Civic activists mapping research

By ERS Research and Consultancy

take part

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community development foundation

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Executive summary

In January 2010, the Community Development Foundation (CDF) commissioned this research on civic activist mapping. Complementing and coordinating with the ongoing national evaluation of the Take Part pathfinder programme, the specific purpose of this research is to:

- collect the views of civic activists on both the Take Part programme and in respect of empowerment generally

- create a snapshot of civic activist characteristics in pathfinder areas

- measure the impact of any resources produced as part of both the Take Part pathfinder and national support programmes

- set the findings of the research in the context of what is already known about the typology of community activists in lay roles in England.

Characteristics of civic activists

Although there is some degree of variance between the individual roles, there are a number of key trends defining the general characteristics of civic activists as being:

- Christian

- white

- almost all qualified to at least secondary school level

- qualified to university level (special constables less so)

- employed (councillors less so)

- male (school governors less so)

- over 50 years old.

School governors

School governors have a younger age profile and are more likely to be in full-time employment than councillors. The vast majority (89%) are classified as either managers/senior officials or professionals, with nearly 70% qualified to university level.

Councillors

Councillors generally progress into their role following extensive and varied experience of civic participation. They are mostly older than school governors or special constables and also more likely to be retired and male.

Special constables

Special constables have the 'youngest' demographic profile of the civic roles but show a pronounced gender imbalance, with a significantly higher proportion of males (71%).

There was a level of cross-over between school governor and councillor roles, with around a fifth of school governors who were also councillors and a quarter of councillors who had been school governors. There is no obvious pattern to the order in which they undertook these roles, although the transfer of learning between the roles is cited as having been beneficial in fulfilling them both effectively.

Motivations

There are a wide range of motivations for becoming a civic activist. These are generally closely related to an individual's aspirations and what they want to get from the role. Key themes were identified as being to:

- 'give something back' to the community

- gain influence (in order to improve the school or community)

- undertake challenges in order to realise personal development.

Over time these aspirations can change and the benefits people derive from their experience in a civic role often vary from those they had initially envisaged. What keeps them in a role is not always what motivated them to take it up.

Personal aspiration or interest (such as career progression or the desire to improve the education of children in the family), a sense of obligation and issue-specific factors (commonly related to the provision or threatened closure of public services or community facilities) are also factors in motivating people to take up a civic role. Positive experiences of civic activism, such as personal development or a sense of having made a difference, were cited as reinforcing key motivations, building people's commitment to a civic role and increasing the likelihood of them being more civically active in future.

The role of school governor acts as a greater catalyst to further civic participation than that of councillor or special constable. Whilst this may be a factor of lower time commitment, there is evidence to suggest that positive experience in the role is acting to motivate and influence school governors to increase their participation and consider other civic roles in future.

The recruitment process for special constables has greater emphasis on testing and the possibility of failing to meet the required standard is more tangibly felt. Of the three civic roles, special constables were the least likely to have started with primarily altruistic motives. Whilst some did see it as a way of 'giving something back' to the community, most special constables took on the role to move towards joining the regular police force and/or were particularly motivated by the personal challenge of 'testing' themselves, seeking a sense of personal achievement in getting through.

Personal invitations are powerful in gaining the involvement of those that may be unsure or lacking in confidence. This generally enables one to one contact through which to safely explore any initial concerns or questions and allow potential civic

activists to receive a first hand account of what is expected. Some interviewees suggested that such approaches can also flatter their recipients into being more receptive to taking on a civic role.

Impacts on civic activists

Benefits of their role commonly identified by civic activists were found to include:

- personal development and increased confidence
- greater levels of responsibility
- having a positive impact on the community
- increased understanding/awareness of community issues
- access to opportunities for professional development.

People generally further increase their levels of civic participation after taking up a civic role. This was most pronounced for school governors, although people across all three roles considered them rewarding and enjoyable, with some reporting their civic involvement as being 'addictive' in a positive sense.

The role of chair of a board of school governors is seen as more demanding and holding greater responsibility than that of other school governors, requiring a larger commitment of time and a wider range of skills and attributes. Councillors with cabinet positions or holding a portfolio were also seen as having greater levels of responsibility than back benchers. They are similarly required to commit more time to the role. Insufficient remuneration is cited as a barrier to becoming and remaining a principal tier councillor.

The loss of leisure time due to additional commitments is seen as a negative impact across each of the civic roles, with many citing the less opportunity to spend time with their family. This was most prevalent in councillors, 54% of whom offered this as a negative impact of their role. Support from family members is seen as significantly contributing to the ability of civic activists to fulfil each of the three roles.

People in civic roles are more satisfied with their local area than the general public. They also demonstrated a slightly stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and feel significantly more able to influence decisions in their locality.

Training and personal development

Personal learning and development is acknowledged as a key element of civic participation and empowerment. It is both an input (applied to fulfilling a civic role) and an outcome from civic activism, enabling people to be more effective within a civic role and contributing to their experience in a positive way. Initial training and support at the point of entering a civic role is considered particularly valuable to help build confidence as people find their way into a role.

There appears to be little standardisation of training by role across different local authority areas. This is reflected in the varied effectiveness and impact of training experienced by civic activists. Mentoring opportunities (particularly prior to undertaking a civic role) and personalised training plans were considered to be effective, although awareness and provision of these is generally lacking.

Whilst it may not be possible or desirable to standardise training approaches, there may be an opportunity to promote good practice, particularly relating to mentoring and peer support, and integrate Take Part pathfinder training with that provided through council and police support services.

The low level of awareness about the Take Part programme amongst interviewees is perhaps understandable given the sample for this research, although a significant number considered that Take Part requires a higher profile in order to meet its aims. Those who had participated in Take Part activities considered them to have reinvigorated their approach and made them more effective in the role. All were extremely positive about their experience, the quality of activities in which they participated and the need for such a programme to promote and enable civic participation.

Discussion Points

Those who have been school governors and special constables for longer periods perceive an increasing professionalisation of their role. Although this is generally seen as positive, the growing demands also have potential to put off new volunteers and limit the length of time people stay in the roles.

Councillors and school governors generally take on roles within the communities in which they live, whilst special constables more commonly fulfil their role in communities other than their own. The relationship between locality and civic activism appears to be more complex than is represented in much of the literature relating to empowerment. The common assumption that people are most likely to be civically active in the area where they live is challenged and this research highlights a rationale for looking beyond the local neighbourhood (or even the local authority area) to more flexibly recruit, encourage, support and facilitate civic activism and link into a broader range of communities of interest and affiliation that do not correspond with 'local' boundaries.

Recognising it in themselves is a prerequisite for those in civic roles to promote and facilitate empowerment more widely. Taking time and direction to reflect on their own experience can help civic activists engage with and contribute to the empowerment agenda to a greater degree.

The use of language and terminology can provide a barrier to engaging with the empowerment agenda. The terms 'civic activist' and 'empowerment' are seen as rather exclusive. Engaging interviewees on the same issues, but in terms of 'getting

people involved in their communities' generated a more positive response, in many cases inciting real enthusiasm and impassioned support for the principles of community empowerment.

