Polls	121	56	110	51
Interactive Website	112	52	139	64
Question and Answer Sessions	110	51	113	52
Co-option/Committee Work	104	48	108	50
Issue Forums	95	44	93	43
Shared Interest Forums	83	38	73	34
Visioning Exercises	81	38	83	38
User Management of Services	38	18	41	19
Referendums	21	10	13	6
Citizens' Juries	14	6	11	5
BASE	216	-	216	-

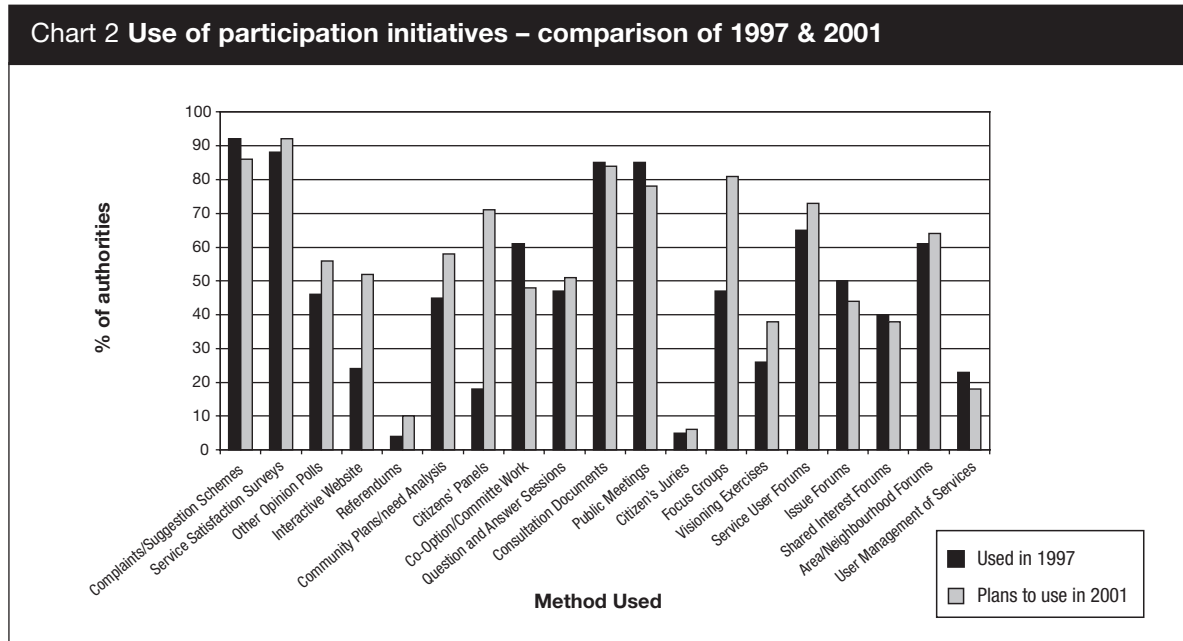
Note: For definitions of the initiatives listed in this table please refer to the Questionnaire Guidelines at Annex B.



Base: 216 responding authorities

The use of referendums and citizen's juries in 2001 was unusual in local authorities – only 21 and 14 authorities respectively (that is 10% and 6%) reported their use. This was consistent across all types of authority. This low level of usage may be due to the cost of these approaches meaning that they are necessarily reserved for when a local authority needs the public's view on a key issue or decision.

2.4 Developments in usage



Base: 216 responding authorities

Chart 2 above compares the 1998 and 2002 survey results which refer to participation activity in 1997 and 2001 respectively. The 1998 survey showed increasing interest in innovative methods of engaging the public – this is confirmed by the 2002 survey, which reveals that authorities are increasingly experimenting with more innovative approaches. In 1997 only 55 authorities (18%) used citizen's panels, compared with 153 authorities (71%) in 2001. Similarly, the use of interactive websites increased from only 74 authorities (24%) in 1997 to 112 authorities (52%) in 2001 – although this will also reflect the increased development of local authority websites and other forms of electronic service delivery.

2.5 Local authorities' plans to use initiatives in 2002

The move towards more innovative methods of engaging the public seems set to continue in 2002 - when comparing figures for approaches used in 2001, with specific plans to use them in 2002, the only methods which show a real increase are as follows:

- interactive websites (up by 27 authorities, that is 12%);
- community plans/needs analysis (up by 22 authorities, that is 11%);
- citizen's panels (up by 9 authorities, that is 4%).

In fact, it is these initiatives that the greatest numbers of authorities plan to use for the first time in 2002. 86 responding authorities have never used interactive websites, but 28

of these (that is 33%) plan to use this approach for the first time in 2002. 20 of the 55 authorities (36%) that have never used community plans/needs analysis intend to do so for the first time in 2002 and 9 out of 51 (18%) authorities plan to use citizens' panels for the first time in 2002. In contrast, it would seem that the more traditional and consumerist approaches – public meetings, consultation documents and service satisfactions surveys – have reached their peak (albeit at a high level across local government), as of the authorities that have never used these methods before, none are planning to start using them for the first time in 2002.

It is worth noting that a degree of caution should be exercised when considering 'plans to use initiatives' as, figures may be lower than will ultimately prove to be the case as some authorities had not yet made specific plans to use an initiative at the time of the survey.

2.6 Trends in the take-up of participation

Authorities were asked when they used each initiative for the first time. This allows us to see how long particular approaches have been in use in local government and identify whether there are any trends or patterns in the introduction of particular public participation initiatives. Charts 3 – 6 show the cumulative number of authorities introducing particular methods of consultation each year. By analysing the take-up of different methods within these categories some interesting each year patterns emerge.

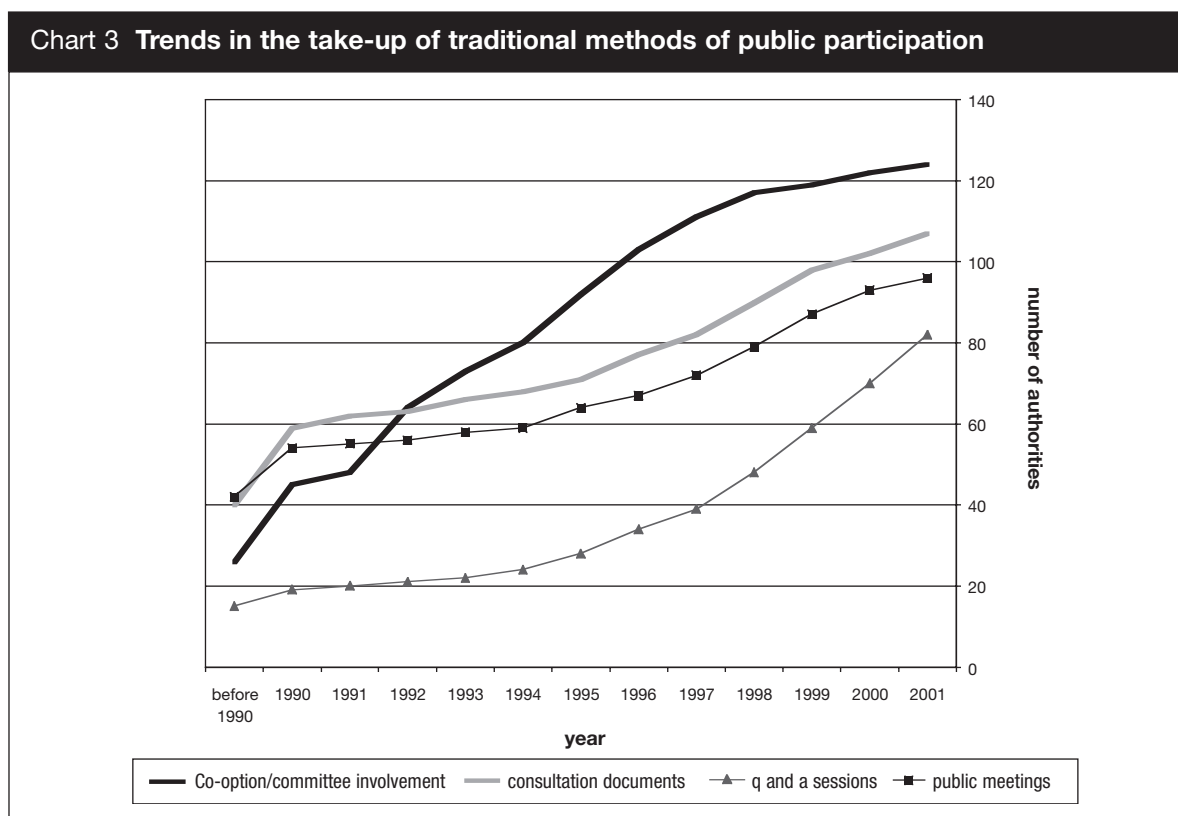


Chart 3 shows trends in the take-up of traditional methods of public participation. The number of authorities introducing these methods of participation each year has continued to grow. The use of co-option to committees grew the most quickly since 1992 - although it does seem to have levelled slightly since 1998. Whilst the introduction of consultation documents and public meetings by authorities has seen a steady rise since the early 90's, their use, too, seems to have levelled off over the past couple of years.

The use of question and answer sessions to engage the public has grown at a much slower rate than other traditional methods since before 1990. However, question and answer sessions seem to have become more popular with local authorities in the late 90's and early 2000s – since 1999, 34 authorities have introduced the use of question and answer sessions, whereas public meetings and consultation documents have been introduced by only 17 authorities and co-option by 7.

Chart 4 Trends in the take-up of customer oriented consultation

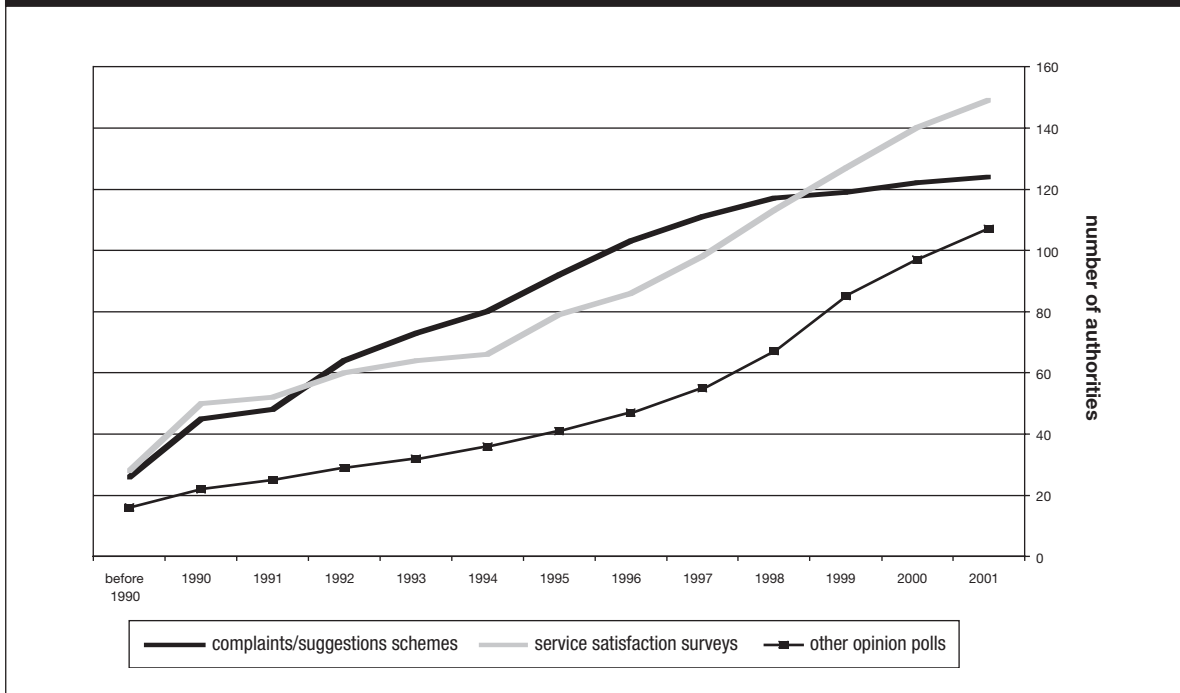


Chart 4 shows that the use of service satisfaction surveys rose quickly throughout the 90's and continues to do so right up until 2001. It is probable that this continuing increase in take-up is as a result of best value requirements and the advent of user satisfaction performance indicators. Complaints/suggestions schemes has seen steady growth through the 90's – this now has levelled off, so much so that its use has actually fallen below that of service satisfaction surveys. 36 authorities have introduced service satisfaction surveys since 1999, whereas only 7 authorities have started using complaints/suggestions schemes. This implies that complaints/suggestions schemes, whilst having been popular in the past, may have reached their peak with authorities now looking for alternative ways to engage the public.

Looking at the take-up of other opinion polls, whilst this increased at a slower rate through the 90's, it has seen a much faster increase since 1998, with 40 authorities having introduced their use since 1999 – perhaps replacing the use of complaints/suggestions schemes. The increased take-up of other opinion polls means that 56% of authorities had used this approach by 2001, compared with 46% by 1997.

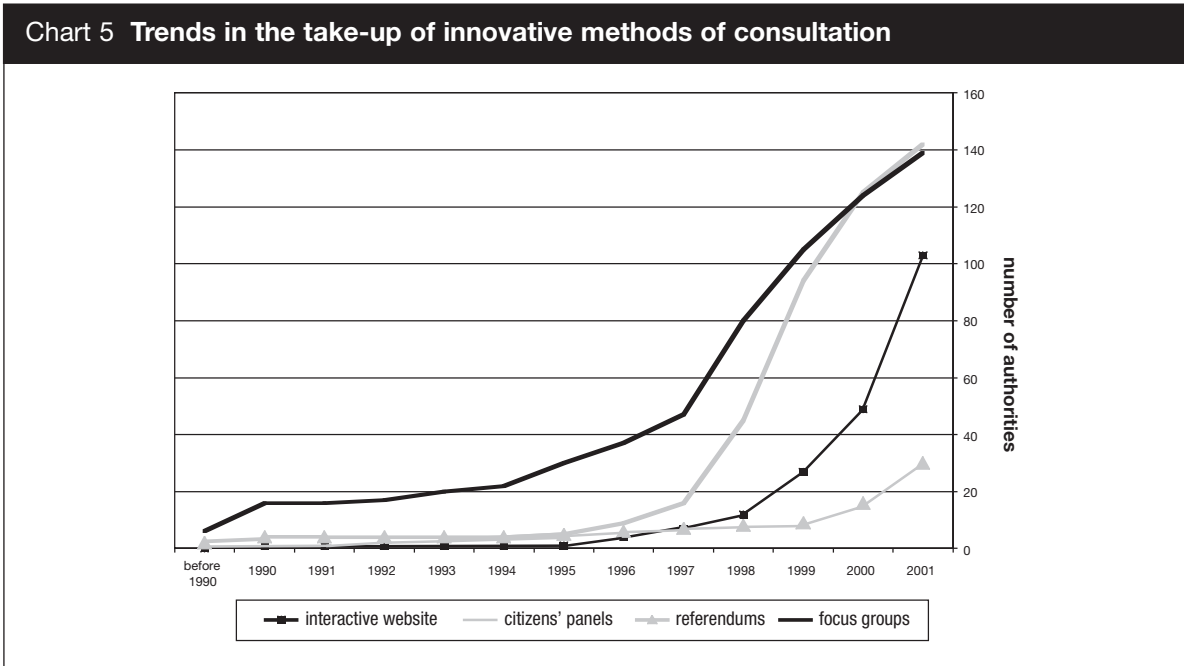


Chart 5 shows a sharp rise in the use of some of the more innovative methods of consultation since 1997 – specifically interactive websites, citizens’ panels and focus groups. The recent levels of usage are in sharp contrast to the very low take-up previously: until 1996, only 1 or 2 authorities were introducing the use of interactive websites or citizens’ panels each year. The sharp rise in the use of interactive websites to involve the public is probably a reflection of the Government’s e-local government agenda, which includes targets for local authorities.

Referendums, however, remain the least popular – probably due to the high cost and high profile nature of this approach – in fact, between 1990 and 2001 a total of only 30 authorities had used a referendum – 14 of which did so in 2001. As discussed later, this jump in 2001 will be due, in part, to the changes to political management arrangements and the statutory requirement for local authorities to consult on the options (including a requirement for a referendum on mayoral options).

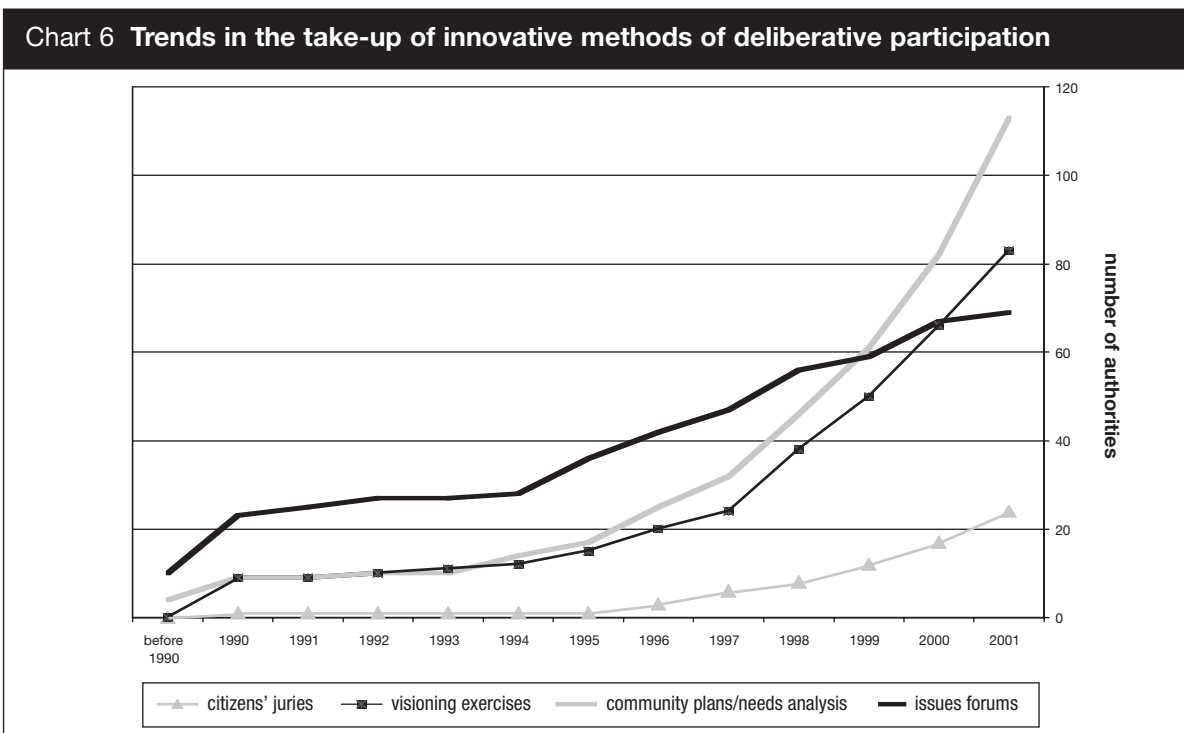


Chart 6 shows that the take-up of visioning exercises and, in particular, community plans/needs analysis has risen sharply since 1997, suggesting local authorities are particularly keen on these forms of deliberative participation. The use of issues forums has risen more steadily since the mid-nineties and shows signs of levelling off slightly in the last two years. As mentioned earlier, authorities are far more tentative about the use of citizens' juries and take-up remains slow – until 1996 only one of the authorities responding to this survey had used a citizen jury. This has since risen to 24 authorities having used a citizens' jury at least once by 2001.

Authorities were also asked whether each of the initiatives listed had **ever** been used in their authority. The results reveal a similar story in terms of the more popular approaches. Service satisfaction surveys prove the most popular with almost all responding authorities (98%) having used this at some point to involve the public. This approach is closely followed by complaints/suggestion schemes (94%), public meetings (93%) and consultation documents (93%). Authorities again seem least likely to use citizens' juries (16%) or referendums (21%) to involve the public in decision-making. See Table 3 below for more detail.

**Table 3 Has this initiative ever been used in your authority?
Did your authority use this initiative during 2001?
Does your authority have specific plans to use this method in 2002?**

	Ever used		Used in 2001		Difference in percentage
	No.	%	No.	%	
Citizens' Panels	162	75	153	71	4
Shared Interest Forums	90	42	83	38	4
User Management of Services	47	22	38	18	4
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	149	69	138	64	5
Service Satisfaction Surveys	211	98	199	92	6
Interactive website	127	59	112	52	7
Issue Forums	111	51	95	44	7
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	202	94	185	86	8
Co-option/Committee Work	124	57	104	48	9
Consultation Documents	200	93	181	84	9
Citizens' juries	34	16	14	6	10
Focus Groups	196	91	175	81	10
Service User Forums	179	83	158	73	10
Referendums	45	21	21	10	11
Question and Answer Sessions	133	62	110	51	11
Community Plans/need Analysis	158	73	126	58	15
Public Meetings	201	93	169	78	15
Other Opinion Polls	156	72	121	56	16
Visioning Exercises	118	55	81	38	17
BASE	216	–	216	–	–

It is important to note that figures for 'ever used' are considerably higher than figures for 'used in 2001' for some participation approaches. This is most noticeably the case regarding visioning exercises, other opinion polls, public meetings and, community plans/needs analysis, which may be a reflection of the fact that that these methods tend to

be used on a one-off basis to address a particular need in a particular year. In contrast, these results imply that approaches like citizen's panels, shared interest forums, user management of services, in particular, are more likely to be used on an ongoing basis to seek the public's views.

2.7 Number of times used

The 1998 and 2002 surveys provide an understanding of the extent of public participation initiatives in local government. In addition, this 2002 research tried to enhance this breadth of information provided by giving some indication of the 'depth' of public participation. So as well as finding out which initiatives are being used by local authorities, this survey sought information on how often initiatives were used in 2001 and how many people were involved, etc. However, providing this sort of information presented some respondents with difficulties if they do not regularly collate such data. As a result, the figures shown here should be treated with a degree of caution, as responses to these questions were low and some of the figures provided by respondents will necessarily be estimates. These findings are, however, useful as a first estimate of the total level of participation and for enabling comparison between the different initiatives.

Table 4 below shows the average number of times each initiative was used by local authorities during 2001. The survey suggests a good deal of variation between the most frequently used approach (area/neighbourhood forums) and methods that tend to be used more intermittently, e.g. referendums and citizens' juries.

As one would expect, referendums are used on a one-off basis – they are a costly, high profile way to engage the public and are, therefore, only used when an important issue is at stake, for example, changes to council decision-making structures or council tax levels. In contrast, not only are service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes used widely across local government, but they are also used on a regular basis - on average 9 or 10 times a year. This is probably because they are one of the more cost-effective ways of seeking the public's views and provide generally acceptable and understandable findings.

Forum-based initiatives tend to be used quite frequently. Local authorities use these at least 8 times on average per year. This suggests that, once set up, such deliberative approaches provide a useful, readily-available resource for finding out the public's views on a particular issue – possibly at relatively short notice. It would seem that, of all these types of initiatives, area/neighbourhood forums are used the most regularly by local authorities – on average 15 times a year.

The more traditional participation approaches - public meetings, co-option to committees and question and answer sessions - are used very frequently (around once a month). This is probably because they are a well-established, widely accepted and convenient way for local authorities to engage members of the public and would tend to attract the more politically active or those who have a special interest in a topic or issue. Consultation documents are used less often – on average 6 times a year perhaps because managing such a process and analysing the responses is more time-consuming and resource intensive than the other traditional methods of participation.

Table 4 How many times was this initiative used during 2001?

	Average no. of times	Percentage of authorities using method in 2001
Referendums	1	10%
Citizens' juries	1	6%
Citizens' Panels	3	71%
Other Opinion Polls	3	56%
Community Plans/Needs Analysis	3	58%
User Management of Services	3	18%
Visioning Exercises	3	38%
Interactive websites*	4	52%
Consultation Documents	6	84%
Focus Groups	7	81%
Shared Interest Forums	8	38%
Service User Forums	8	73%
Service Satisfaction Surveys	9	92%
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	10	86%
Issue Forums	10	44%
Co-option/Committee Work	10	48%
Public Meetings	11	78%
Question and Answer Sessions	12	51%
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	15	64%

*This probably refers to particular consultation using the website.

2.8 Target group for participation

For each of the initiatives provided in the questionnaire, respondents were asked how many times, during 2001, each method involved:

- a) the whole population;
- b) particular citizen group; or
- c) a particular neighbourhood.

For most participation initiatives local authorities tend to involve the **whole population** rather than targeting particular groups or neighbourhoods – nine of the nineteen initiatives more often involve the whole population. In particular, complaints/suggestion schemes, other opinion polls, interactive websites and citizens' panels are most predominantly used to consult whole populations (or representative samples) as opposed to being used to engage particular citizen groups or neighbourhoods.

As shown in Table 5 below, six of the nineteen approaches are more likely to involve a particular citizen group: co-option/committee work; focus groups; service user forums; issue forums; shared interest forums and most noticeably user management of services. Given that 44% of authorities have experienced difficulties engaging particular social groups, it is interesting that the authorities seem to be using smaller-scale, deliberative

approaches as a way of encouraging citizens from 'hard-to-reach' groups to become more involved in the work of the council.

Only four of the nineteen initiatives - area/neighbourhood forums, visioning exercises, public meetings and referendums - are most predominantly used to consult particular neighbourhoods.

Table 5 Of all the times each initiative was used during 2001, how many times has it involved the following target groups: whole population (including representative samples); a particular neighbourhood; or a particular citizen group?

	Used at least once to consult...					
	Whole population		Citizen group		Neighbourhood	
	No. of authorities	%	No. of authorities	%	No. of authorities	%
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	35	19%	7	4%	0	0%
Service Satisfaction Surveys	94	47%	56	28%	16	8%
Other Opinion Polls	62	51%	16	13%	9	7%
Interactive Websites	45	40%	10	9%	2	2%
Referendums	13	62%	1	5%	14	67%
Community Plans/Needs Analysis	33	26%	12	10%	24	19%
Citizens' Panels	88	58%	19	12%	1	1%
Co-option/Committee Work	12	12%	28	27%	8	8%
Question and Answer Sessions	23	21%	12	11%	13	12%
Consultation Documents	68	38%	39	22%	24	13%
Public Meetings	38	22%	21	12%	47	28%
Citizen's Juries	8	57%	0	0%	0	0%
Focus Groups	49	28%	71	41%	21	12%
Visioning Exercises	10	12%	12	15%	17	21%
Service User Forums	16	10%	54	34%	9	6%
Issue Forums	11	12%	27	28%	10	11%
Shared Interest Forums	6	7%	28	34%	6	7%
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	8	6%	9	7%	54	39%
User Management of Services	0	0%	8	21%	3	8%

Note: Percentages are based on number of authorities that used each particular method in 2001.

2.9 Number of people involved by local government

Table 6 shows the average number of people that were involved in each type of participation across local government as a whole. Again, the figures presented here should be treated with a degree of caution, as responses to these questions were low and some of the figures provided by respondents will necessarily be estimates. It is also worth noting that these figures will be affected by the number of times an initiative is used in any one year, it is therefore possible that survey respondents may have double-counted where the same people have participated in an initiative on more than one occasion. These figures are, however, still useful in starting to gauge the overall levels of participation and for making comparisons between different initiatives.

Whilst only 21 responding authorities (10%) used referendums in 2001 and did so once during 2001, this approach involved, by far, the greatest number of people on average (73,929) per authority that used it – this will, however, reflect the population size of the authorities undertaking referendums. This represents approximately around 1million people across all authorities in the sample that used referendums in 2001. Consultation documents also involve a high number of people (an average of 14,269 per authority in 2001). Given that 84% of authorities used this method in 2001, it is consultation documents (of all 19 approaches) that have engaged the most people during that year – approximately 2.5million people across all authorities in the sample that used this approach.

Citizens' panels are popular with authorities (71% having used them in 2001) and involved, on average, around 8000 people per authority area. If this figure is aggregated to represent all authorities in the sample that used citizens' panels in 2001, it comes to approximately 1million people in total – similar to the figure for referendums but with fewer people involved more frequently.

Whilst service satisfaction surveys were used by the most authorities in 2001, their 'coverage' would be less than referendums and consultation documents because fewer people tend to be involved on any one occasion: on average, service satisfaction surveys and involved around 5,500 people per authority area during 2001. Similarly, complaints/suggestions schemes are very popular with authorities, 86% of them having used this approach in 2001 and authorities reported (see later) that this approach is most often used to engage the whole population. However, complaints/suggestions schemes are perhaps less effective than other methods at obtaining views from large numbers of people as in 2001 it involved only around 1500 people on average per authority. This is probably because of the 'passive' nature of this approach and the potential that only regular service users with a problem or complaint will 'self select' as respondents.

Table 6 In total, during 2001, how many people were involved using each method?			
	Average number of people in 2001 (No. of respondents to question)	Range (minimum – maximum)	Percentage of LAs using this method in 2001
Referendums	73,929 (11)	2,932-413,825	10%
Consultation Documents	14,269 (62)	7,600-697,193	84%
Citizens' Panels	7,934 (101)	10,550-651,100	71%
Service Satisfaction Surveys	5,714 (94)	10,013-322,591	92%
Other Opinion Polls	5,496 (60)	2,000-143,800	56%
Community Plans/need Analysis	5,247 (51)	811-50,439	58%
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	1,653 (59)	863-5,968	86%
Issue Forums	737 (27)	163-9,004	44%
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	685 (53)	418-2,329	64%
Public Meetings	662 (66)	442-1,068	78%
User Management of Services	427 (11)	11-3,100	18%
Interactive Websites*	386 (44)	116-1,213	52%
Shared Interest Forums	367 (33)	145-2,252	38%
Service User Forums	295 (56)	143-1,767	73%
Visioning Exercises	156 (32)	84-328	38%
Question and Answer Sessions	155 (37)	105-437	51%
Focus Groups	148 (87)	124-256	81%
Co-option/Committee Work	118 (50)	20-607	48%
Citizens' juries	23 (7)	17-26	6%

Figures are estimates provided by authorities. Figures may include some double counting, if the same people have been involved in an initiative on more than one occasion.

*This probably refers to particular consultation using a website.

As might be expected, approaches which are aimed at a specific issue or specific citizen group/neighbourhood (e.g. forum-based approaches, public meetings, question and answer sessions), tend to involve smaller numbers of people.

During 2001, citizens' juries were the least popular form of participation – and tend to involve small numbers of people – on average 23 per authority. Consequently, this approach engaged the least number of people across all 19 initiatives during 2001. It could

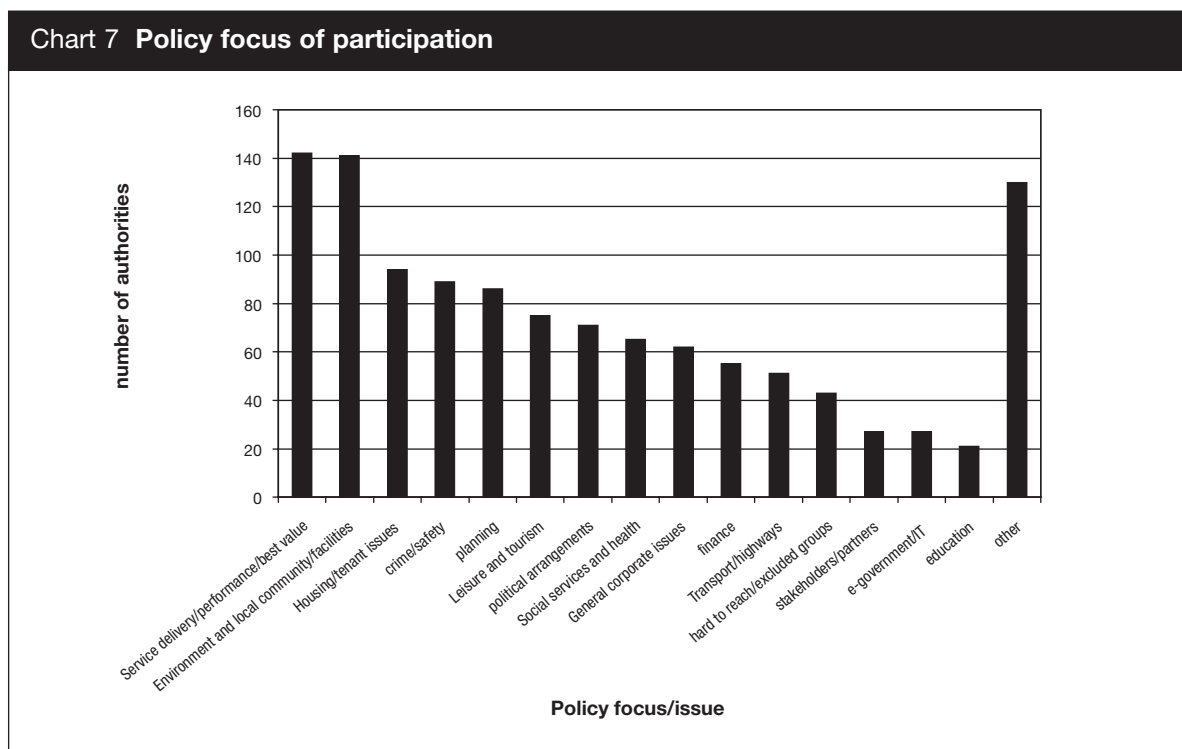
be estimated that this approach would have involved less than 300 people in total across all 14 respondents in the sample that used it.