1. Introduction

Scope of the research

In January 2010, the Community Development Foundation (CDF) commissioned a piece of research on civic activist mapping. Complementing the ongoing national evaluation of the Take Part pathfinder programme, the specific purpose of this research is to:

- collect the views of civic activists on both the Take Part programme and in respect of empowerment generally

- create a snapshot of civic activist characteristics in pathfinder areas

- measure the impact of any resources produced as part of both the Take Part pathfinder and National Support programmes

- set the findings of the research in the context of what is already known about the typology of community activists in lay roles in England.

The research focused on three specific civic roles – councillors, school governors and special voluntary constables (referred to hereafter as special constables), with the latter selected after the Office of the Presiding Judge and the Magistrates' Association declined the request for magistrates to be involved. The research aimed to go beyond a simple mapping exercise and gain insight into the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of people in those roles and capture key learning points related to civic activism.

The research was also required to examine awareness of, and any links to, local and national Take Part programmes, the Connecting Communities programme and the empowerment agenda more generally (defined with reference to active citizenship, strengthening local democracy and the community empowerment white paper; Communities in control: Real people, real power, (CLG 2008b).

Context of the research

The white paper, *Communities in control: Real people, real power* (CLG 2008b) (hereafter referred to by its commonly used name as the Community empowerment white paper) sets out a range of policies to create a more vibrant democracy by better promoting participatory engagement and giving more control and influence to more people. This can be seen in the context of broader policy direction to join up the respective roles of active citizens and the state in addressing the challenges that communities face. Acknowledging the continuous nature of processes required to build democratic capacity and active participation, as well as the close relationship with established practices such as community development and community planning,

the aim is to advance more people to higher rungs on the 'ladder of participation' (Arnstein, 1969)[1].

Civic behaviour can be divided into three broad categories (*Citizenship survey*, 2008-09):

- *civic consultation* refers to active engagement in consultation about local services or issues through activities such as attending a consultation group or completing a questionnaire about these services

- *civic participation* covers wider forms of engagement in democratic processes, such as contacting an elected representative, taking part in a public demonstration or protest, or signing a petition

- *civic activism* refers to involvement either in direct decision-making about local services or issues; or in the actual provision of these services by taking on a role such as a local councillor, school governor or magistrate

Civic activism

Civic activism is the least common form of civic behaviour. Just 10% of people had participated in direct decision-making (most commonly about local services or issues) in the last year, with fewer still having actually taken on civic roles such as those of councillor, school governor or special constable (*Citizenship survey, 2008-09*).

The *Citizenship survey 2008-09* highlights the most significant levels of involvement among civic activists as being related to decision-making about young people's services (24%), local regeneration (21%) and housing (in the sense of being a member of a tenants' committee, 19%). Involvement in specific civic roles was lower, with 11% of 'activists' having been a school governor, 4% a local councillor and just 1 per cent special constables (Figure 1 over page).

Whilst the figures vary slightly, these themes are also highlighted in the Hansard Society's *Audit of political participation* (2008) and Involve's *Activating empowerment* report (2009).

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[1] See Figure 2, page 12

Figure 1. Types of civic activism undertaken (Citizenship survey 2008-09)
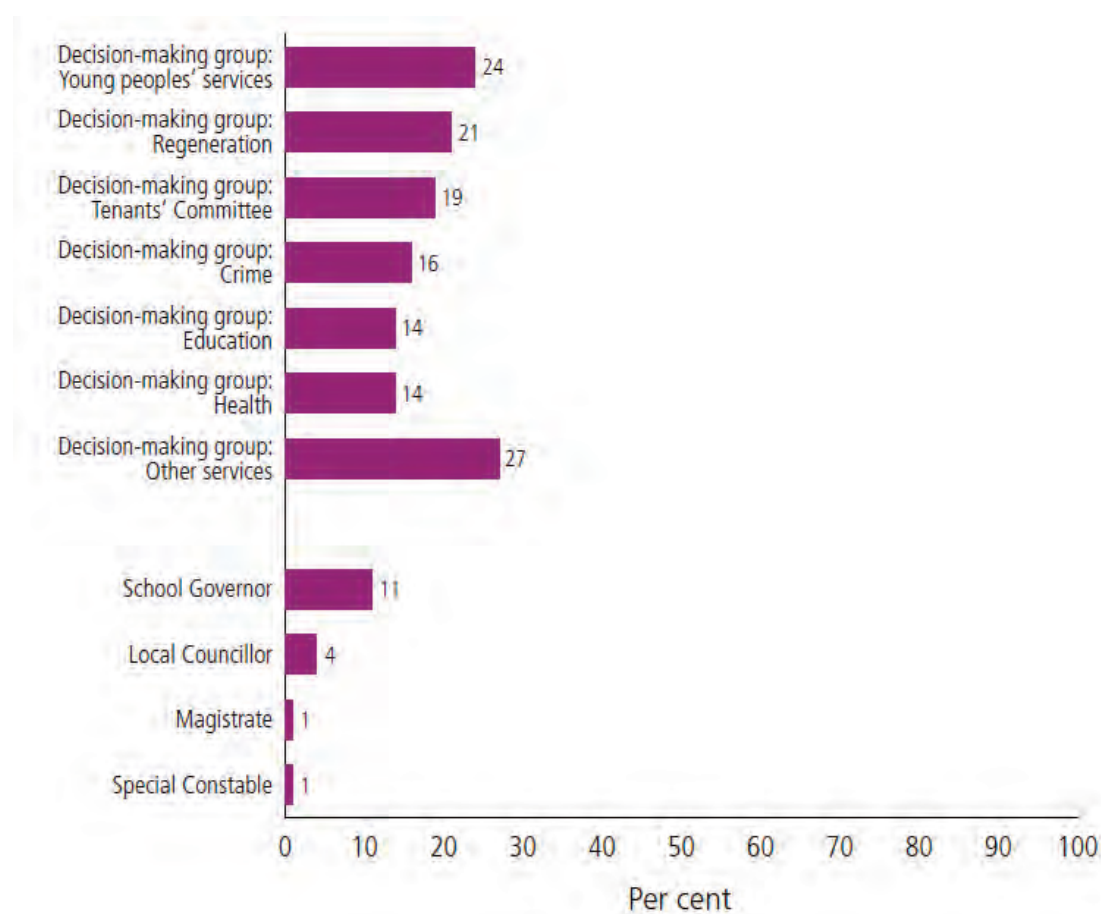
Policy context

The policy context is one which aims to devolve funding and responsibilities to the most local level whilst empowering active citizens. The Community empowerment white paper built on the themes of the earlier local government white paper, *Strong and prosperous communities* (2006) and the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act which provides the legislative framework for its implementation. It included extended duties for local authorities to promote democracy and involve people in decision making.

The Community empowerment white paper introduced a range of measures to support activities such as participatory budgeting and community volunteering projects. One such measure was the Take Part pathfinder programme, a three-year programme of support for active citizenship and learning. CDF has been commissioned to deliver this programme by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG).