We must accept that the responses from which we have developed Table 6 will include some double counting and some estimates. However, even allowing for this and large one-off referendums in only a few authorities, the scale of public involvement across local government is sizeable. Roughly speaking the survey suggests that, in total, around 8million people were involved by all 216 responding authorities in participation exercises during the whole of 2001. If this figure is aggregated up to represent all English local authorities, assuming non-respondents are not too dissimilar, it would imply that local government as a whole engaged approximately 14million people via participation and consultation initiatives during 2001.

2.10 Policy focus of participation

Chart 7 shows that local authorities are seeking to engage the public on a diverse range of issues - but most often in relation to service delivery/best value (66% of authorities) and the environment/local community (65%). Other policy areas that authorities involve the public in (although not to the same extent) are housing (44%) and crime/safety (41%). The results also suggest that local authorities seem rather more reluctant to involve the public in relation to e-government/IT and education. Local authorities probably feel that issues relating to e-government – beyond some service delivery/access issues - are too complex and of limited interest to the general public. It is, perhaps, the case that education issues are most often dealt with by specific schools, rather than at the local authority level.

129 of the authorities also indicated a specific issue or policy focus on which they consult, that was not covered by the 14 main categories listed on the chart. These 'other' issues included things like equal opportunities, repairs and maintenance, neighbour disputes, trading overtime, operational objectives, careers planning, etc.



Further analysis looks at whether specific types of participation initiative tend to be used to consult on specific service areas or issues. As one might expect, the more customer-oriented approaches, such as complaints/suggestions schemes and service satisfaction surveys, but also citizens' panels, are used most often to investigate issues of service delivery and best value. As mentioned earlier there has been a significant rise in the use of focus groups – it would seem that this approach is more often used to seek the public's opinions on service delivery issues, 32% of authorities using focus groups in 2001, used them for this purpose.

There has also been a rise in the use of interactive websites recently – these tend to be used to seek views on a wide variety of issues, but most often service delivery (20%) and environment and local community issues (23%).

In terms of the more deliberative approaches, specifically, community plans/needs analysis, visioning exercises and issues forums – these approaches are more often used to seek the public's views on issues relating to the environment and local community/facilities. This is also true of the more traditional approaches – 30% and 27% of authorities respectively that used public meetings in 2001 sought citizens' views on the environment and local community/facilities.

Unsurprisingly, 13 of the 21 authorities using referendums in 2001, did so to seek citizens' views on political management arrangements. This bears out the earlier point that the rise in the use of referendums over the last few years is due to the requirement to consult on changes to decision-making structures, in particular changes to a mayoral form of constitution. As the White Paper states:

Local choice will remain the guiding principle [for reviewing their constitutions], based on full consultation and, where appropriate, referendums.

Interestingly, 22% of authorities using focus groups in 2001 (that is 39 authorities) did so to consult the public on issues relating to political management arrangements.

2.11 Corporate vs. departmental

The survey results show that, overall, slightly more participation initiatives (11 out of 19) are more often managed at the corporate, rather than departmental level, in authorities – see Table 7. There are, however, some specific participation approaches that are significantly more likely to be managed by individual departments as opposed to corporately - this suggests these particular initiatives tend to be used to engage the public on service-specific issues. As one would expect this is true of service satisfaction surveys, service user forums and user management forums. (At the corporate level these may be used to establish how well the council as a whole runs things.) However, it appears that consultation documents, issue forums and shared interest forums also tend to be managed at the departmental level, suggesting they, too, are most often used to engage the public on service-specific issues.

There is a fairly even split between whether community plans/needs analysis and public meetings are managed corporately or at the departmental level, indicating these are used to consult on both corporate and service-specific issues.

Table 7 Of all the times each initiative was used during 2001, how many times was it managed at the corporate or at the departmental level?

	Managed at least once at the...			
	Corporate level		Departmental level	
	No. of authorities	%	No. of authorities	%
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	32	17%	19	10%
Service Satisfaction Surveys	70	35%	82	41%
Other Opinion Polls	107	88%	26	21%
Interactive Website	39	35%	24	21%
Referendums	10	48%	3	14%
Community Plans/need Analysis	56	44%	59	47%
Citizens' Panels	103	67%	15	10%
Co-option/Committee Work	33	32%	18	17%
Question and Answer Sessions	35	32%	12	11%
Consultation Documents	55	30%	61	34%
Public Meetings	50	30%	52	31%
Citizen's juries	7	50%	1	7%
Focus Groups	70	40%	63	36%
Visioning Exercises	23	28%	18	22%
Service User Forums	10	6%	68	43%
Issue Forums	15	16%	31	33%
Shared Interest Forums	18	22%	26	31%
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	51	37%	20	14%
User Management of Services	0	0%	15	39%

Percentages are based on number of authorities that used each particular method in 2001.

2.12 Capacity to conduct participation exercises

CONDUCTED IN-HOUSE OR CONTRACTED-OUT

Now thinking about the capacity of authorities to conduct participation initiatives, the survey results show clearly that authorities tend to run participation exercises in-house, rather than contracting them out. The one exception is citizens' panels, which are contracted-out by more local authorities. There are, however, a number of initiatives – other opinion polls, community plans/needs analysis, citizens' juries and focus groups – that are more likely to have some element or part contracted-out. This is probably due to the fact that these approaches can be resource-intensive and require specific research/consultation skills and experience, which authorities may not possess in-house. See Table 8 for more detail.

It is also worth noting that a sizeable minority of authorities do contract-out the following exercises in whole or part: service satisfaction surveys; referendums; and, visioning exercises. Those very rarely contracted out in any way are complaints/suggestions schemes, co-option/committee work, question and answer sessions and user management of services.

Table 8 Of all the times each initiative was used during 2001, how many times was it conducted by an in-house team, contracted out or a mixed approach taken?				
	No. of authorities that have managed an exercise in-house/contracted it out/taken a mixed approach at least once			
	In-house	Contracted -out	Mixed approach	Some contracted -out element
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	40	1	2	3
Service Satisfaction Surveys	80	39	29	68
Other Opinion Polls	35	29	16	45
Interactive website	44	3	6	9
Referendums	8	4	1	5
Community Plans/need Analysis	32	14	21	35
Citizens' Panels	33	45	31	76
Co-option/Committee Work	42	1	1	2
Question and Answer Sessions	41	1	2	3
Consultation Documents	73	7	13	20
Public Meetings	69	3	8	11
Citizen's juries	1	1	6	7
Focus Groups	61	40	27	67
Visioning Exercises	22	5	11	16
Service User Forums	61	8	7	15
Issue Forums	32	2	4	6
Shared Interest Forums	32	1	6	7
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	59	2	7	9
User Management of Services	12	0	2	2

COLLABORATION ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

As we can see from Table 9, almost all responding authorities (97%) claimed to be working in collaboration with other organisations on schemes to enhance public participation – this figure is up from 81% in 1997. It seems that the most likely partnership (in 89% of local authorities) is with the police.

Other organisations/groups that authorities seem inclined to collaborate with are health authorities (79%), voluntary/community organisations (75%) and other local authorities (73%). Of the organisations provided in the questionnaire, authorities seem least likely to collaborate with churches (25%) and public utilities (17%). The 1997 survey revealed similar results – it seemed most likely that local authorities would collaborate with health authorities and with the police when engaging the public. (However, it should be noted that the question used in the 1997 survey was open-ended, whilst the question used in the 2001 survey was closed response.)

Table 9 With which of the following organisations has your authority collaborated on schemes to enhance public participation?

	Number	Percentage
Police	193	89%
Health authorities	171	79%
Voluntary/community organisations	161	75%
Local authorities	157	73%
Housing associations	127	59%
Local businesses	112	52%
Local schools or colleges	112	52%
Parish/town councils	101	47%
Training and enterprise councils (TECs)	77	36%
Churches	53	25%
Public utilities	37	17%

Respondents also reported a range of other organisations that they collaborate with to enhance public participation that were not provided in the questionnaire. These included:

- LSP (8 authorities)
- Fire and rescue service (6 authorities)
- Other faith groups (4 authorities)
- Transport authority (3 authorities)
- Community strategy group (2 authorities)

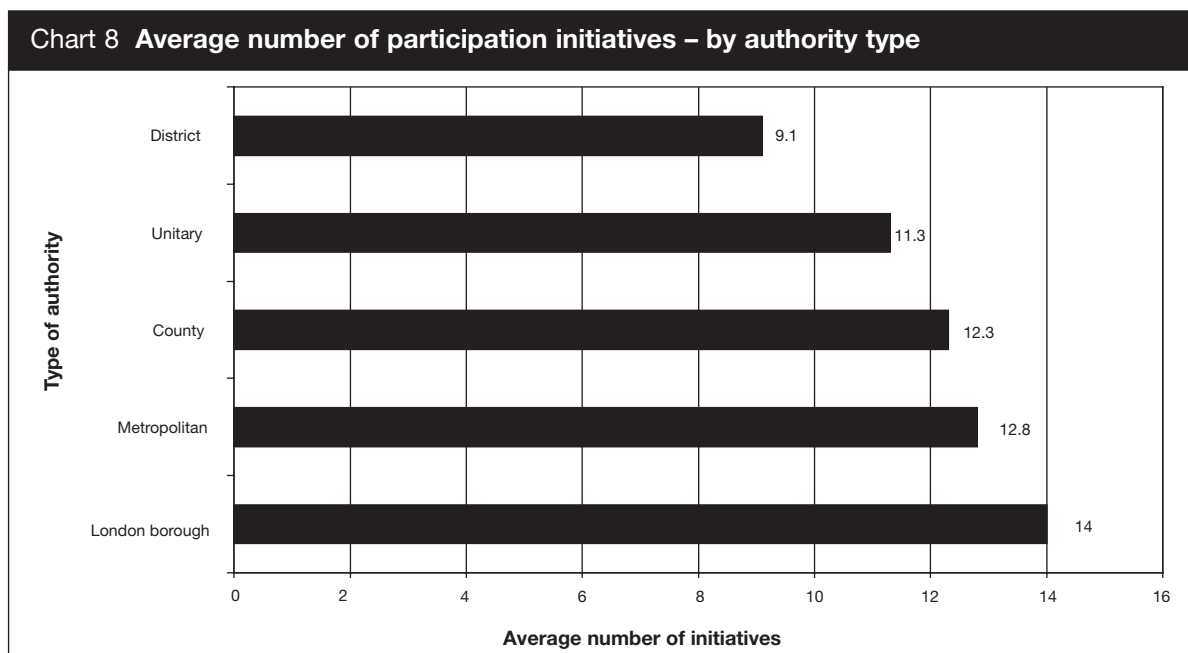
The extent to which local authorities collaborate with other organisations in consulting the public may account for why they tend not to contract-out many participation exercises – they can access skills and resources in this way, rather than ‘buying-in’ expertise.

CHAPTER 3

Factors influencing public participation approaches

3.1 Type of authority

Overall, the average number of initiatives used by a local authority is 10.5. Chart 8 below gives the average number of initiatives that each type of authority used during 2001. It indicates that each London borough typically used around 14 different types of participation in 2001. By contrast district councils typically used about 9, perhaps due to smaller budgets and fewer resources.



Base: 216

Numbers of initiatives used per year have increased since 1997 – the average for all authorities is up from 9.1. Looking at the average number of initiatives for each type of authority, unitary authorities have made the lowest increase in the number of public participation initiatives. In 1997, the average for unitaries was 11.0, compared with 11.3 in 2001. London boroughs, for example, have increased from 11.1 to 14 initiatives per authority during 2001 and districts have increased from 8.2 to 9.1.

Table 10 shows how use of the four main different types of initiative varies according to type of authority. We can see that London boroughs appear the most active across all types of participation initiative addressed in this survey – the difference is particularly noticeable for traditional and innovative approaches. District councils seem less likely than other types of authority to experiment with the innovative and more resource-intensive approaches – perhaps reflecting capacity issues or the rural setting in many districts. Or perhaps, to a degree,

a tendency to use alternative ways of seeking the public's views that this survey did not cover.

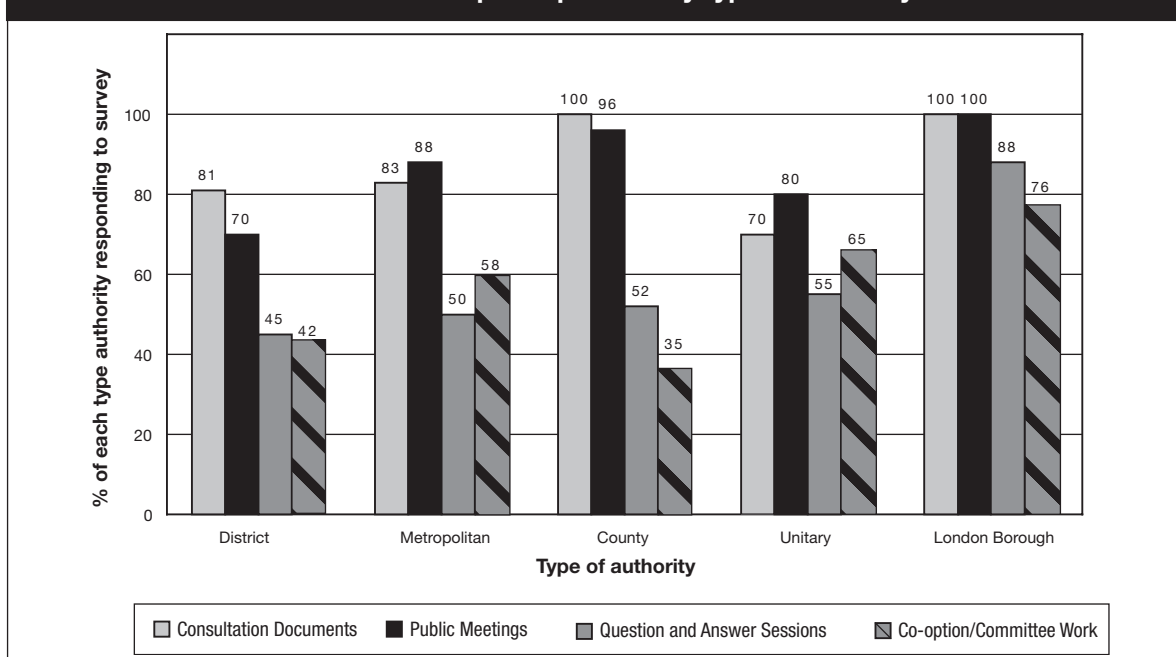
Table 10 Types of participation used in 2001 – by type of authority

	District	Metropolitan	County	Unitary	London borough
Traditional	60%	70%	71%	68%	91%
Customer-oriented	75%	85%	84%	77%	86%
Innovative	46%	64%	63%	59%	71%
Deliberative	28%	46%	45%	40%	45%
Base	132	24	23	20	17

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

Chart 9 below compares the use of 'traditional' forms of participation across the five different types of local authority. There is fairly high usage (70%+) of consultation documents and public meetings across all types of authority. The use of question and answer sessions and co-option to committees was lower and more varied: question and answer sessions were used by between 45% and 88% of the different types of authority and co-option to committees by between 35% and 78%.

Chart 9 Use of traditional forms of participation – by type of authority



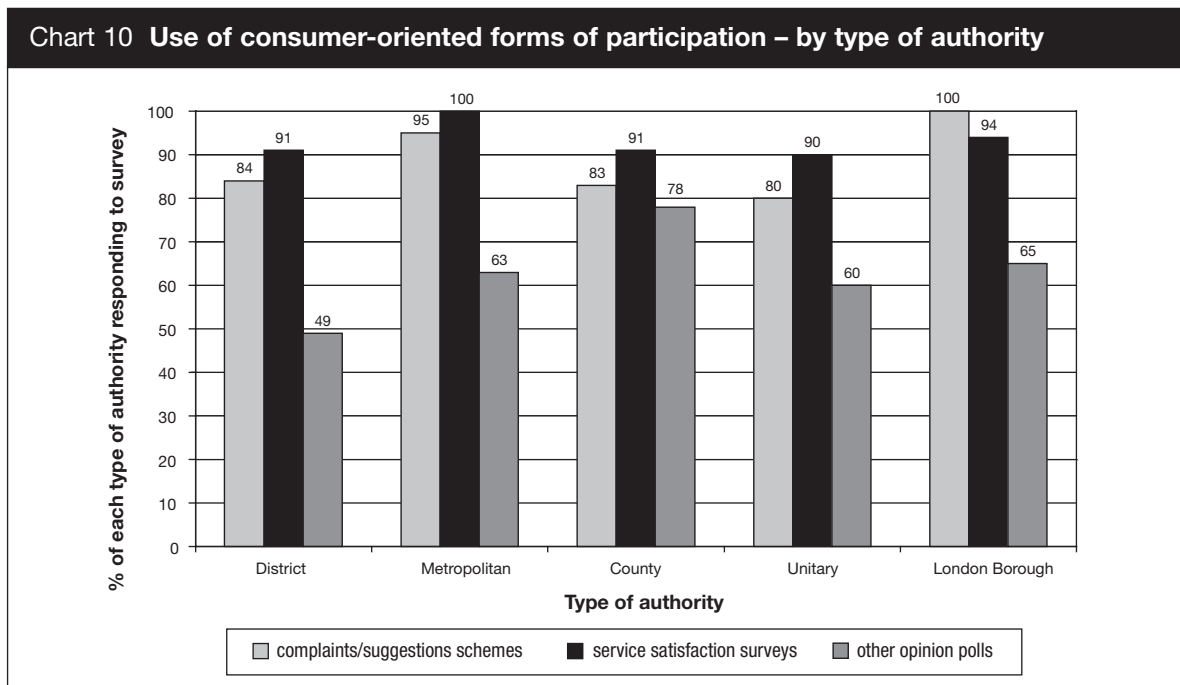
Now looking at each type of authority individually, some findings stand out:

- Traditional approaches seem the most popular with **London boroughs**. In particular, all London boroughs used consultation documents and public meetings and 70% of them used co-option to committees, compared with 65% of unitaries and 35% of counties.
- All **county councils** used consultation documents and 96% of them used public meetings. They are, however, the least likely to co-opt citizens to committees as a way of involving them in the work of the council – only 8/23 (35%) of counties used this approach in 2001, compared with 48% of authorities overall.