This national programme of 18[2] Take Part pathfinders builds on the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme, established in 2004, which piloted approaches to citizenship learning for adults. Take Part incorporates a range of local training, information and support encouraging active citizenship. A national support programme for the Take Part pathfinders is also in place, to share best practice and resources between areas, as well as allowing additional organisations to use the methods and practice built up through the pathfinders.

The pathfinders are run as partnerships between local authorities and other key organisations, such as VCS bodies and educational institutions to:

- build the skills and confidence of local people so that they can pursue civic activism, community leadership and lay governance roles

- support people and organisations in developing an understanding of barriers to participation, and how to overcome those barriers

- raise awareness of routes into lay governance roles, especially those involving local strategic partnership partners, and to support people in their progression through those routes to support improvement against national indicator 3 (civic participation in the local area) and national indicator 4 (people feeling that they can influence decision in their locality).

A national evaluation of the Take Part pathfinder programme is being undertaken at the same time as this research and relevant emerging findings have been shared and incorporated into this report.

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[2] Please note that the Yorkshire and Humber phase 2 pathfinder is comprised of two organisations working in different locations who have shared the funding between them. For the purposes of the evaluation they will be referred to as one pathfinder with two projects. As such there are 18 pathfinders involved in this work, although these are comprised of 19 organisations.

2.   Profiling civic activists

Across the country, thousands of people serve in a wide range of civic roles, which play an essential part in the successful running of civil society (DCLG 2010). The civic roles of councillor, school governor and special constable are relatively well known, formal in nature and could be said to represent the high levels of commitment required on the upper rungs of Arnstein's ladder (Figure 2 below). Although relatively few citizens progress to these roles (see Figure 1, page 10) they were selected as presenting scope to generate significant learning and insight from the experiences of those who undertake them.

The narrow focus of these three roles, when compared to the broad range of all civic activities, must be considered when drawing more general conclusions on civic activism from this dataset.

Figure 2. Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969)
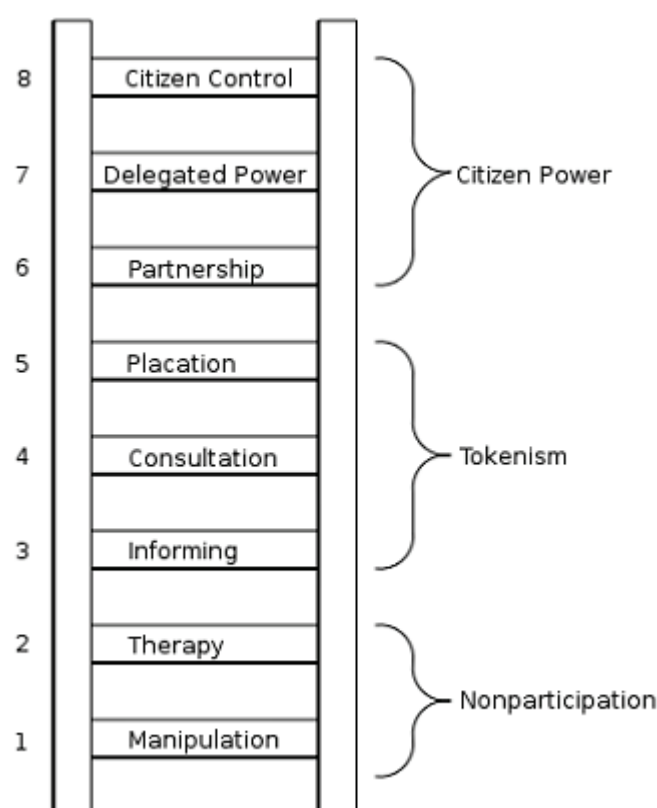
The three roles differ in their purpose and scope, incorporating a range of functions and responsibilities (within each role as well as across them all), and different physical, mental, emotional and intellectual demands. Along with the diversity of experience, aspirations and training needs amongst the individuals consulted, this contributes to a high level of complexity within the data generated. Whilst the

sample is not representative, the study team has sought to filter out trends in the data that might inform a level of segmentation.

Levels of complexity within civic roles

> **School governor:** *'The role of chair of the board of governors can be like having a high-level managerial job. It requires you to provide leadership, manage people at different levels, tackle difficult situations and make unpopular decisions. It is not something you commit to lightly.'*

The role of chair of a board of school governors is seen as more demanding and holding greater responsibility than that of other school governors, requiring a larger commitment of time and a wider range of skills and attributes. This role is also often closely linked to that of the headteacher. For example, chairs might align their retirement from the role with the appointment or embedding of a new headteacher.

> **Chair of a board of school governors**: *'I intend to retire when we have a new headteacher in place next year. I want to see that the school is in safe hands moving forward.'*

Those holding cabinet positions or a portfolio were seen as having greater levels of responsibility than other councillors. They are similarly required to commit more time to the role. This study had a preference for first-term councillors within the sample. These councillors generally acknowledged the need to build skills, confidence and experience over time before taking on a cabinet post.

> **Councillor**: *'As a first term councillor, I'm still trying to get to grips with the requirements of representing my ward and being a backbencher. I don't feel ready to take on more responsibility and don't have any plans for a cabinet role.'*

Overview

Although there is some degree of variance between the individual roles, there are a number of key trends that chime with the *Citizenship survey (2008-09)* and the *Audit of political engagement* (2008) to define general characteristics of civic activists as being:

- Christian (66%)
- white British (83%)
- almost all qualified to at least secondary school level (94%)
- qualified to university level (special constables less so) (67%);
- employed (councillors less so) (65%);
- male (school governors less so) (57%); and
- over 50 years old (57%)

Figure 3. Overall profile characteristics of civic activists in the sample.
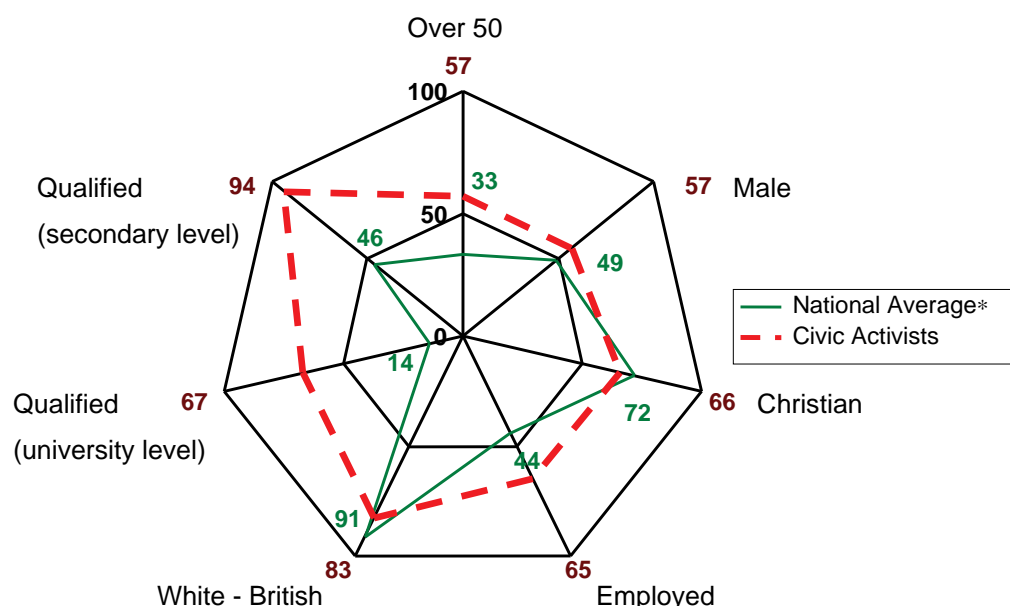
*Source: ONS Census 2001

Councillors and school governors generally take on roles within the communities in which they live (exceptions include councillors getting involved in local politics through a 'safe seat' or based on their interest in a particular local issue). Special constables more commonly fulfil their role in communities other than the one where they live. This is seen to be an advantage by most, who consider that the nature of the role would not be compatible with their ability to lead their 'normal lives' as citizens. Special constables felt that being required to arrest or deal with criminals in their own neighbourhood or community would adversely impact on their quality of life.

There are also a number of school governors who have taken on the role outside of the immediate community in which they live. Many of these were governors at more than one school. These people were recruited to a second role because they were seen to have demonstrated (to local authority officers supporting school governors) that they have appropriate skills or experience that meets the particular needs or circumstances of another school.

The sample did contain a number of school governors who were also councillors (and vice versa). Although some had been nominated or recruited specifically on account of their status as a councillor, there is no obvious pattern to the order in which they undertook these roles. As discussed later in this report, the transfer of

learning between these roles is cited as having been beneficial in fulfilling them effectively.

The findings are broadly consistent with previous research, showing that civic activism tends to be higher in middle age. The Citizenship survey (2008-09) shows that people aged 16 to 25 were less likely than those aged 35 to 74 to have participated in civic activism. Only 7% of 16 to 25 year olds had participated compared with 11% of 35 to 49 year olds, 12% of 50 to 64 year olds and 13% of 65 to 74 year olds.

Our sample was not structured to explore any relationship between ethnicity and civic activism and we are therefore unable to contribute any further to previous research indicating that ethnicity does not have a significant effect on participation in civic activism when other factors are controlled for (Citizenship survey, 2008-09).

Similarly, the self-selecting sampling method does not enable conclusions on the relationship between academic qualifications and civic activism. However, the data did broadly correlate with the previous finding (*DCLG2007* and *National Foundation for Educational Research* 2009) that graduates are more likely to be civic activists than people with lower level qualifications or none (see Figure 4 below). Past research demonstrates that whilst just 30% of the adult population hold a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 and above (i.e. a degree or professional qualification), the figure for councillors was found to be around 50% (*National census of local authority councillors,* 2008). This was significantly higher amongst our sample, with school governors and councillors particularly highly qualified.

Figure 4. Proportion of the sample with a University-level education
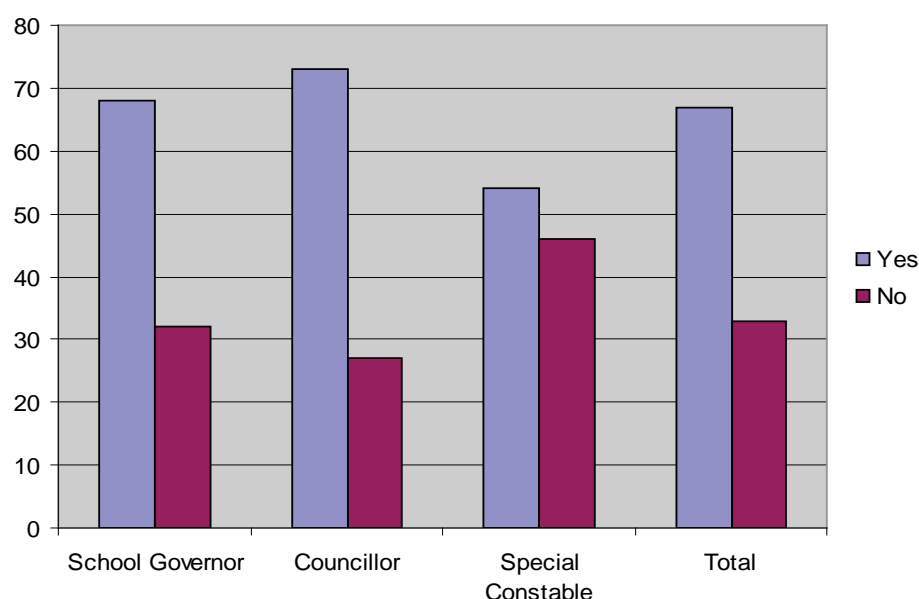
Analysis of the 2006 Census of councillors suggests that councillors are more likely than the general population to hold managerial or executive roles (40% compared to

17%) and less likely to hold administrative, secretarial or sales roles (11% compared to 19%). Although a high proportion of civic activists in the sample were from managerial and professional occupations (Figure 5 over page) the extent to which this can inform conclusions is limited by the sample size and method of selection.

Figure 5. Employment background of civic activists in the sample (%)
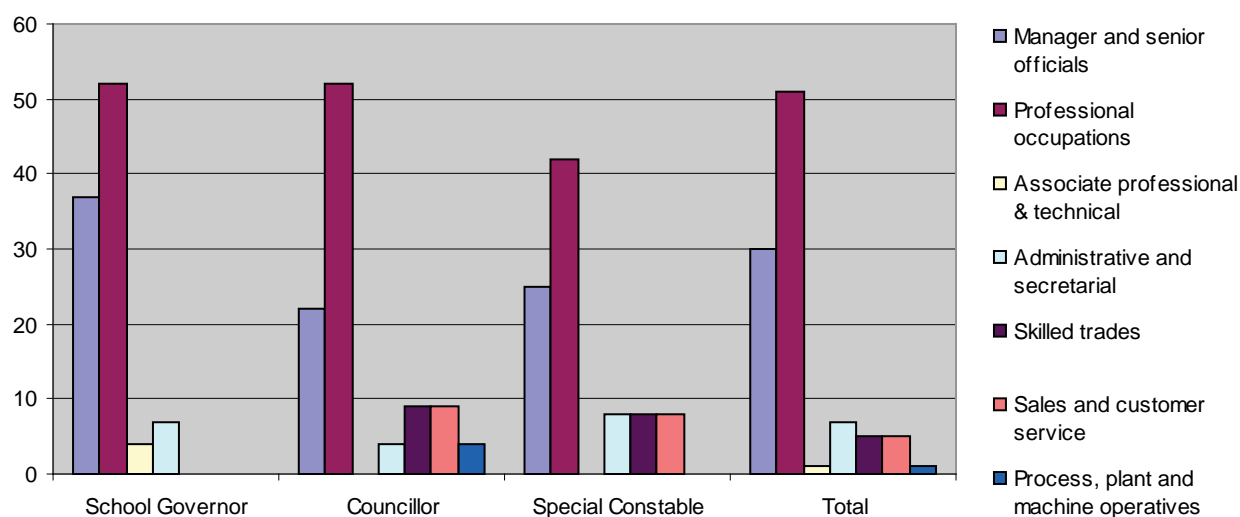
Previous experience

Almost all (over 90%) councillors and school governors had previous experience of civic participation before taking on their current role, while just under half of special constables had previous experience of civic participation.