- **Unitary authorities** seem more keen than other types of authority (with the exception of London boroughs) to use co-option/committee work to engage the public, as 65% of unitaries did so in 2001, compared with only 50% of metropolitan boroughs. Unitaries do, however, appear less likely relative to other types of authority to use public meetings and consultation documents compared with other types of authority.
- **District councils** use consultation documents and public meetings to a similar extent as other authorities but, like county councils, seem to use co-option far less – 42% of district councils used co-option in 2001, compared with 58% of metropolitan and 70% of London boroughs.

CUSTOMER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

As you can see from Chart 10 below, authority types vary the least in their usage of the customer-oriented approaches to participation. Use of service satisfactions surveys (90%+) and complaints/suggestions schemes (80%+) is high across all types of authority.



Looking at Chart 10 in more detail reveals that:

- Complaints/suggestions schemes and service satisfaction surveys are the most popular with **metropolitan** and **London boroughs**. In 2001, all metropolitan boroughs used service satisfaction surveys and all London boroughs used complaints/suggestions schemes.
- A similar proportion of **district councils** use service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes, compared with authorities overall – in fact, their usage was higher than unitaries. This is, perhaps, because these approaches are relatively less onerous in terms of time and resources and present less difficulties for smaller authorities.

- **County councils** show the most even usage across all three types of customer-oriented approach, and the highest usage of other opinion polls: more than three-quarters (78%) of counties used these in 2001, compared with 65% of London boroughs and 63% of metropolitan boroughs.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Charts 11 and 12 below show that use of the more innovative participation initiatives – particularly those with a deliberative element - vary much more by type of authority than the traditional and customer-oriented methods. Focus groups (70%+), citizens’ panels (64%+) and community plans needs analysis (52%+) are the most popular across all types of authority. Referendums (less than 30%) and citizens’ juries (less than 14%) are used the least.

Chart 11 Use of innovative forms of participation – by type of authority

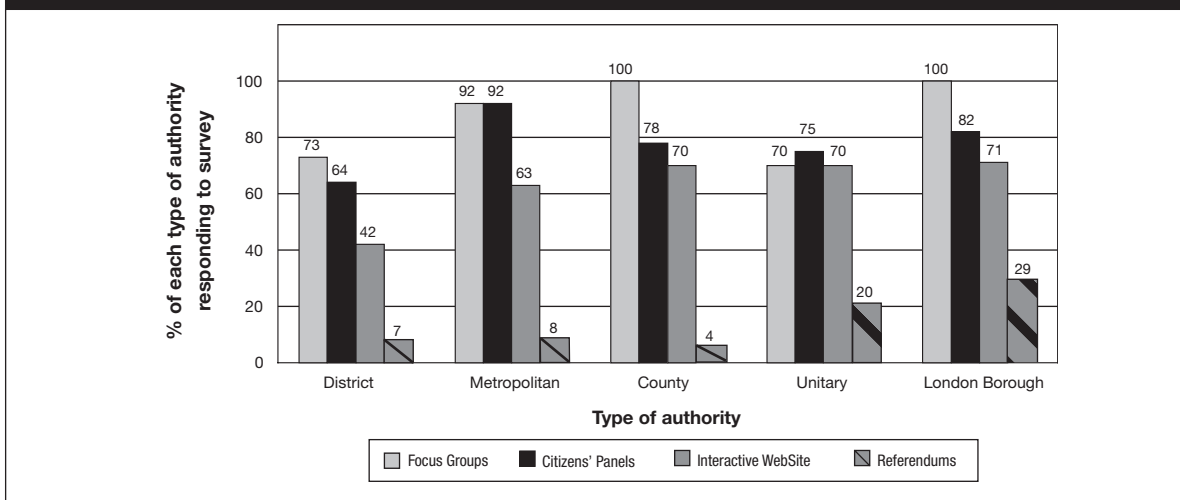
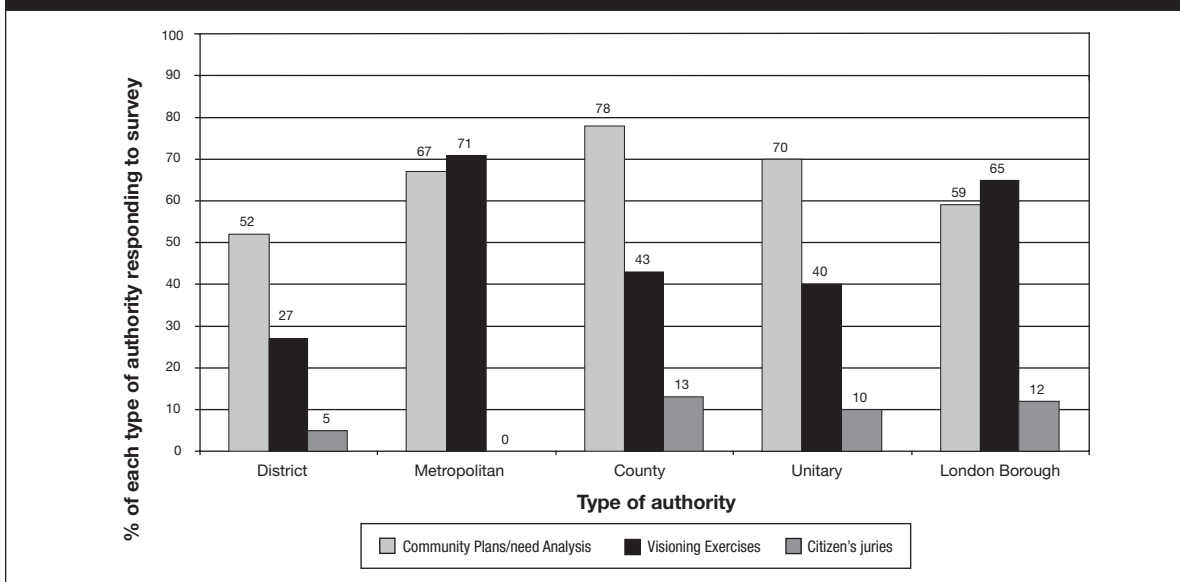


Chart 12 Use of deliberative forms of innovative participation – by type of authority



- **Metropolitan boroughs** seem particularly keen to try out the more innovative participation initiatives, as 71% used visioning exercises in 2001, which is the highest usage of all types of authority – compared with 65% of London boroughs and 43% of county councils.

- **District councils** seem less likely to introduce the use of forums and websites compared with other authorities. Forum-based participation initiatives require ongoing commitment of time and resources to recruit participants and manage these exercises. Interactive websites involve not only an initial outlay of expenditure, but skilled staff and necessary resources to maintain the website in the long-term. These issues of capacity and cost may well present smaller authorities with difficulties.
- Focus groups and citizens' panels are the most popular with **London boroughs**, as 100% and 82% respectively used these approaches during 2001. They are also much more likely than all other types of authority to use referendums, as 5/17 (29%) of them did so in 2001. They do, however, seem the least keen of all types of authority on using community plans/needs analysis, as only 10 of 33 London boroughs used this approach to involve the public in 2001, compared with 14 unitaries and 16 metropolitan boroughs.
- All **county councils** used focus groups and they also seem to favour community plans/needs analysis more than any other type of authority, as 18/23 (78%) used this approach in 2001, compared with 16/24 (67%) of metropolitan councils and 14/20 (70%) unitaries.
- A fairly significant proportion of **unitary authorities**, as 70% (14/20) have used interactive websites and community plans/needs analysis during 2001. Relatively speaking, they are also the most likely type of authority (after London boroughs) to use referendums – 4/20 (20%) unitaries.

3.2 Rural vs. urban

The analysis also looked at whether the type of area in which a local authority is located might impact on the level or type of participation activity. Responding authorities were divided between broadly urban and broadly rural authorities by grouping them as follows:

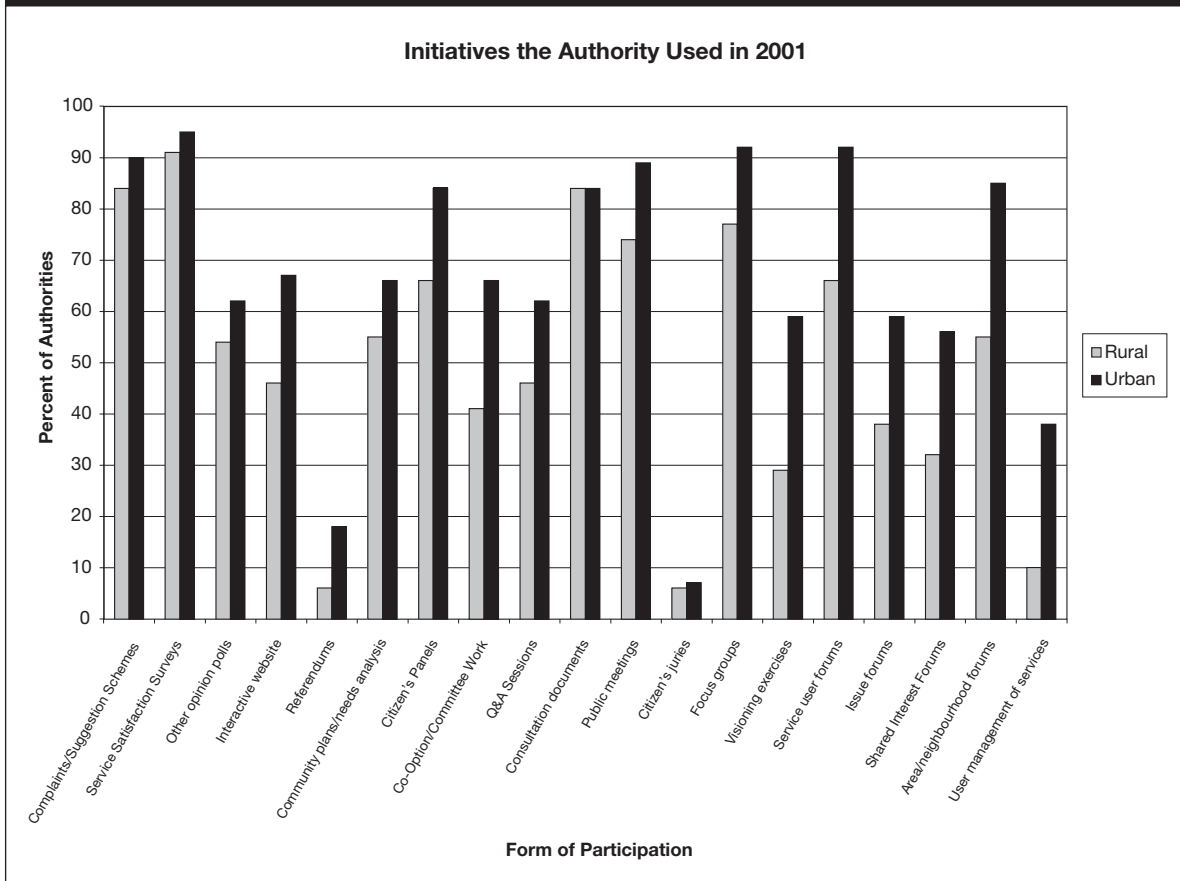
Urban: London boroughs; metropolitan boroughs; and, unitary authorities.

Rural: County councils; district councils.

Some broad trends emerge from this analysis. It is, however, important to bear in mind the limitations of these generalisations:

- Many metropolitan authorities do contain significant rural areas and there are urban areas within many counties and districts.
- It is also worth noting that 155 'rural' authorities responded to the survey, whereas only 61 'urban' authorities did so – thus the percentages are affected by this difference in the base figures, i.e. one additional urban authority would add 1.6% whereas one additional rural authority would add 0.6%.
- This analysis does mask differences between type of authority – which was discussed in some detail above.

Chart 13 Initiatives used in 2001 – rural vs. urban authorities

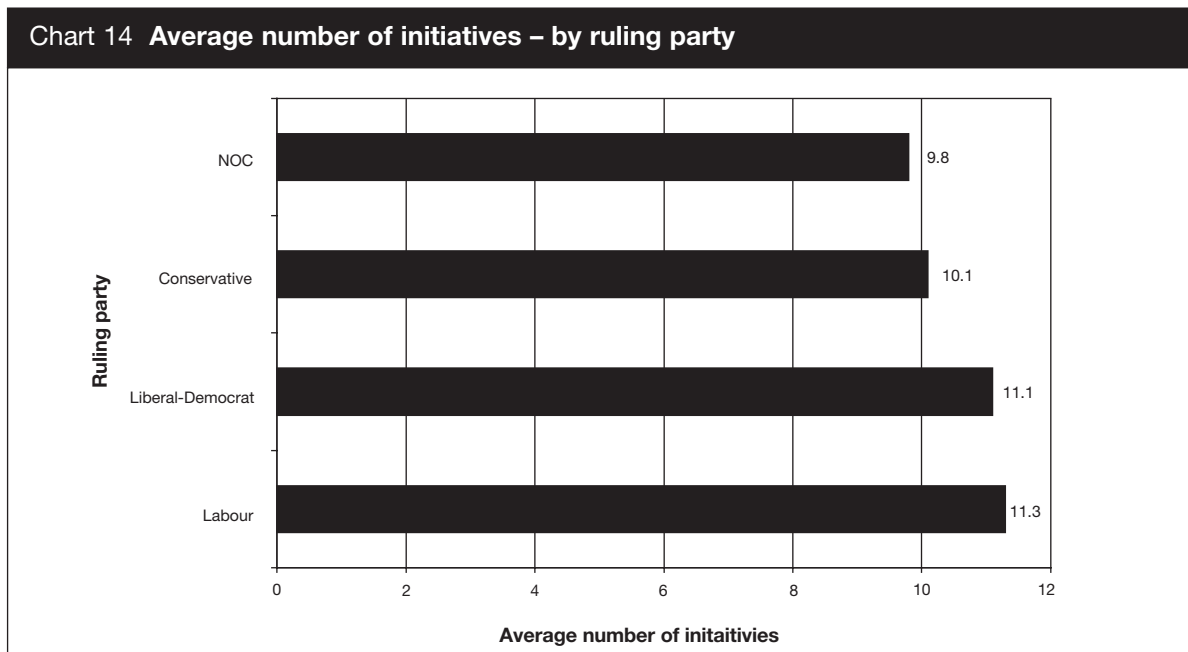


From the chart above we can see that urban authorities seem to be more active across all the types of participation initiative addressed in this survey – with the one exception of consultation documents, which were used by 84% of rural and 84% of urban authorities. The difference between urban and rural authorities is particularly marked in relation to the following initiatives:

- Visioning exercises (used in 59% of urban authorities and 29% of rural ones).
- User management of services (used in 38% of urban authorities and 10% of rural ones).
- Service user forums (used in 92% of urban authorities and 66% of rural ones).
- Co-option/committee involvement (used in 66% of urban authorities and 41% of rural ones).
- Shared interest forums (used in 56% of urban authorities and 32% of rural ones).

3.3 Analysis by political control

Chart 14 below shows the average number of initiatives analysed by political control. It reveals little difference between authorities with different ruling parties. Labour and Liberal-Democrat controlled authorities seem slightly in the lead, using an average of around 11 initiatives in each authority – but are closely followed by Conservative controlled authorities who appear to have used an average of about 10 initiatives in 2001.



The 1997 survey suggested that the absence of a majority political party reduced the average number of initiatives. The 2001 survey reveals that this gap has since narrowed, as there is now no significant difference in the level of participation activity between authorities which have no overall control and Conservative controlled authorities. Authorities with no overall control were perhaps slower to begin using participation initiatives, but are now catching up. See Table 11 below.

Table 11 Forms of participation used in 2001 – by political control

	Labour	Liberal-Democrat	Conservative	NOC
Traditional	66%	68%	64%	65%
Customer-oriented	78%	84%	76%	78%
Innovative	61%	54%	49%	51%
Deliberative	38%	35%	34%	28%
Base	67%	21%	59%	62%

Analysing the different forms of participation by political control does not reveal many significant patterns or trends. However, a few things do stand out. Broadly speaking, authorities controlled by Labour and Liberal-Democrat tend to be the most active across the types of participation covered in this research, ie their higher average number of initiatives is not concentrated in one form. That said, Labour authorities seem to be the most innovative in relation to public participation and Liberal-Democrat authorities are the most keen on customer-oriented approaches.

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

As one might expect, authorities differ the least in relation to the use of traditional, well-established methods – this is particularly true of consultation documents and public meetings. There is also less difference in relation to customer-oriented approaches – although, as mentioned above, these approaches are more popular with Liberal-Democrat authorities – see Chart 15 below.

Chart 15 Use of traditional methods of public participation – by ruling party

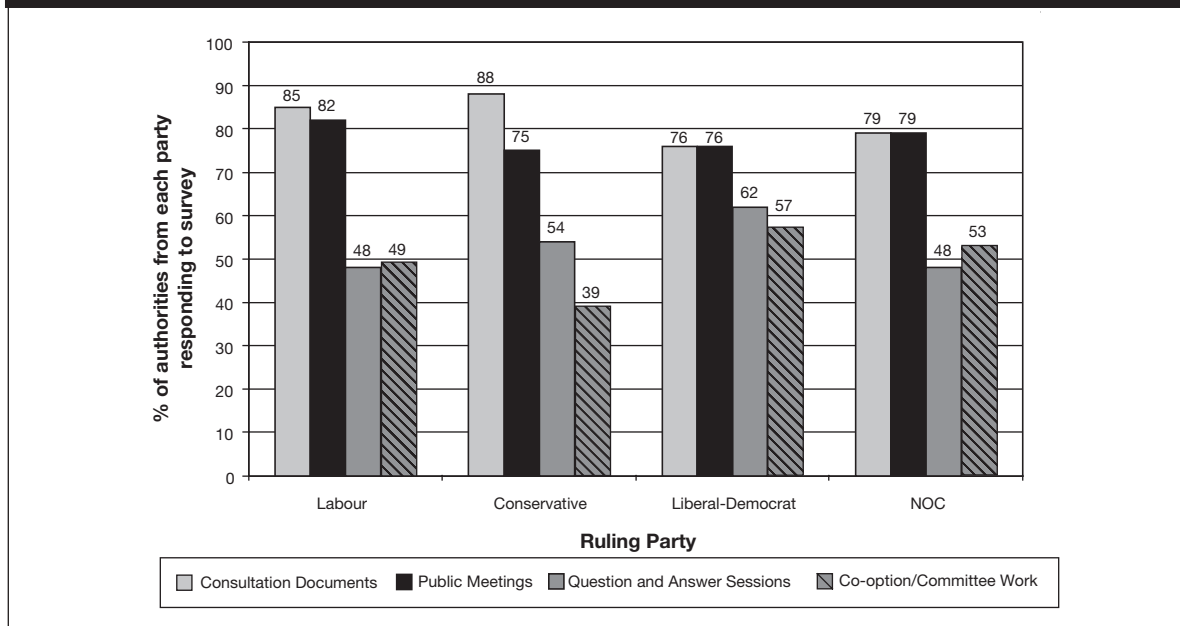
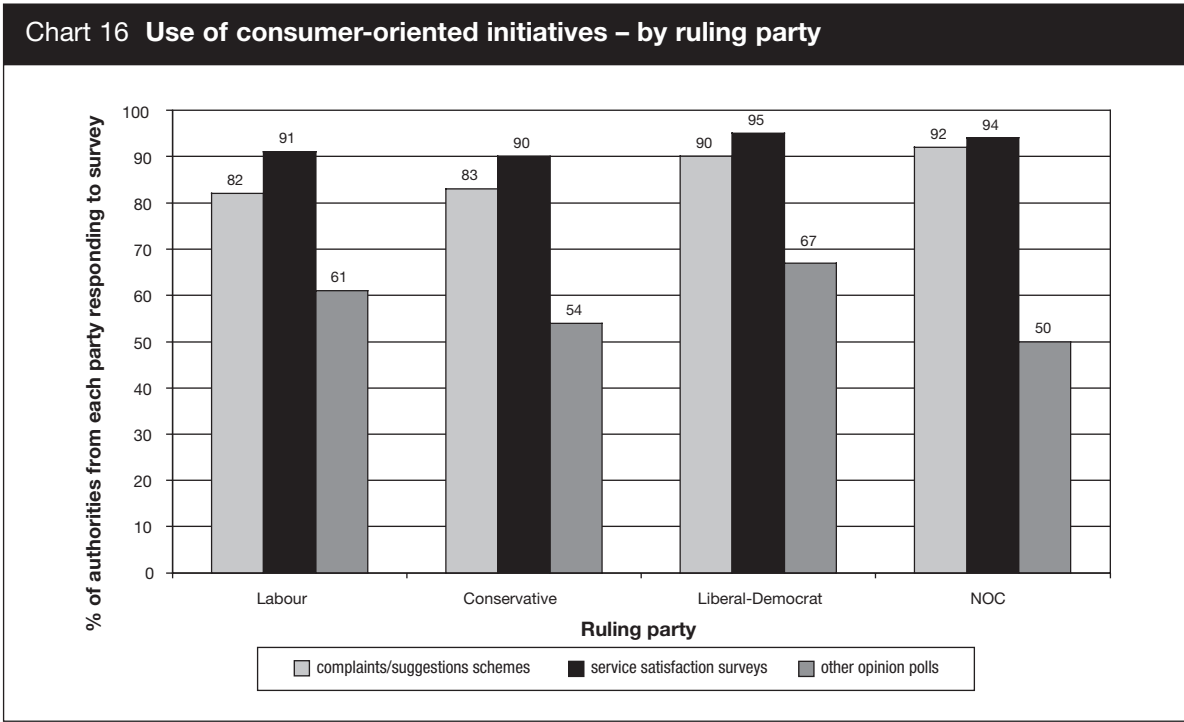


Chart 15 reveals some interesting findings:

- Whilst question and answer sessions and co-option to committees are less popular across all authorities, well over half of Liberal-Democrat authorities used these approaches in 2001. 62% of Liberal-Democrat authorities used question and answer sessions in 2001, compared with 48% of Labour controlled authorities. Similarly, 57% of Liberal-Democrat authorities used co-option to committees compared with 49% of Labour authorities.
- Authorities with **no overall political control** seem to use traditional forms of participation to a similar extent as other authorities, and, in fact, are slightly more likely than Liberal-Democrat authorities to use consultation documents and public meetings to engage with the public – 79% of NOC authorities used these methods in 2001 compared with 76% of Liberal-Democrat authorities.
- In 2001, **Conservative** authorities used consultation documents the most (88% compared with 76% of Liberal Democrat authorities) and co-option to committees the least (39% compared with 57% of Liberal Democrat authorities) of all authorities in 2001.

CUSTOMER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

As with the more traditional methods, customer-oriented approaches are popular across all authorities. Service satisfaction surveys (90%+) and complaints suggestions schemes (82%+) were the most popular in 2001, across all authorities no matter what their political control.

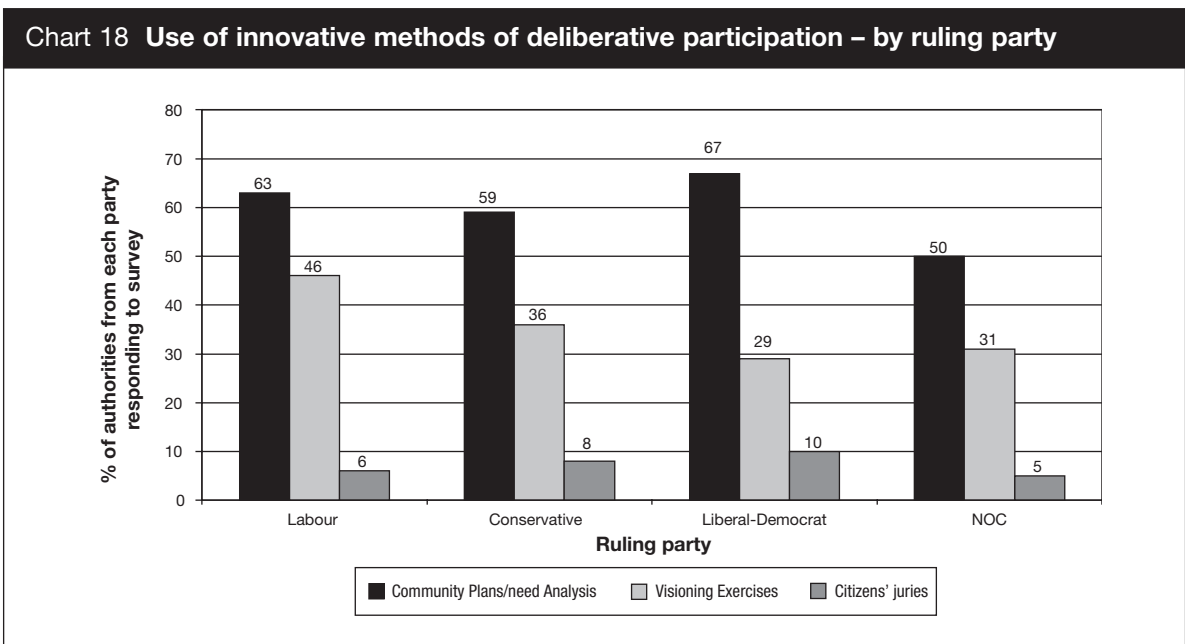
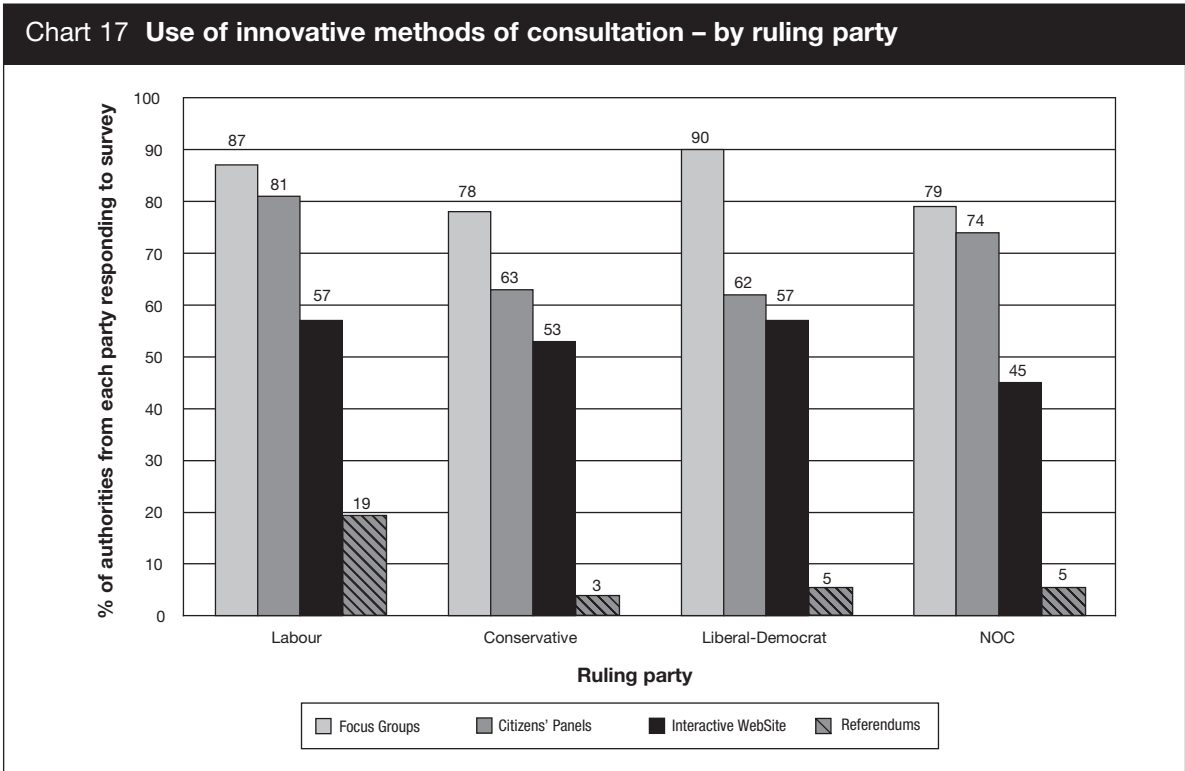


As can be seen from Chart 16 above:

- Liberal-Democrat** and authorities with **no overall control** seem the most likely to use service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes – for example, 92% and 90% of NOC and Liberal-Democrat authorities respectively used complaints/suggestions schemes in 2001, compared with 82% of Labour authorities. Also, Liberal-Democrat authorities seem the most likely (67%) to use other opinion polls to engage the public, and NOC authorities the least (50%).
- Conservative** authorities are perhaps less keen on using other opinion polls, as 54% of them did so in 2001, compared with 61% of Labour and 67% of Liberal-Democrat authorities.
- Labour** authorities do not stand out as particularly liking or disliking any of the customer-oriented approaches more than other authorities, as they are fairly close to the average across each of the initiatives in the above chart.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

As with type of authority, during 2001, the use of focus groups (78%+) (followed by citizens’ panels (62%+)) was the highest across all authorities no matter the ruling party. And, referendums (less than 20%) and citizens’ juries (less than 11%) showed the lowest level of usage in that same year.



Looking at Charts 17 and 18 in more detail, we can see the following:

- Of all the types of political control, it appears the **Labour** authorities are the most keen on citizens' panels, visioning exercises and, most noticeably, referendums – 19% of Labour authorities used referendums in 2001, compared with only 5% of Liberal-Democrat and 3% of Conservative authorities.
- Whilst the use of referendums was used the least across all authorities during 2001, its use was the lowest amongst **Conservative** authorities – only 3% of them used referendums, compared with 5% of Liberal-Democrat authorities and of NOC authorities and 19% of Labour councils.

- Focus groups and community plans/needs analysis were the most popular with **Liberal Democrat** authorities – for example, 90% of them used focus groups in 2001, compared with 79% of Conservative authorities.
- **NOC** authorities used community plans/needs analysis and citizens' juries the least in 2001 – 50% of NOC authorities used community plans/needs analysis in 2001, compared with 59% of Conservative and 67% of Liberal-Democrat authorities.

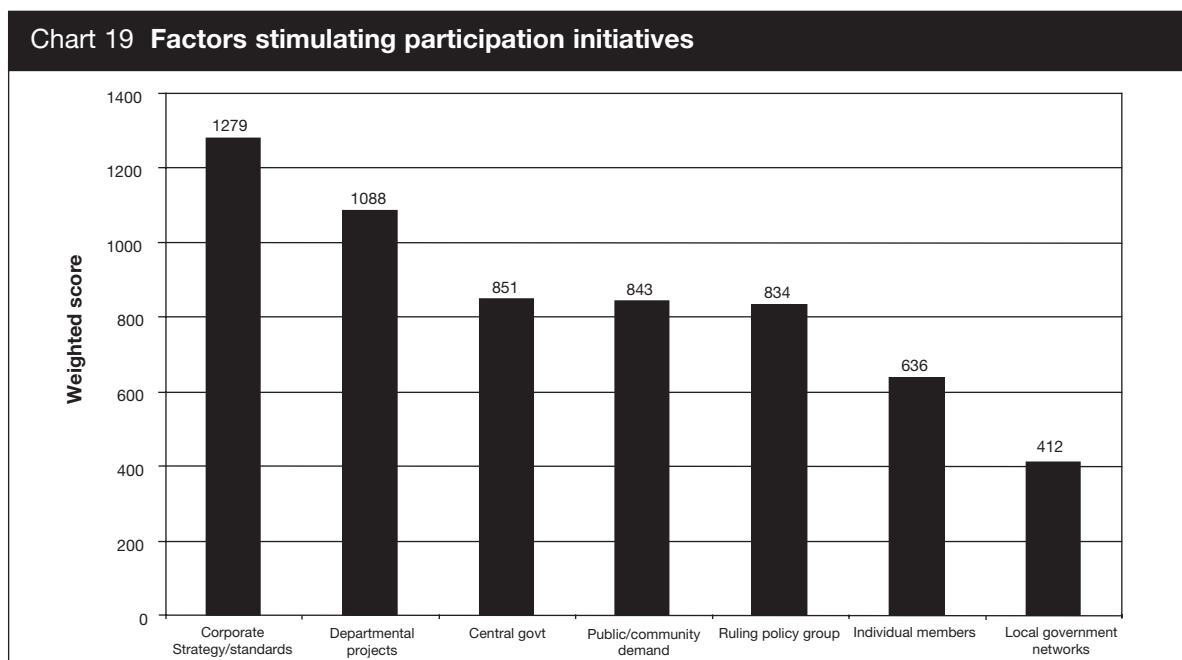
CHAPTER 4

Issues in public participation

4.1 Factors stimulating participation initiatives

Respondents were asked to rank a number of factors according to how important they have been in stimulating participation strategies within their authority. The survey indicates that the main driver for public participation initiatives is to inform corporate strategies and standards. Of the 216 authorities responding to this question, 96 (44%) reported that ‘*corporate strategy/standards*’ is the most important factor in stimulating participation initiatives. 37 authorities (17%) cited ‘*departmental projects*’ as the most important factor. ‘*Individual members*’ and ‘*local government networks*’ seem to have less influence, as only three authorities regard promotion by ‘*individual members*’ as the most important factor in stimulating these sorts of initiatives and none suggested that ‘*local government networks*’ was the most important.