Councillors' previous civic participation covers membership of the widest range of local voluntary and community groups. When compared with school governors, councillors are significantly more likely to have previous experience of civic participation in the following areas:

- as a member of a tenants' group (41%)
- in another councillor role (40%)
- as a member of a local area regeneration group (37%)
- as a member of a group set up to tackle local crime (29%).

Of those consulted, 37% had current membership of a political party. This figure is greatly skewed by the councillors, 86% of whom were members of political parties compared with only 16% of school governors and 2 out of 31 special constables. The findings do not demonstrate any discernable difference in the characteristics or attitudes of civic activists who are members of a political party when compared to those who are not members. Nor is there any relevant variation in characteristics and behaviours between members of different political parties.

School governors

Over 75% of school governors were aged 25–49, making them typically younger than councillors. The split between male (45%) and female (55%) was fairly equal. Almost half (47%) were in full-time employment, more than double that of councillors, and 21% were retired (half the rate of councillors). The vast majority (89%) were classified as either managers/senior officials or professionals. Nearly 90% were white with nearly 70% qualified to university level.

Figure 6. Age profile of school governors.
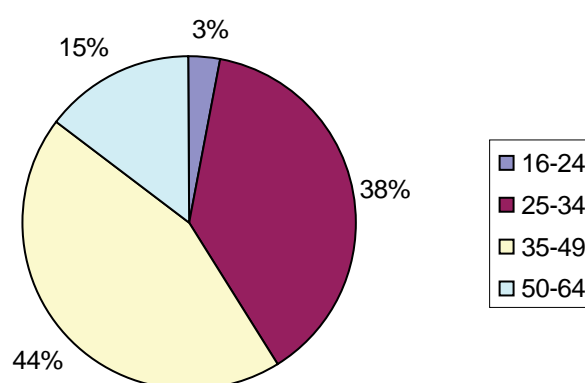
School governors generally include representatives of parents, staff, the community and the local authority. Figures provided by DCSF show that in 2006 there were approximately 350,000 school governors in England, with a further 11% of posts vacant, particularly prevalent in inner city areas (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0085, accessed 17 May 2010).[link now squiffy]

Councillors

The findings provide evidence of councillors generally progressing to their role following a varied and often substantial experience of civic participation. The same data could be interpreted as indicating there is a particular 'typology' of characteristics found in some councillors who actively pursue opportunities to participate in local decision making groups and processes. As well as encouraging their level of civic participation, this could be seen as feeding an existing propensity to get involved in community life.

The majority of councillors (75%) were aged over 50, with 44% retired. 56% are Christian, which is broadly consistent with the other civic roles, although significantly more councillors (19%) described themselves as Muslim than in the other roles. As

with other civic roles, those councillors employed were classified as either managers/senior officials or professionals. Some 73% were educated to university level and two thirds of councillors consulted were male.

Figure 7. Age Profile of councillors
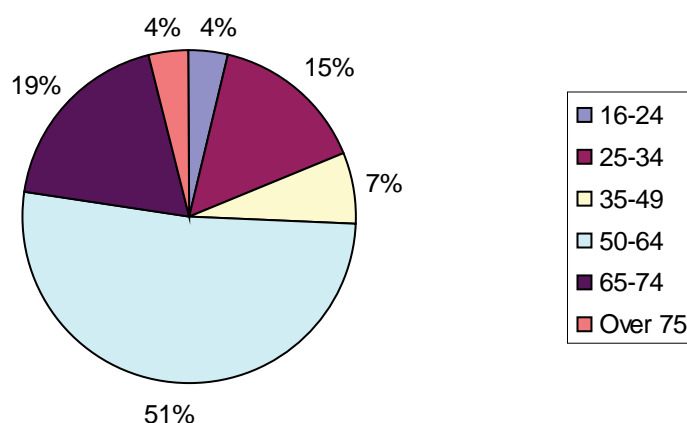
Special constables

Special constables had the 'youngest' demographic profile of the civic roles with the majority (61%) below the age of 35 and 34% below the age of 25. This is related to the physical demands (and tests) associated with the role and the fact it is commonly seen as a route to employment within the police.

Figure 8. Age Profile of special constables
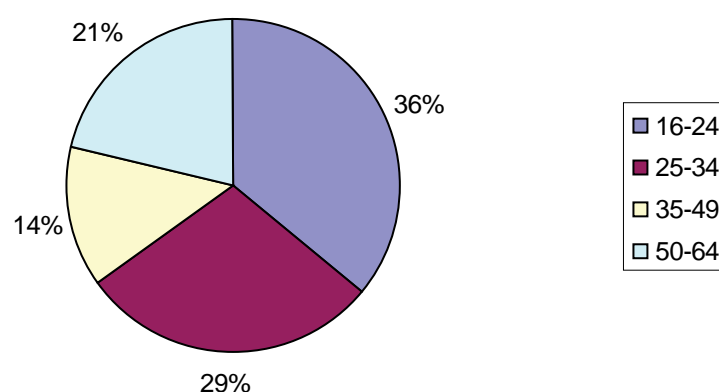
Again the majority were Christian (58%), although the gender split was greater than the other roles with a significantly higher proportion of males (71%). Over half of special constables (53%) were in full-time employment, although unlike the other

roles a significant proportion (20%) were still in education. 71% of special constables had qualifications gained through work, significantly higher than school governors (54%) and councillors (41%).

3. Undertaking a civic role

Motivations and influences

Amongst those engaged in this research, the main motivations for taking on a civic role are to:

- 'give something back' to the community (43%)

- gain influence (in order to improve the school or community) (28%)

- undertake challenges in order to realise personal development (26%)

- use existing expertise and skills to enhance their role (16%).

A quarter of interviewees stated their main motivation in undertaking the role was to 'give something back' to the community. This was most evident amongst school governors, with 28% stating this as being their primary motivation. The most prevalent motivation amongst school governors, however, was the attendance of their child/children at the school (33%).

The study team also found a broad range of more personal motivations for taking up civic roles. These ranged from personal aspiration (such as to become an MP) to a sense of duty (such as resulting from having children in a school).

Some 17% of councillors undertook their role in response to a specific issue in their local community and in order to gain influence within the decision making process. These motivations were couched in both positive terms (e.g. 'to help make X a better place to live') and negative terms (e.g. a wish to fight against something, such as a proposed development or threatened closure of public services or community facilities).

Some councillors saw themselves as responding to an external challenge to 'put up or shut up' (i.e. join the council or accept its decisions), reflecting previous research findings (Grimsley et al. 2005) that negative relationships with authorities, a sense of relative deprivation and/or injustice can also act as catalysts for participation.

Many interviewees had friends or family with experience of civic roles. The degree to which they saw this as influencing them in taking on their role varied. Whilst many cited this as a direct influence on them, others considered having friends or family in civic roles to be a factor of their shared values rather than a direct influence on their personal journey.

> **School governor**: *'Your family instils moral values that have an influence on how you live your life. I suppose this was significant in my becoming a school governor.'*

> **School governor**: *'Both my sisters are school governors, but I don't think this influenced my decision to become one.'*

Research shows that being asked by someone already on a committee is regarded as a powerful way of gaining the involvement of those that may be unsure or lacking in confidence (Dalziel et al. 2007). The findings from civic activist mapping support this assertion, with engagement by invitation (through a variety of routes) highlighted by school governors and councillors as triggering their participation. This generally enables one-to-one contact through which to safely explore any initial concerns or questions and allow potential civic activists to receive a first hand account of what is expected. Anecdotally, it was suggested that such approaches can also flatter and motivate their recipients to get involved.

School governors

A significant number of school governors see their role as a route to becoming better informed and more able to contribute positively towards their children's education. This raises a question of whether their motivation is altruistic, wanting to 'give something back' to the community, or whether it is more focused on the needs of their own family. The question is partly answered by the finding that more than half of those school governors have carried on (or intend to carry on) in the role once their child has left.

> **School governor**: 'I did have children at the school, but that was 20 years ago and I'm still here.'

47% of school governors stated they were related or knew of someone close to them who had undertaken a civic role, with 30% stating that this influenced them in taking on their role.

Councillors

The *National census of local authority councillors* (2006) suggests that being asked to stand is an important motivator to becoming a councillor. This is supported by the findings from this research, which highlight the strong links between being approached and deciding to stand (with political parties often central to this process).

29% of councillors know friends or family who have undertaken civic roles, with one in five acknowledging that this influenced them in taking on the role. Several councillors cited their spouse as a key influence in them becoming involved in local politics and pursuing the role. Two councillors had taken up the role following the death of a spouse who had been a councillor. They felt they knew the requirements of the role and that they could do a good job, with some citing a sense of civic pride as contributing to their motivation.

Some councillors and school governors identified particular links between their professional background and civic role. Several councillors had retired from public service roles, though not generally within the same community that they now represent. Many felt this enabled them to understand and help address community

issues, contributing to their motivation in taking on the role as well as their effectiveness in fulfilling it.

> **Councillor**: 'As a retired local district nurse, I felt I knew the needs and issues of local people and was well placed to make a difference.'

Special constables

Of the three civic roles, special constables were the least likely to have primarily altruistic motives for taking on their civic role. Whilst some did see it as a way of 'giving something back' to the community, 56% took on the role in order to gain experience needed to join the regular police force.

Special constables are more likely than school governors or councillors to know friends or family who have been in civic roles and more readily attributed this as influencing their decision to take on the role. The study team recorded a number of special constables being married to others in the same role. Several also mentioned having a spouse, parent or sibling employed in the regular police force, with that relationship in those instances seen as having a major influence on their taking up the role.

> **Special constable**: 'I have a number of family members in the police force. I knew what I was committing to and that it was something I wanted to do.'

Previous experience

The majority of councillors engaged were building on previous experience of civic participation. Most cited satisfaction obtained from the past experiences as contributing to their motivation to take up and continue in the role. The annex to the Community empowerment white paper evidences positive experiences of participation as reinforcing key motivations to get involved and contributing to growing commitment. The findings support this assertion, which extends to each of the civic roles. Positive experiences, such as personal development or a sense of having made a difference, generally influence people to remain involved or increase their level of participation.

The interviews highlighted a progression path for councillors that begins with less formal roles and builds towards a greater level of individual commitment and responsibility. This journey provides learning and experience whilst building relationships that are seen as important preparation for becoming a councillor.

> **Councillor**: 'I was a school governor before I was a councillor. I became aware that I could make a difference and that I have relevant skills from my professional background. Becoming a councillor enabled me to have more of a positive impact and to further apply those skills.'

Less than half of school governors had previous experience of civic roles. However, they demonstrated the greatest increase in their level of civic participation since taking up the role and the highest level of participation in 'groups making decisions on local health or educational services'.

Table 1. Previous experience of civic participation

Q. Prior to taking on your current role, have you ever been a…..	% answering YES		
	School governors	Councillors	Special. constables
local councillor (local authority, town or parish)	14	**40**	-
member of a group making decisions on local health or education services	**30**	24	7
member of a decision-making group set up to regenerate the local area	16	**37**	4
member of a decision-making group set up to tackle local crime problems	14	**29**	4
member of a tenants' group decision-making committee	14	**41**	4
member of a group making decisions on local services for young people	**35**	**41**	4
member of another group making decisions on services in the local community	**30**	**36**	-
member of any other type of voluntary or community group	**65**	**70**	19

Voluntary time commitment

People generally increase their levels of volunteering and civic participation after taking up a civic role. A number of interviewees commented that they had 'become hooked' on civic activism once they had experienced the difference they could make in their communities.

Some 60% of respondents stated that they have volunteered at least once a week (on average) over the past 12 months. Nearly 85% stated they volunteered once a month or more frequently. Figures 9-12 on the following pages demonstrate the extent of voluntary activity amongst civic activists.

Figure 9. Average time voluntarily committed by **civic activists (all 3 roles)** in the last 12 months

- At least once a week
- Less than once a week but at least once a month
- Less often
- I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months
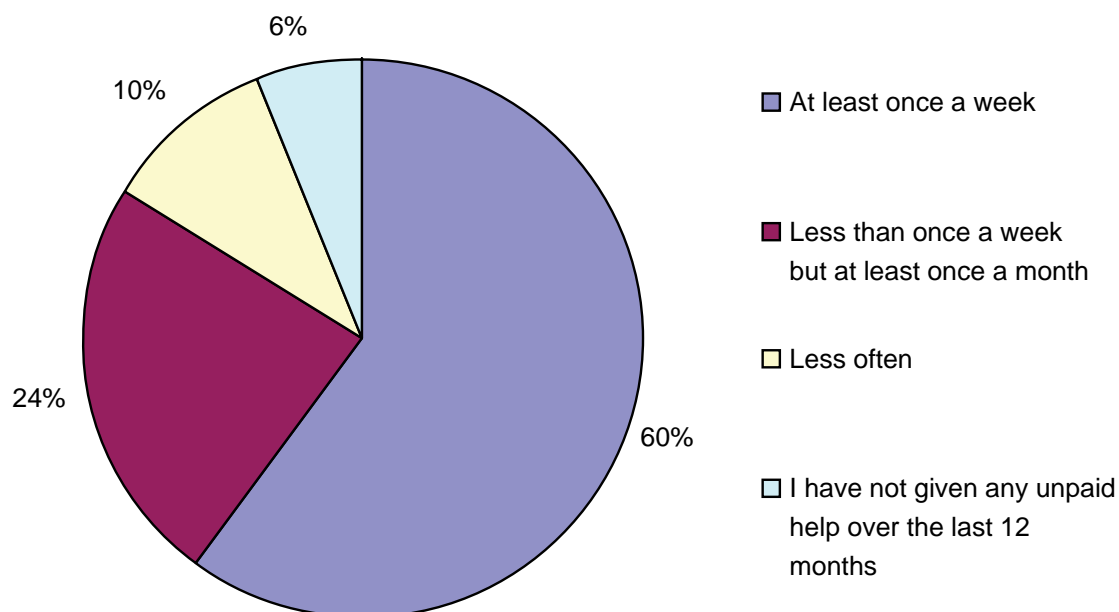
Figure 10. Average time voluntarily committed by **school governors** in the last 12 months