Chart 19 provides a weighted score for each factor. Weightings were calculated by multiplying the number of times a factor was ranked first, second, third and so on by a simple weighting (e.g. where six factors were ranked, those factors ranked first received a weighting of six, those ranked second a weighting of five and so on.)



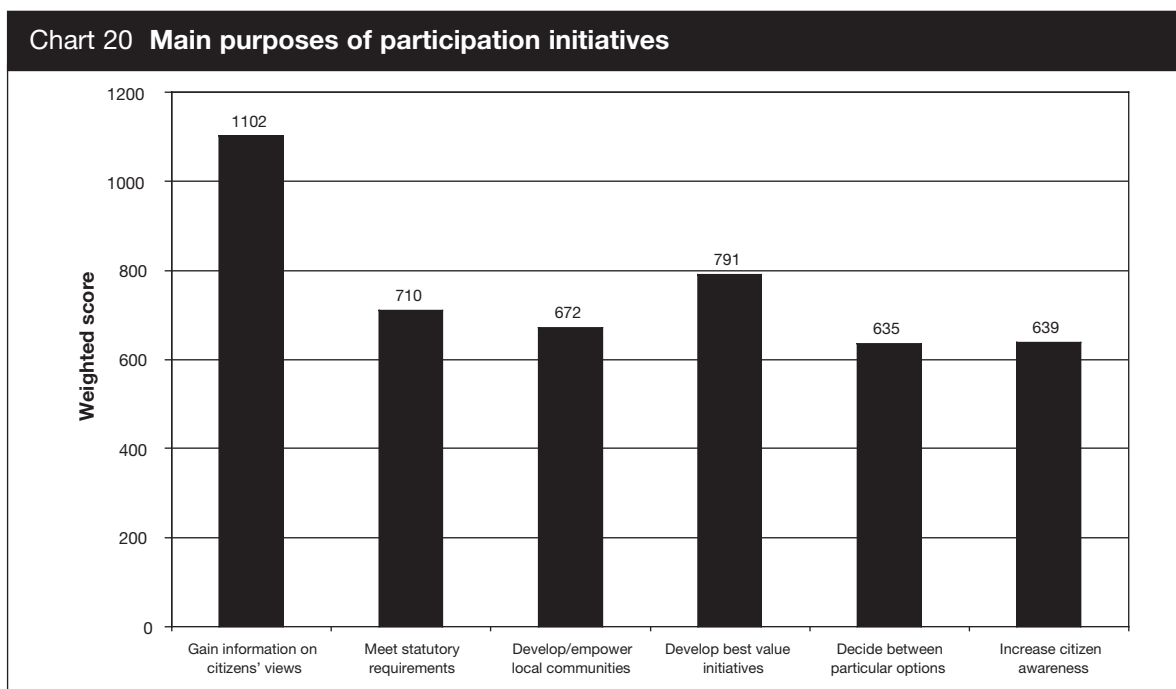
Base: 216 responding authorities

Chart 19 further confirms that ‘*corporate strategy/standards*’ is the most important factor (ranked most highly) in stimulating participation initiatives – achieving a weighted score of 1279 – and that ‘*local government networks*’ are by far the least influential – scoring only 412.

These findings are similar to the 1997 survey – with ‘*corporate strategy/standards*’ and ‘*departmental projects*’ coming out top. One notable difference is the increased perceived influence of ‘*central government*’, which has moved from 6th highest weighted score in 1997 to the 3rd highest in 2001. This perhaps reflects government initiatives and policies, introduced since 1997, that encourage or require local authorities to involve the public more in local decisions.

4.2 The main purposes of participation initiatives

Thinking now about **why** local authorities are seeking to engage the public in decision-making, the questionnaire listed a number of possible purposes for public participation initiatives to rank them according importance. A clear majority of respondents selected ‘*to gain information on citizen’s views*’ - 123 authorities (57%) ranked this factor as the ‘most important’. ‘*To meet statutory requirements*’ came second, but with significantly less authorities (only 35 authorities – that is 16%) ranking as the ‘most important’ factor – see Chart 20. These findings were consistent across all types of authority.

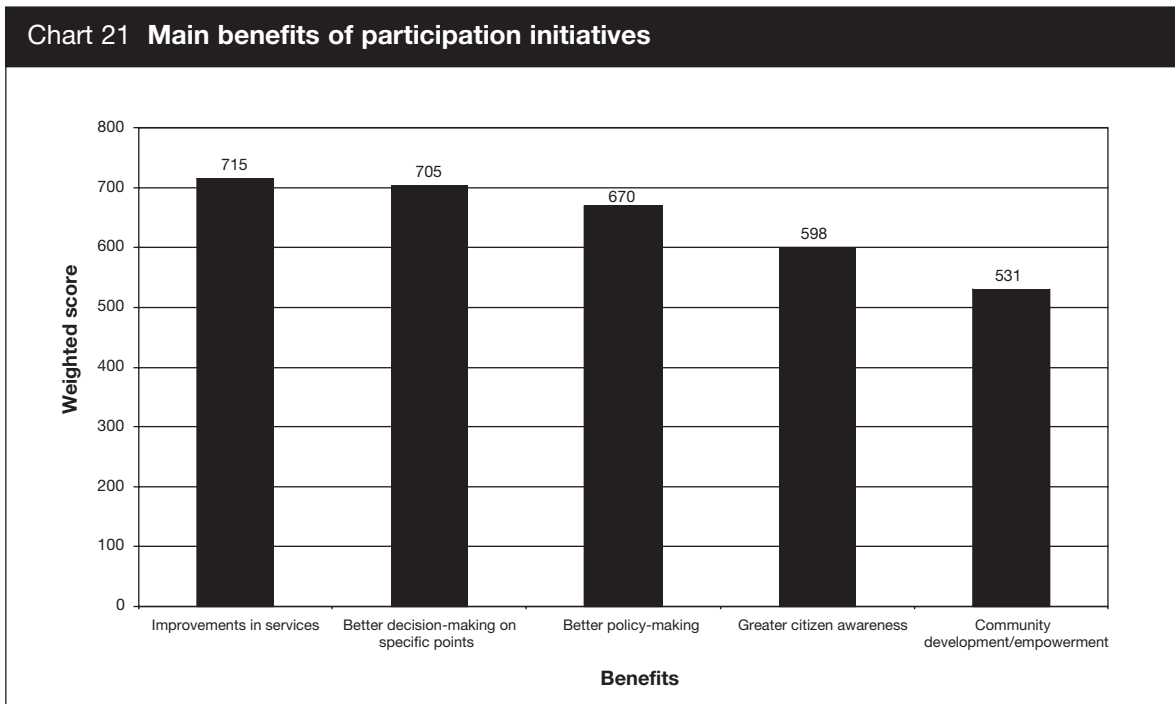


Base: 216 responding authorities

The weighted score analysis reveals similar findings: ‘*to gain information on citizens’ views*’ received the highest weighted score of 1102, followed by ‘*to develop best value initiatives*’ with a weighted score of 791 and then ‘*to meet statutory requirements*’ with 710. ‘*Best value initiatives*’ receive a higher weighted score, despite only 19/223 authorities ranking it as the most important factor – authorities seem most likely to rank best value initiatives as a 2nd and 3rd most important factor, when compared with all other possible influences. No doubt this will reflect the increasingly important role that central Government has played in promoting public participation initiatives in the last few years, for example, through best value.

4.3 Benefits of public participation initiatives

It would seem that authorities see engaging the public as particularly important in helping to improve service delivery and decision-making when provided with five different alternatives. The greatest number of authorities (56 authorities or 26%) indicated that *'improvements in services'* is the most important benefit of consulting the public – closely followed by allowing *'better decision-making on specific points'*, which was selected by 51 authorities (24%) as the most important benefit.

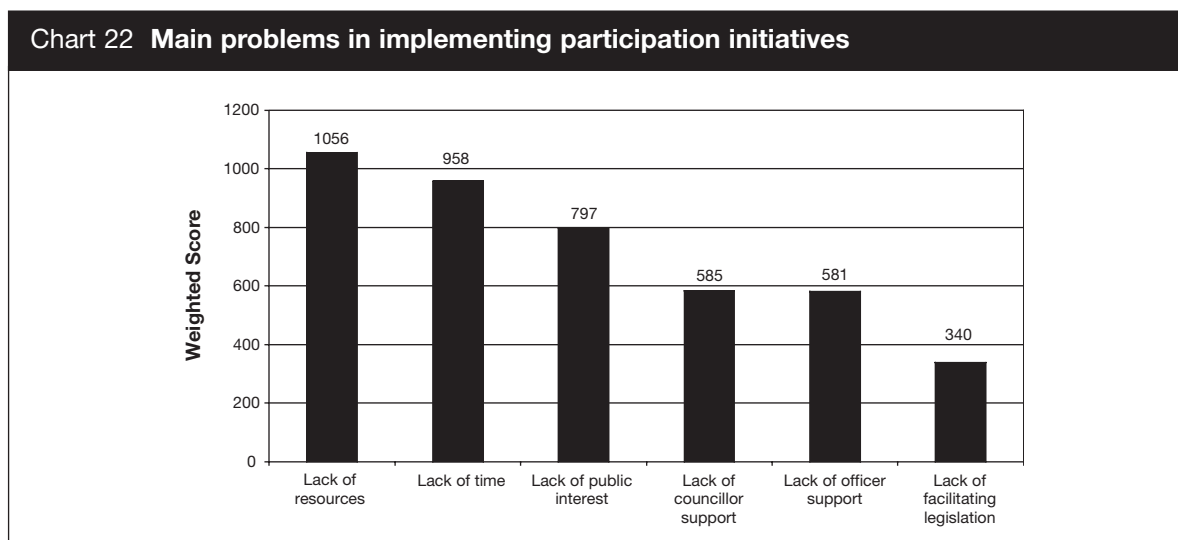


Base: 216 responding authorities

As illustrated on Chart 21, the weighted score analysis confirms that *'improvements in services'* and *'better decision-making on specific points'* are seen by local authorities as the most important benefits (ranked most highly) of participation initiatives.

4.4 The main problems with implementing participation initiatives

Respondents were provided with a variety of possible problems that they may have encountered in implementing participation initiatives and asked to rank them according to importance. The results are illustrated on Chart 22. Whilst local authorities are clear about the benefits that engaging the public can bring – demonstrated by the widespread use of participation initiatives across local government – the survey suggests authorities still have some concerns. A *'lack of resources'* was ranked the *'most important'* problem in implementing participation initiatives by the greatest number of authorities: 190 authorities (88%) ranked this as the most important. A *'lack of time'* was ranked the most important problem by almost as many authorities: 177 authorities, that is 82%.



As illustrated on Chart 22, 'lack of resources', followed by a 'lack of time' received the highest weighted scores as problems in implementing participation initiatives. Support from outside the council is also seen as presenting some difficulties, since a 'lack of public interest' received the next highest weighted score. Public apathy towards local politics is an enduring concern – issues associated with low turnout in local elections would seem to extend to participation between elections. As authorities continue to experience difficulties motivating people to become involved in local politics, it could be that they are using a variety of initiatives to find which ones more people respond to.

Support from within the council – either from councillors or officers – can also be a problem in implementing participation initiatives, but to a lesser extent. Looking at the weighted scores from the 1997 – the same order appears. This suggests that authorities still face the same challenges that they did four years ago.

4.5 Disadvantages of participation initiatives

The majority of authorities responding to the survey claim to have experienced some sort of negative effect when carrying out participation initiatives: 97% reported this to be the case (that is 210 authorities). It would seem most likely that authorities have experienced negative effects relating to public perceptions and managing public involvement:

- Nearly two-thirds of authorities responding to the survey (64%) are concerned that public participation initiatives may lead to consultation fatigue amongst the public.
- Over half (56%) of responding authorities also seem concerned that consulting the public may simply capture the views of dominant, but unrepresentative, groups.
- 53% of authorities believe that participation exercises can raise public expectations that the authority cannot meet. (*Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation*,⁵ published by the Department in 1998, is still valid and covers issues around selecting appropriate issues for participation where the public can have an influence.)

⁵ Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation, DETR, 1998
<http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/epplg/index.htm>

A sizeable number of authorities report that public participation initiatives have caused negative effects on the internal processes of the authority:

- 43% feel that conducting participation exercises places additional burdens on officers and members. (Similarly, authorities were most likely to report ‘lack of resources’ and ‘lack of time’ as the ‘most important’ problems in conducting public participation initiatives.)
- 39% of authorities feel that engaging the public can slow down the decision-making process. However, as discussed earlier, other authorities see ‘better decision-making’ as one of the most important benefits of engaging the public. For more details see Table 12 below.

	Number	Percentage
Consultation ‘overload’	138	64%
Captures the views of dominant, but unrepresentative, groups	122	56%
Raise public expectations which the authority cannot meet	114	53%
Places additional burdens on officers and members	93	43%
Slows down the decision-making process	85	39%
Encourage over-concentration on relatively trivial issues	39	18%
Undermine the authority or democratic legitimacy of elected members or officers	34	16%
Promote disagreement and conflict among different sections of the community	17	8%

Some authorities reported other negative effects not listed in the questionnaire, most of which relate to public perceptions - for example:

- five authorities are concerned that consulting the public brings about adverse publicity;
- one respondent stated that participation initiatives are seen as a public relations exercise; and
- another authority is concerned that consultation creates confusion amongst the public of which organisation is responsible for what.

4.6 Circumstances or issues where the public should not be involved

94% of authorities indicated that there are some circumstances in which the public should not be consulted. Three issues were indicated more frequently by far:

- Confidential issues
- Internal management issues

- Commercially sensitive issues

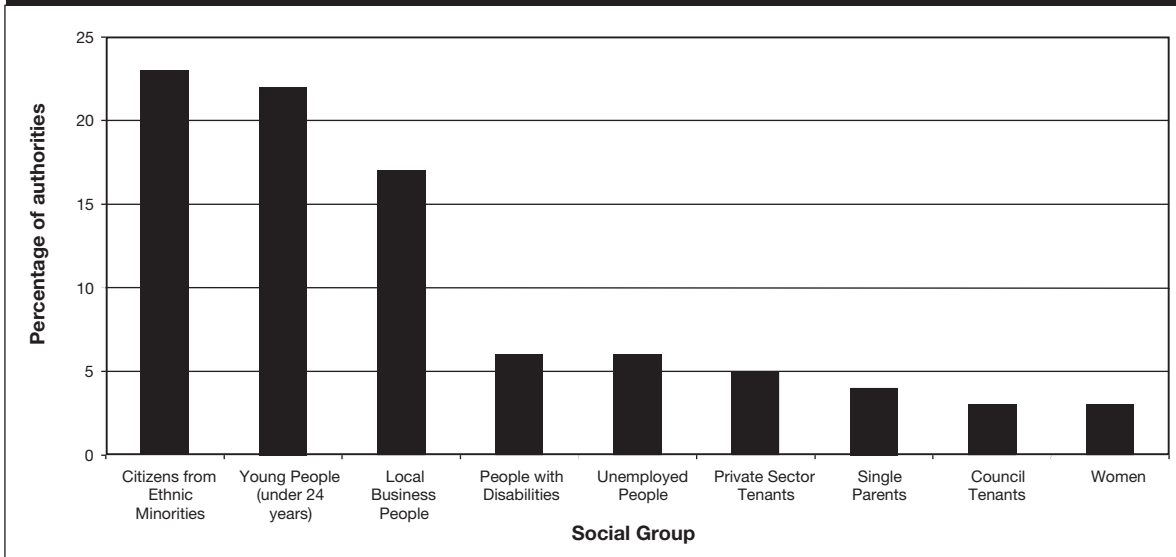
Intuitively, all authorities should report that the public should not be involved in issues that are confidential or commercially sensitive, it is probably the case that some respondents took this as given, and so did not feel it necessary to report. However, management issues – for example political management and the operation of the constitution – might offer potential for public involvement but many authorities would not involve the public. Authorities also indicated that the public should not be consulted when doing so might have a detrimental effect (unnecessarily raise public fears), or where the public cannot realistically influence decisions (activities prescribed by statute, when a quick decision is required, or there is a clear manifesto commitment or policy statement) – See Table 13.

Table 13 Issues in which authorities would choose not to involve the public.		
	Number	Percentage
Confidential issues	168	78%
Internal management issues	167	77%
Commercially sensitive issues	142	66%
Issues that might raise public fears unnecessarily	48	22%
Activities prescribed by statute	46	21%
Issues requiring a quick decision	42	19%
Clear manifesto commitment or policy statement	21	10%
Issues on which it is difficult to achieve broad consensus within the community	11	5%

4.7 Problems of involving particular social groups

Approaching half of responding authorities (44%) acknowledged that they have experienced difficulties engaging particular social groups. The two groups most likely to present difficulties are citizens from ethnic minorities and young people (under 24 years) – these were cited by 23% (50 authorities) and 22% (48 authorities) of respondents respectively. The ethnic minority percentage may be even more significant given that many local authorities surveyed will not have such populations in their area. As illustrated on Chart 23, 17% of authorities have had trouble involving local business people in their consultation activities.

Chart 23 Social groups that authorities have had difficulties engaging



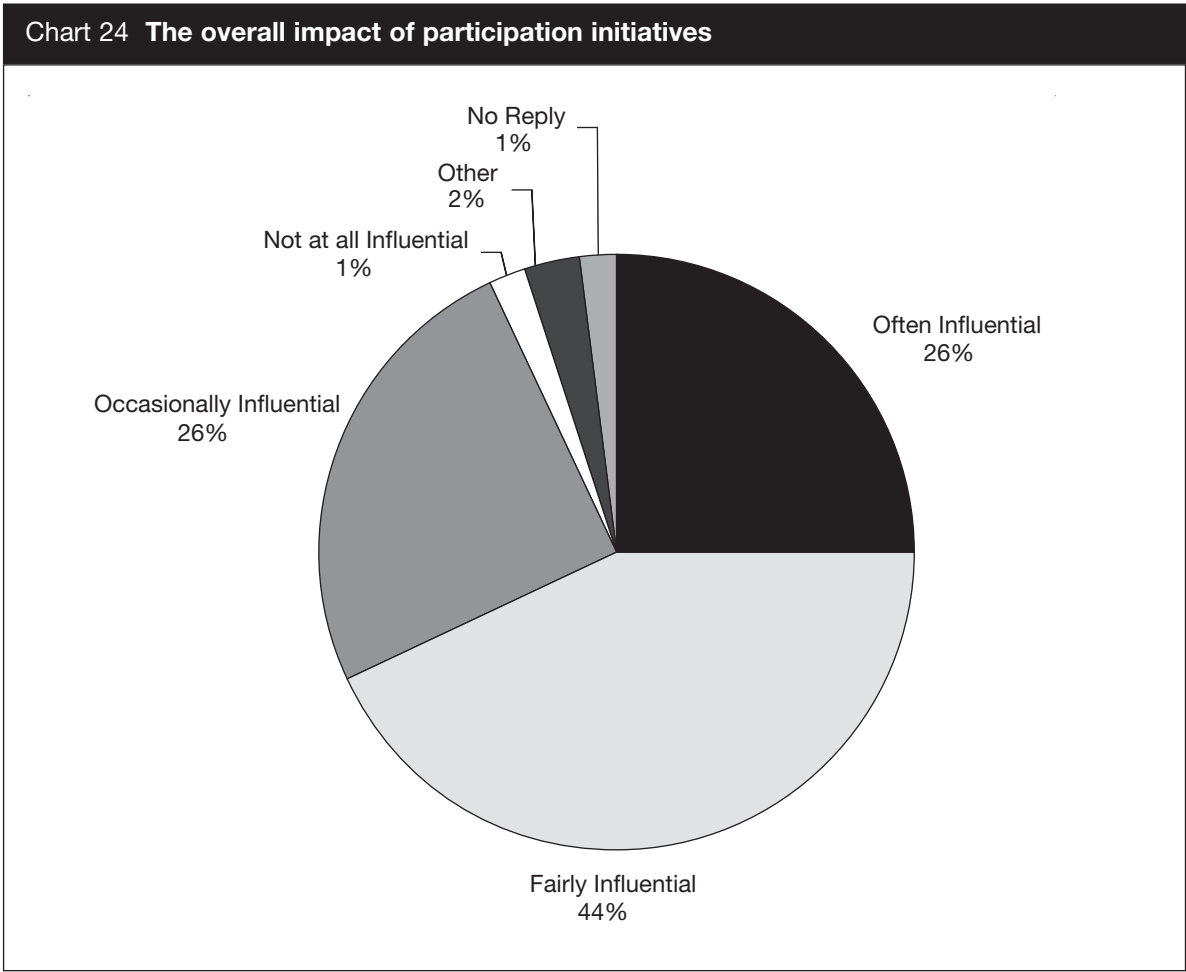
Base: 216 responding authorities

Authorities also offered a range of different groups (not provided in the questionnaire) that have presented difficulties in terms of involvement – these included travellers (six authorities); ‘hard-to reach/reclusive’ groups (two authorities); low users of council services (one authority); full time workers; asylum seekers (one authority); teachers; and lesbian and gay communities (one authority).

4.8 Impact of participation initiatives on final decision-making

Earlier it was reported that almost a quarter of authorities (24%) see the most important benefit of public participation is that it allows ‘*better decision-making on specific points*’. In terms of the impact that participation initiatives have on final decisions, a majority of authorities (70%) think that they are ‘often’ or ‘fairly’ influential on decision-making. More specifically:

- A quarter (26%) of authorities indicated that public participation initiatives are ‘**often** influential’ on decision-making.
- The highest proportion of authorities (44%) consider participation initiatives to be ‘**fairly** influential’ on final decision-making - this was consistent across all types of authority, except unitary authorities, the majority of which (9/20 authorities or 45%) believe participation initiatives to be ‘often influential’.
- A quarter (26%) indicated that public participation is only ‘**occasionally** influential’ on decision-making, but just two authorities believe participation initiatives to have no influence at all.



Base: 216 responding authorities

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

Local government continues to push forward the agenda on public participation - authorities are increasingly trying to involve people in local decisions and developing service delivery. Many initiatives are used in local authorities, and some considered innovative a few years ago, now seem standard in the majority of local authorities. Local authorities clearly recognise the benefits of engaging the public, particularly in terms of improving service delivery and decision-making. Authorities do, however, have some concerns about the time and resources required, and about motivating all sections of the community to become involved. That said, these concerns have not prevented authorities from increasingly trying to involve the public, as the number of participation initiatives has risen, across all types of authority, since 1997.

Current use and take-up of different methods of participation

It is clear from the survey results that traditional approaches to public participation and those with a 'consumerist' nature are well established across local government. In fact, service satisfaction surveys and complaints/suggestions schemes are almost universally used by local authorities. Emphasis on best value and improved service delivery in recent years may have further promoted the use of these approaches – although consumerist methods have been well-established in local government since before 1992. Their popularity may stem from the fact that they are relatively less resource intensive, can be used for a variety of service areas and provide accepted and generally understandable findings.

There is, however, some evidence that these methods have reached their peak. Trend data show that the take-up of consultation documents, public meetings, co-option/committee involvement and complaints/suggestions schemes have slowed significantly in the last few years. In contrast, the survey reveals a marked increase in the take-up of some innovative and deliberative approaches since 1997, particularly interactive websites, citizens' panels and focus groups. To illustrate the point, 28 of 86 authorities that have never before used interactive website to engage the public, plan to do so for the first time in 2002 – however, no authority intends to use public meetings, consultation documents or service satisfaction surveys for the first time.

The survey provides some indication of the increasing scale of public involvement in local decision-making. Taking into account the various caveats set out at section 2.9, the survey also suggests that a total of around 8million people were involved by all 216 responding authorities in participation exercises during the whole of 2001. This implies that local government as a whole engaged approximately 14million people via participation and consultation initiatives during 2001.

Whilst there are few significant relationships between participation approaches and type of authority or political control, some broad patterns emerge. District and rural councils seem the least active across the participation initiatives addressed in this survey, especially the more innovative and resource-intensive approaches. London boroughs and authorities controlled by Labour and Liberal-Democrat parties have been the most active during 2001. Overall the results suggest that authorities have a core set of approaches that they use each year and others which they use on ad hoc or trial basis to address a specific need or issue.

What are local authorities consulting on?

Local authorities most often seek to engage the public on issues relating to service delivery/best value and to the environment/local community. Also, but to a lesser extent, on housing and crime/safety. It does not seem that any particular types of initiative are used to engage the public on any specific issue. However, complaints/suggestions schemes (and, inevitably, service satisfaction surveys) are most often used to obtain the public's views on service delivery and best value issues and referendums tend to be used to seek citizens' views on political management arrangements.

How are local authorities organising participation initiatives?

Given that a majority of authorities are concerned about resource/time demands of participation initiatives, it is perhaps surprising that local authorities more often manage them in-house. That said, the more resource-intensive and/or innovative approaches, such as citizens' panels, citizens' juries, focus groups and opinion polls are likely to be contracted-out to some extent. It could be that, rather than contracting-out exercises, authorities are seeking to collaborate with other authorities or agencies as a way of accessing additional skills/resources. Almost all authorities (97%) work with other organisations on schemes to enhance public participation – in most cases (89%) authorities work with the police, but also health authorities, voluntary/community organisations and other authorities. This also suggests that, when it comes to seeking views on inter-agency or cross-cutting issues, authorities are keen to avoid duplicating other organisation's efforts.

Outcomes of participation

There are mixed views on the extent to which the results of participation exercises impact on the decision-making process – a majority of authorities (70%) think that participation initiatives are often or fairly influential on final decision-making but a significant minority (27%) think they are only occasionally or not at all influential.

Despite this, local authorities see improved service delivery and decision-making as the main benefits of enhanced participation. However, the research suggests that, when designing participation activities it is important to ensure the public is not 'over-consulted' and that it is made clear to people what they can expect as a result of the consultation, as raising unrealistic expectations can fuel dissatisfaction. It is similarly important to bear in

mind the capacity of the authority to conduct the exercise and to use the results when deciding how exactly to go about engaging the public.

Whilst local authorities are clear about the benefits that engaging the public can bring, they seem concerned that the effectiveness of such activities may be affected by low levels of public interest in participation initiatives, or indeed the representativeness of those responding. 56% of authorities are concerned that participation exercises may simply capture the views of dominant, but unrepresentative, groups. This is compounded by the fact that 44% of authorities report having experienced difficulties in engaging people from certain social groups – particularly, those from ethnic minorities and young people. However, it would appear that local authorities are seeking to address this issue by aiming certain participation exercises at specific citizen groups or neighbourhoods. The survey suggests that forum-based initiatives, user management of services and co-option to committees are popular ways of engaging with particular citizen groups.

It is important to use future research to build on this knowledge of public participation in local government and to understand how and why some approaches are more effective than others. It will also be interesting to see whether the use of citizens' panels, community plans/needs analysis and interactive websites increase over time, as was suggested by this survey.

ANNEX A

Technical report

This survey of all local authorities in England was a follow-up to a similar exercise carried out in 1997.

Questionnaire layout and printing, piloting, dispatch, response monitoring and reminder activity, coding and data input and delivery of data files was managed by McCallum Layton.

The project timescales were as follows:

Pilot questionnaire mailout	27 Feb
Pilot follow-up, by telephone	6 – 7 Mar
Pilot feedback and questionnaire finalisation	8 – 11 Mar
Materials to print	12 Mar
Mainstage mailout	15 Mar
Initial cut-off date	19 Apr
First reminder (with questionnaire) mailout	24 Apr
First reminder cut-off date	15 May
Second reminder (no questionnaire) mailout	20 May
Second reminder cut-off date	7 June
Third reminder (by telephone)	12 – 28 Jun
Final cut-off for fieldwork	5 Jul

The pilot stage

For the pilot stage, questionnaires were sent to 15 authorities selected at random, addressed to the Chief Executive, with a covering letter explaining the pilot process. A week later, all of these were followed up by phone; we identified to whom the documents had been forwarded, contacted those individuals where possible, and asked for their feedback on the extent to which they felt the questionnaire would be straightforward to complete. This process did not highlight any concerns about the questionnaire, but several respondents felt that the initial cut-off date originally envisaged (12 April) was too soon, especially as the Easter break fell in between – this was therefore extended by one week.

The key difficulty encountered at the pilot stage was tracking down where the questionnaire had been sent on to – this often involved a chain of at least 3 people, and in a couple of cases the Chief Executive’s PA did not have any note of having received and sent it on in the first place.

In the event, we obtained feedback on the questionnaire from 7 of the 15 authorities mailed to for the pilot.

The breakdown of pilot authorities in terms of council type was as follows:

	Sent to	Feedback obtained from
District	7	2
County	2	1
London Borough	4	2
Unitary	2	2

The job titles of those contributing feedback to the pilot were Chief Executive (2), Head of Communications (2), Head of Corporate Policy (1), Chief Strategic Officer (1) and Strategic Management Officer (1).

Response

By the end of the survey period, we received responses from 216 local authorities, representing a response rate of 57% from the 382 mailed to. 5 authorities refused.

Response rate progress over the various stages of the survey were as follows:

By:	No. received	% response
Initial cut-off date (19 Apr)	102	27%
First reminder cut-off date (15 May)	171	45%
Second reminder cut-off date (7 Jun)	190	50%
Final cut-off (5 Jul)	216	57%

Response rates by authority type were:

	Total	Rec'd	Response
County	34	21	62%
Metropolitan Borough	36	24	67%
District	238	134	56%
London Borough	33	17	52%
Unitary	47	20	43%

By region, response rates were:

	Total	Rec'd	Response
West Midlands	38	25	66%
North West	46	29	63%
South East	74	42	57%
Eastern	54	30	56%
Yorks & Humber	22	12	55%
South West	51	27	53%
North East	25	13	52%
London	33	17	52%
East Midlands	45	21	47%

And by political control:

	Total	Rec'd	Response
Lib Dem	31	21	68%
Labour	118	67	57%
Conservative	111	60	54%
NOC	123	66	54%
Independent	4	2	50%
Not known	1	-	-

ANNEX B

Questionnaire and guidelines



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A Survey

THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Return of Completed Questionnaires

Please return completed questionnaires in the pre-paid envelope provided, by 19th April 2002.
Completed forms should be returned to:

McCallum Layton
Oakhurst
23 Harrogate Road
Leeds
LS7 3PD

Queries

If you have any queries regarding the content of the questionnaire, or the research in general, then please contact:

David Purdy	020 7944 4122	david.purdy@dtlr.gsi.gov.uk
Demelza Birch	020 7944 4123	demelza.birch@dtlr.gsi.gov.uk

If you have any queries regarding the return of the questionnaire, then please contact:

Kate Thompson	0113 262 6444	katethompson@mccallum-layton.co.uk
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SECTION A – RESPONDENT DETAILS

These details are required to enable initiatives in individual authorities to be identified and to facilitate comparison of initiatives between different types of authority.

A1 Authority Details

A1a Name of Authority _____

A1b Type of authority (*tick one box only*)

Metropolitan Borough	<input type="checkbox"/>	County Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
London Borough	<input type="checkbox"/>	District Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unitary	<input type="checkbox"/>		

A1c Overall political control (*tick one box only*)

Conservative	<input type="checkbox"/>	No overall control	<input type="checkbox"/>
Labour	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Lib-Dem	<input type="checkbox"/>		

A1d Election cycle (*tick one box only*)

Thirds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Four yearly	<input type="checkbox"/>
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A2 Responding Officer Details

A2a Full name: _____

A2b Position/Job Title: _____

A2c Contact Telephone Number: _____

A2d Fax Number _____

A2e Contact Address: _____

A2f E-mail Address: _____

SECTION B – YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY’S APPROACH TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

While we understand that it is difficult to generalise across a broad range of initiatives, we are interested here in the purpose and impact of your authority’s general approach to public participation. (By ‘public participation’ we mean any initiative which seeks to involve general members of the public in the activities of the authority – these may range from schemes which seek the views of individuals on particular services, through to those which involve members of the public directly in formal decision-making processes at a corporate level.)

B1 How important are the following in stimulating participation initiatives in your local authority?
(Please rank the following, where 1 is the most important and 7 the least.)

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Individual members | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ruling group policy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Corporate strategy/standards | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Departmental projects | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public/community demand | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Government networks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Central government | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B2 What are the main purposes of public participation initiatives in your local authority?
(Please rank the following, where 1 is the most important and 6 the least.)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| To meet statutory requirements | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To decide between particular options | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To develop ‘best value’ initiatives | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To gain information on citizen views | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To increase citizen awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To develop/empower local communities | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B3 What are the main problems in implementing participation initiatives?
(Please rank the following statements, where 1 is the most important and 6 the least.)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Lack of councillor support | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of officer support | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of public interest | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of resources | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of facilitating legislation | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B4 What are the main benefits that participation initiatives have brought to your local authority?
(Please rank the following, where 1 is the most important and 5 the least.)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Better policy-making | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Better decision-making on specific points | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improvements in services | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Greater citizen awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community development/empowerment | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B5 Have participation initiatives had any negative effects on the work of the authority?
(Please tick all that apply.)