- At least once a week
- Less than once a week but at least once a month
- Less often
- I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months
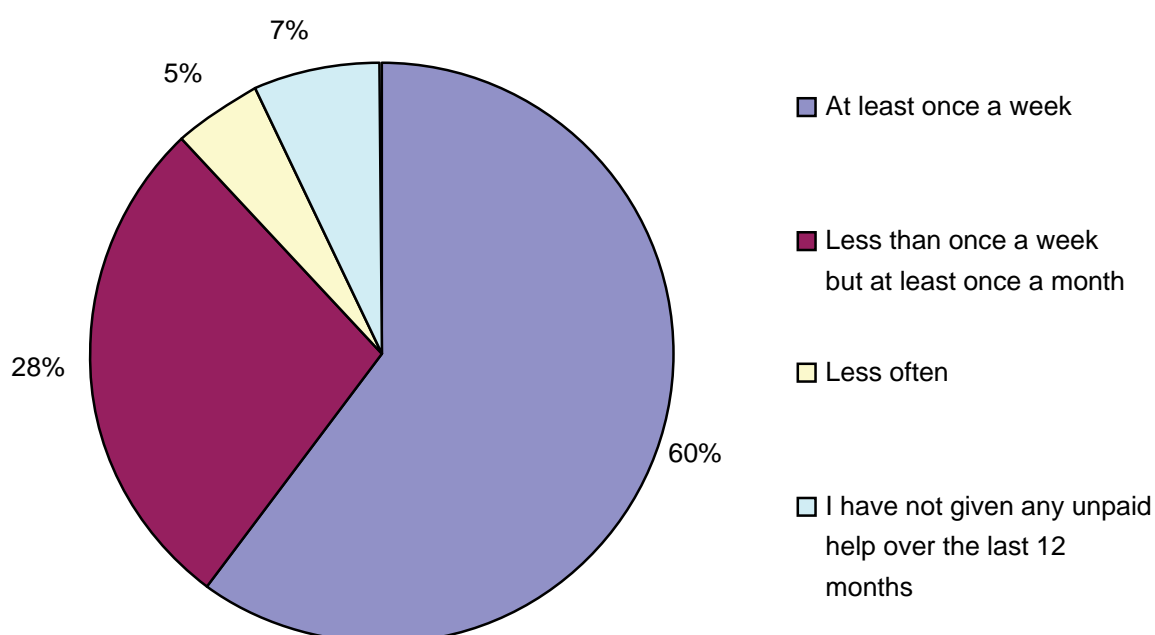
Figure 11. *Average time voluntarily committed by* **councillors** *in the last 12 months*

- At least once a week
- Less than once a week but at least once a month
- Less often
- I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months
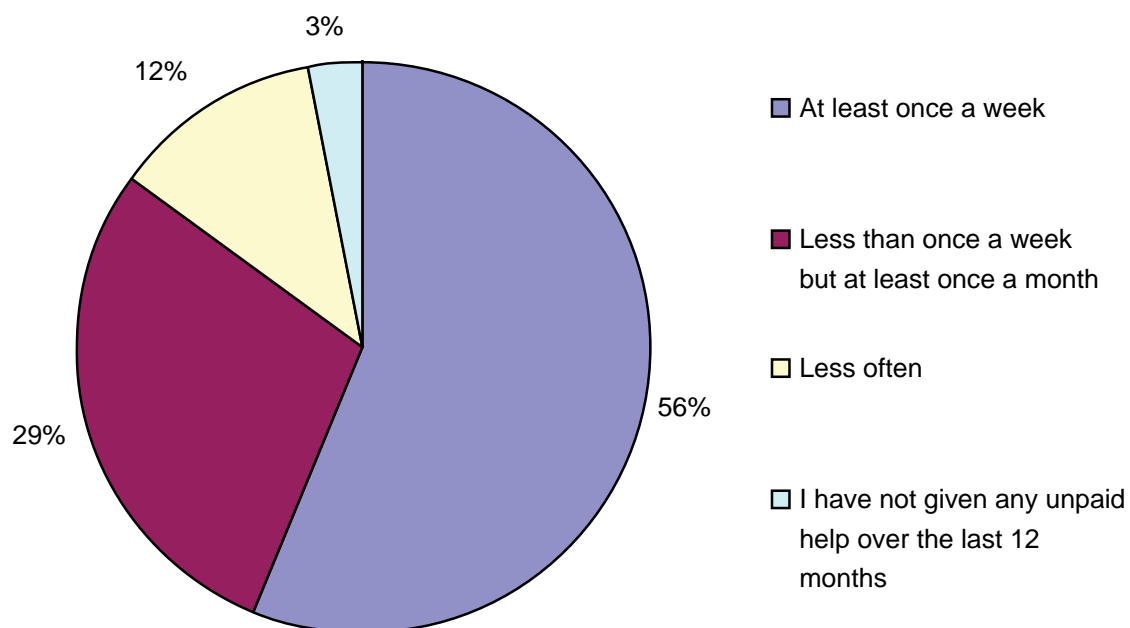
Figure 12. *Average time voluntarily committed by* **special constables** *in the last 12 months*

- At leasat once a week
- Less than once a week but at least once a month
- Less often
- I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months
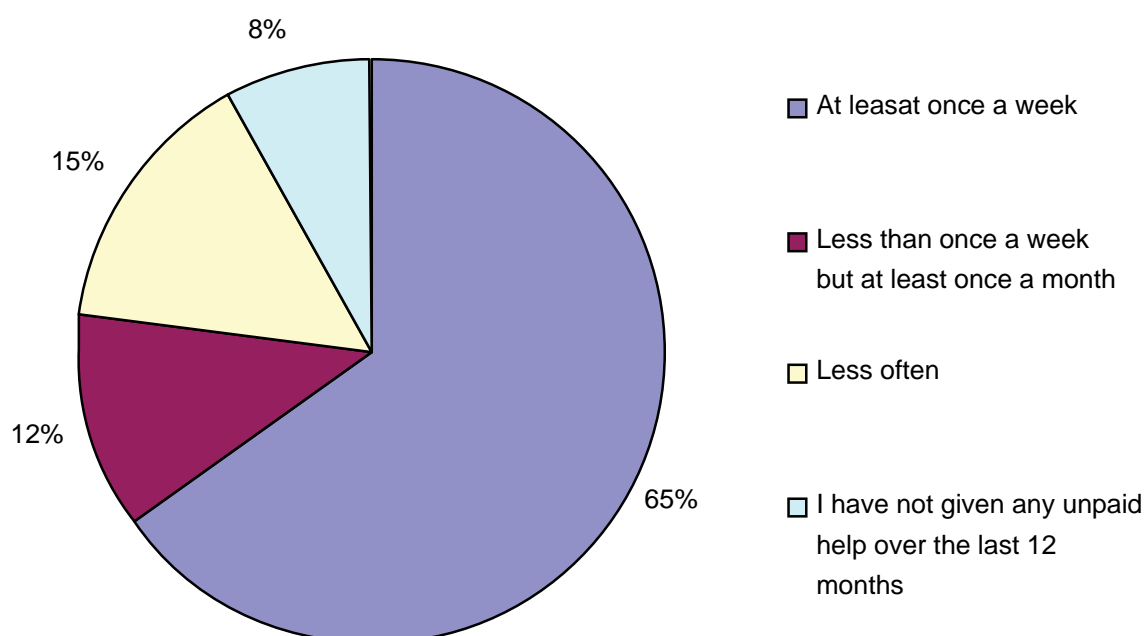
The role with the highest proportion of people volunteering their time at least once a week was special constables (65%). Despite having a greater proportion of 'high-frequency' volunteers, special constables also outnumber the other roles in volunteering less often than once a month or not at all. This could indicate the role of special constable to be more flexible than the others and better able to accommodate people with a either lot or very little time to commit.