- Raise public expectations which the authority cannot meet
- Slowing down the decision-making process
- Places additional burdens on officers and members
- Captures the views of dominant groups, which may not be representative of the wider community
- Encourage over-concentration on relatively trivial issues
- Promote disagreement and conflict among different sections of the community
- Undermine the authority or democratic legitimacy of elected members or officers
- Lead to consultation 'overload'
- Other (please write in below)
-
-
- None

B6 How would you describe the overall impact of participation initiatives on final decision-making in your authority? (Please tick one.)

- Not at all influential
- Occasionally influential
- Fairly influential
- Often influential
- Other (please write in)

.....
.....

B7 Are there particular circumstances or issues where you would choose not to involve the public?

Yes No

If 'yes' - from the following list, please indicate the issues in which you would choose not to involve the public. (Please tick all that apply.)

- Internal management issues
- Confidential issues
- Commercially sensitive issues
- Activities prescribed by statute
- Issues requiring a quick decision
- Issues on which difficult to achieve broad consensus within the community
- Issues that might raise unnecessary public fears
- Clear manifesto commitment or policy statement
- Other (please write in)

.....
.....

B8 Has your local authority tried and failed to involve any particular social group(s)?

Yes No

If 'yes' - from the following list, please indicate which groups the authority has been unable to involve effectively. *(Please tick all that apply.)*

- Young people (under 24 years)
- Citizens from ethnic minorities
- Local business people
- Council tenants
- Private sector tenants
- Single parents
- Women
- People with disabilities
- Unemployed people
- Other (please write in)

.....

B9 Is your authority working on schemes to enhance public participation in collaboration with other local agencies?

Yes No

If 'yes' - with which of the following organisations has your authority collaborated on schemes to enhance public participation? *(Please tick all that apply in the first column, then please rank according to how often your authority has collaborated with a particular local agency, where '1' is the 'most often'.)*

	Collaborated at all	Ranking
Local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parish/town councils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary/community organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local schools or colleges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public utilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing associations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Churches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....

B10 Are there any other features of your local authority's **overall approach** to public participation which have not been addressed in this section but which you would like to emphasise?

.....

		C1	C2	C3	C4
CONSULTATION INITIATIVE		Has this initiative ever been used in your authority? ✓ if yes, X if no	If 'yes', when was this initiative first used by your authority? (please write in year)	Does your authority have specific plans to use this method this year (2002)? ✓ if yes, X if no	Did your authority use this method during 2001? ✓ if yes, X if no
A	Complaints/suggestions schemes				
B	Service satisfaction surveys				
C	Other opinion polls				
D	Interactive web-site				
E	Referendums				
F	Community plans/needs analysis				
G	Citizen's panels				
H	Co-option/committee involvement				
I	Question and answer sessions				
J	Consultation documents				
K	Public meetings				
L	Citizens' juries				
M	Focus Groups				
N	Visioning exercises				
O	Service user forums				
P	Issue forums				
Q	Shared interest forums				
R	Area/neighbourhood forums				
S	User management of services				

Please answer
C2 for each
ever used

Please complete
C5-10 for each
used in 2001

		C5	C6	C7	
CONSULTATION INITIATIVE		How many times was this initiative used during 2001? your authority? <i>(please write in number)</i>	In total , during 2001, how many people (respondents/participants) were involved using this method? <i>(number year)</i>	Of all the times this initiative was used during 2001, how many times was it managed at the following levels: this year (2002)? <i>(please write in numbers)</i>	
A	Complaints/suggestions schemes				
B	Service satisfaction surveys				
C	Other opinion polls				
D	Interactive web-site				
E	Referendums				
F	Community plans/needs analysis				
G	Citizen's panels				
H	Co-option/committee involvement				
I	Question and answer sessions				
J	Consultation documents				
K	Public meetings				
L	Citizens' juries				
M	Focus Groups				
N	Visioning exercises				
O	Service user forums				
P	Issue forums				
Q	Shared interest forums				
R	Area/neighbourhood forums				
S	User management of services				

Please complete C10 for each type of initiative you used in your authority during 2001.

		C10
	CONSULTATION INITIATIVE	What POLICY FOCUS/ISSUE is this initiative most often used to inform? Please give 'top three' policy areas or issues.
A	Complaints/suggestions schemes	1 2 3
B	Service satisfaction surveys	1 2 3
C	Other opinion polls	1 2 3
D	Interactive web-site	1 2 3
E	Referendums	1 2 3
F	Community plans/needs analysis	1 2 3
G	Citizen's panels	1 2 3
H	Co-option/committee involvement	1 2 3

		C10. . . continued
	CONSULTATION INITIATIVE	What POLICY FOCUS/ISSUE is this initiative most often used to inform? Please give 'top three' policy areas or issues.
I	Question and answer sessions	1 2 3
J	Consultation documents	1 2 3
K	Public meetings	1 2 3
L	Citizens' juries	1 2 3
M	Focus Groups	1 2 3
N	Visioning exercises	1 2 3
O	Service user forums	1 2 3
P	Issue forums	1 2 3

		C10. . . continued
	CONSULTATION INITIATIVE	What POLICY FOCUS/ISSUE is this initiative most often used to inform? Please give 'top three' policy areas or issues.
Q	Shared interest forums	1 2 3
R	Area/neighbourhood forums	1 2 3
S	User management of services	1 2 3

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

**WE WOULD BE GRATEFUL TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTS DESCRIBING
INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN YOUR AUTHORITY.**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Background to the survey

The purpose of the survey is to obtain data on the forms and methods of public participation being used by local authorities in England. The survey asks about traditional as well as innovative approaches to public participation, and is concerned with both statutory and non-statutory forms of participation. It constitutes a 'census' of local authorities' efforts to enhance public participation.

The survey is being managed by McCallum Layton. No individual council will be named in connection with this survey; McCallum Layton will only provide unidentified respondent data to the DTLR.

Filling in the questionnaire

The questionnaire has been piloted among selected local authorities and is designed to be filled in by a central officer, identified by the Chief Executive. The main questionnaire should be returned in the reply-paid envelopes that have been enclosed for your convenience.

Every effort has been taken to maximise clarity and minimise the time necessary for survey completion.

If you do experience difficulty in interpreting or answering any of the survey questions, please contact David Purdy (020 7944 4122) or Demelza Birch (020 7944 4123) at the Local and Regional Government Research Unit, DTLR.

If you have any queries about return of the questionnaire, please contact Kate Thompson at McCallum Layton, on 0113 262 6444.

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Returning the questionnaire

Please return completed questionnaires by 19th April 2002 in the reply-paid envelope provided, to:

McCallum Layton
Oakhurst
23 Harrogate Road
Leeds
LS7 3PD

We would also be happy to receive any documents produced by your local authority on innovative approaches to public participation.

Guidance notes

The following notes are intended to clarify any problems of definition regarding questions asked in the survey.

Section A: Respondent Details

These details are required to enable initiatives in individual authorities to be identified and to facilitate comparison of initiatives between different types of authority.

Section B: Your Local Authority's Approach to Public Participation

This section asks about your authority's general approach to public participation, covering the main purpose and impact of initiatives, and the problems and benefits encountered. By 'public participation' we mean any initiative which seeks to involve general members of the public in the activities of the authority - these may range from schemes which seek the views of individuals on particular services through to those which involve members of the public directly in formal decision-making processes at a corporate level.

While we know that it will be difficult to generalise across a broad range of participation initiatives, we want to obtain a 'flavour' of your authority's experience to date. As you will appreciate, to ask these questions about each form of participation would have produced too lengthy and complex a questionnaire. Some of the questions ask you to rank statements in order of priority; others are 'yes/no' questions.

Section C: Different Forms of Public Participation

This section collects information about the range and extent of participation initiatives that are currently used by local authorities. These may be run by the authority on its own or in collaboration with other agencies. Please complete information for each form of participation used by your authority – definitions are provided below. Where questions refer to '2001' this means the period 1 January to 31 December 2001. To aid completion of this section, we provide fuller explanation of some of the questions below:

- C5 **How many times was this initiative used during 2001?** Please give the total number of times each specific initiative was used by the authority during 2001. Each 'time' counted should relate to a separate information/data collection exercise. For example, six focus groups all gathering views on a particular issue in spring 2001 would be a single use of an initiative – not six. If the focus groups were repeated in autumn 2001, this would imply two uses. If a survey has asked residents in different areas or different service users about the same issue then this should be counted as a single use of the survey approach. If, however, each survey covers issues specific to an area or a service then each survey should be counted as a separate use of the method. For ongoing initiatives, such as citizens panels, the number should relate to each separate data collection exercise.
- C6 **In total, during 2001, how many people (respondents/participants) were involved using this method?** As far as possible, the response should provide an accurate indication of the number of citizens who were involved in an initiative or method. If, for example, six focus groups each involved ten people then 60 should be given as the number. If a method has been used more than once, please give the sum total of people involved across **all** uses – not the number involved in each use/occasion. If the same people were known to be involved repeatedly over several uses of the method they should only be counted once e.g. for a citizens' panel the membership should be given once.
- C7 **Of all the times this initiative was used during 2001, how many times was it managed at the corporate or departmental level?** Please give the number of times each initiative was managed at the corporate or at the departmental level. Where the initiative relates to a cross-cutting issue, please indicate 'corporate'. (Figures given [*corporate + departmental*] should sum to give the total number of times used during 2001 – as provided in response to C5.)
- C8 **Of all the times this initiative was used during 2001, how many times has it involved the following target groups.....whole population, particular neighbourhood, or particular citizen group?** An example of a particular citizen group would be young people or swimming pool users. (These figures [*whole population + particular neighbourhood + or particular citizen group*] should sum to give at least the total number of times used during 2001 – as provided in response to C5.)
- C9 **Of all the times this initiative was used during 2001, how many times was it conducted by an in-house team, contracted-out or a 'mixed approach' taken?** This refers to the process of carrying out the participation/consultation exercise and would include the following: design of approach, sampling, fieldwork/data collation, input of data and analysis of responses/results. If one (or part of one) of these tasks was conducted by an external contractor, then the exercise (for the purposes of this questionnaire) would be described as a '**mixed approach**'. If no part were carried out by an external contractor, the exercise would be '**in-house**' and if all parts were

conducted by an external contractor, it would be described as '**contracted-out**'. (Figures given [*in-house + contracted-out + mixed approach*] should sum to give the total number of times used during 2001 – as provided in response to C5.)

C10 What policy focus/issue is this initiative most often used to inform? Please list the service, issue or policy areas in which each form of participation was used in 2001 (e.g. community safety, leisure, highways, political management arrangement, best value). Please give the three areas in which each form of participation was most often used in 2001.

The following nineteen forms of participation are listed. Definitions and examples for these listed forms of public participation are given below in order to minimise ambiguity and ensure the comparability of responses:

- Complaints/suggestions schemes: These may be temporary or ongoing, service-specific or authority-wide. They may take different forms, e.g. fill-in cards or a telephone line.
- Service satisfaction surveys: These may be one-off or regular initiatives, focusing either on specific services or on the local authority's general performance. Surveys may be carried out in a variety of ways (e.g. postal or door-to-door) and may cover the entire local authority population or a particular group of service users or citizens.
- Other opinion polls: These may be used to find out citizens' views on non-service specific issues (e.g. community safety or 'the town in 2000'). Opinion polls are generally used to obtain citizens' immediate reactions. 'Deliberative opinion polls' are used to compare a group of citizens' reactions before and after they have had an opportunity to discuss the issue at hand.
- Interactive web-site: This may be based on the internet or on a local authority-specific intranet, inviting e-mail messages from citizens on particular local issues or service matters. We are only interested in interactive initiatives and not in the use of computer technologies simply to provide information on services or facilities.
- Referendums: These allow citizens to vote on policy-specific options, as in the recent referendums on council tax options.
- Community plans/needs analysis: The purpose of these is to set out priorities for local service provision and local authority policy, often on a community-by-community (or neighbourhood) basis. In general, councillors take primary decisions about the budget while citizens review (and may reorder) specific priorities.
- Citizens' panels: These are ongoing panels which function as a 'sounding board' for the local authority. Panels focus on specific service or policy issues, or on wider strategy. The panel is made up of a statistically representative sample of citizens whose views are sought several times a year.
- Co-option/Committee Involvement: Co-optees are citizens who usually represent a particular community group or set of interests on council committees (including overview and scrutiny) or working parties. In some cases these citizens act in an advisory capacity but in others they play a full role in decision-making.
- Question and answer sessions: These are held at the end of council or committee meetings, providing citizens with an opportunity to direct questions at elected members.
- Consultation documents: These are a traditional method of communicating issues for discussion or decision-making options to citizens. They may be specific to a particular service, citizen group or neighbourhood. They may be used in conjunction with public meetings or other forms of participation (e.g. service user forums). They may be linked to statutory requirements for public consultation.
- Public meetings: These are a traditional method of seeking public views on particular issues or facilitating debate on broad options for a specific service, policy or neighbourhood. They may be initiated by the local authority (or a particular department) or be convened in response to citizen or community concerns. We are referring here to one-off public meetings, rather than ongoing forums (covered below).

- Citizens' juries: A citizens' jury is a group of citizens (chosen to be a fair representation of the local population) brought together to consider a particular issue set by the local authority. Citizens' juries receive evidence from expert witnesses and cross-questioning can occur. The process may last up to four days, at the end of which a report is drawn up setting out the views of the jury, including any differences in opinion. Juries' views are intended to inform councillors' decision-making.
- Focus groups: One-off focus groups are similar to citizens' juries in that they bring together citizens to discuss a specific issue. Focus groups need not be representative of the general population, perhaps involving a particular citizen group only. Discussions may focus on the specific needs of that group, on the quality of a particular service, or on ideas for broader policy or strategy. Focus groups do not generally call expert witnesses and typically last between one and two hours only, usually involving around 12 people.
- Visioning exercises: A range of methods (including focus groups) may be used within a visioning exercise, the purpose of which is to establish the 'vision' participants have of the future and the kind of future they would like to create. Visioning may be used to inform broad strategy for a locality, or may have a more specific focus (as in environmental consultations for Local Agenda 21).
- Service user forums: These are ongoing bodies which meet on a regular basis to discuss issues relating to the management and development of a particular service (e.g. an older people's day centre, or a leisure centre or park). Forums may have a set membership or operate on an 'open' basis. Such groups may have the power to make recommendations to specific council committees or even to share in decision-making processes.
- Issue forums: These are also ongoing bodies with regular meetings, but focusing on a particular issue (e.g. community safety or health promotion). Again, they may have a set membership or operate on an open basis, and are often able to make recommendations to relevant council committees or to share in decision-making processes.
- Shared interest forums: These are similar to issue forums but concentrate upon the needs of a particular citizen group (e.g. young people or minority ethnic groups). Again, they may have a set membership or operate on an open basis, and are often able to make recommendations to relevant council committees or to share in decision-making processes.
- Area/neighbourhood forums: Such forums are concerned with the needs of a particular geographically-defined area or neighbourhood. Meeting regularly, they may deal with a specific service area (e.g. planning or housing) or with a full range of local services and concerns. Area forums may or may not have dedicated officers attached to them. They may have a close link with the relevant ward councillors or with councillors responsible for the service areas under discussion. We are interested here in area forums in which citizens play a key role, rather than in councillor-only area committees. Membership may be set or 'open'. Where there is a formally-established membership (e.g. of representatives from tenants' or community associations in the area), members of the public may be free to participate in an open discussion session at meetings.
- User management of services: These initiatives represent the most radical form of public participation in that citizens are given direct control over the management of local services and resources. Examples of user management include community-based housing organisations (or tenant management co-operatives) and community-run nurseries, youth clubs and community centres. Such initiatives usually operate through an executive committee, elected by the wider group of users.



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Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government

The research involved the collection, through a postal questionnaire survey, of in-depth and systematic information on approaches taken by local authorities to enhance public participation in their decision making and service delivery. Through case studies, the research addressed what local authorities want, and, what people want from their local authorities and how they would feel about new innovations. Overall, the research provided guidance material for local authorities on developing a more strategic approach to enhancing participation.

Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation

This guidance is designed for both members and officers to help them think through the most appropriate way, for the authority and its citizens, to advance an approach to public participation. The guidance encourages the reader to take a broad view of the participation activities taking place across the whole authority area. The guidance also considers the purpose and benefits of a range of specific initiatives and refers the reader to guidance and literature covering area based and specific initiatives.

Council Tax Consultation – Guidelines for Local Authorities

These guidelines are designed to assist local authorities in consulting the public on council tax. Whilst guidelines on consultation are available, little has been produced that is specific to consulting on local tax and spend issues – an area that presents particular difficulties. This document draws on the experience of councils and debates with practitioners to provide practical support to those authorities committed to carrying out quality and effective consultation on council tax and budget issues.

Youth Participation in Local Government

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study to investigate the reasons why young people are not participating in local government and consider what might be done to alter this. It demonstrates in considerable depth the different ways in which young people view and participate in local politics, and the factors that shape and influence their individual perspectives. It provides useful insights and solutions that can help inform the invigoration of democratic processes.

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