Given that councillors have more previous experience of civic participation, it is interesting to note that the volunteer time they committed (including their current civic role) over the past 12 months was broadly consistent with that of school governors.

For many councillors, their level of voluntary activity (outside of their civic role) was seen to have reached a plateau or declined in the past 12 months. In some cases this was attributed to their councillor commitments leaving little extra time or energy with which to pursue other opportunities. The level of volunteering amongst school governors, however, was seen to be on an upward trajectory, increasing more rapidly in line with their awareness of, and appetite for, civic participation.

Recruitment

The interviews identified a wide variety of recruitment routes for school governors and councillors. Special constables were generally recruited in a more uniform manner. The study team sought to identify common themes within the recruitment processes for each role and explore the relative effects of different processes and to link these with the experience of interviewees in taking on and fulfilling that role.

Councillors

Whilst councillors are obviously elected into their role, they are also initially nominated through what often amounts to a recruitment process. Although in some cases councillors play a significant instigating role in their own nomination, most who identified a trigger for their decision to stand in local elections cited this as being an approach or encouragement from within their political party.

School governors

Over a third of school governors were recruited to the role following a direct invitation from someone already involved in the operation of the governing group. This was the most common method of initial engagement and recruitment to the role.

There is a particularly broad range of recruitment routes for school governors, including direct approaches by headteachers, other school governors and officers from the local authority. Some experienced a very formal process (included applying in writing to the local authority or standing for election against other candidates) and

others experiencing no formal process (largely attributed to a lack of suitable candidates for the position).

> **School governor**: *'I was invited by a council officer as a result of being a local councillor for the area served by the school. I was fast-tracked through the recruitment process.'*

> **School governor**: *'I was on the Parent and Teachers' Association and approached by the headteacher to take on the role of chair of governors. The process was very straightforward and I was elected unopposed.'*

School governors were often actively recruited on account of their professional background and experience of working in a specific field, such as accounting, human resources, property management or supporting voluntary groups and funding applications.

Several school governors also felt that they 'represented' a particular ethnic or social group, or a specific neighbourhood, on their board of governors. In each case they felt that their recruitment had been invited or supported because of this as well as on the basis of their personal skills and experience.

Special constables

The recruitment process for special constables has greater emphasis on testing and the possibility of failing to meet the required standard is more tangibly felt. It is seen as challenging and rewarding by those who get through. Special constables are particularly motivated by this challenge and the desire to 'test' themselves.

The vast majority of special constables stated that specific advertising campaigns had influenced their decision to apply. Several considered that their recruitment process is more intensive than that for many paid jobs. Their experience is aligned to a process which is similar to that through which regular police officers are recruited, involving a written application, interview, presentation and testing processes.

> **Special constable**: *'The recruitment process is a natural filter. Barriers are deliberately put up to ensure those who become 'specials' are highly committed and well suited to the role.'*

> **Special constable**: *'I saw an advert on the TV about becoming a special constable and wanted to accept the challenge.'*

Those special constables whose appointment pre-dated current recruitment processes were not retrospectively subjected to it. There was a perception amongst some special constables that the process is becoming more challenging as well as increasingly standardised amongst police forces nationally.

4.   The civic activist experience

The reflective and discursive consultation process undertaken as part of this research enabled interviewees to consider their experience of civic roles in relation to a wide range of factors including their original motivations and aspirations, length of time in the role and previous civic participation. A vast range of experiences were evident, influenced by individual perceptions and attitudes.

This consultation process was reported by many interviewees, without prompting, as being useful in itself and offering an opportunity for self-assessment of why they took on civic roles, what they have experienced as a result and aspirations for their future civic participation.

The majority of civic activists consider their personal characteristics, attitudes, beliefs and circumstances to be a major factor influencing their experience whilst in the role.

Impacts on civic activists

Popay et al (2007), McLean and Andersson (2009) and DCLG (2009a) have produced a wide range of existing research outlining the impacts of civic activism on those involved. These impacts include:

- increased political efficacy

- satisfaction gained from making a contribution and influencing change

- personal development through learning about services and developing new skills

- increased self-esteem from a sense of being listened to, or from a sense of altruism

- a greater understanding and sense of trust in service providers

- greater self-confidence from the experience of attending business meetings, speaking in public, expressing opinions etc

- personal enjoyment and satisfaction from gaining an inside knowledge of a neighbourhood and extending social networks.

More specifically, research into coproduction by people outside paid employment suggests that the resulting increase in social interaction can lead to positive personal health and wellbeing outcomes (Boyle and Harris 2009).

Findings from the consultation resonate with all of the benefits outlined above. The following key themes emerged most strongly:

- having a positive impact on the community (25%)

- increased understanding/awareness of community issues (17%)

- increased confidence (9%)

- greater levels of responsibility (7%)

- access to opportunities for professional development (6%).

Many interviewees stated that their role had given them insight into particular issues of which they were previously unaware. On further exploration, this was found to mainly reflect a positive personal learning/development experience. The few exceptions stated that increased awareness had a negative impact on their outlook by making them more aware of unsavoury elements or activities within communities.

School governors commonly considered the benefits of their role to include increased understanding of the systems through which the school, and the education service more widely, operates. This was seen to help them more effectively contribute to the health of the school.

The loss of leisure time due to additional commitments was strongly cited as a negative impact of civic roles, with many citing less time spent with their family. This was most prevalent in councillors, more than half of whom offered this as a negative impact of their role. Support from family members is seen as significantly contributing to the ability of civic activists to fulfil each of the three roles.

Whilst generally seen as positive, the perception that civic roles are becoming increasingly professional has potential to be off putting for new volunteers or could limit the length of time people stay in the roles.

Councillors cited their previous experience of civic participation as having prepared them, to varying degrees, for the challenges of their role. Whilst many considered becoming a councillor to represent a big 'step up' in terms of complexity and commitment, almost all felt better prepared as a result of their experience.

Quotes relating to the impacts experienced by civic activists

School governors:

'My aspirations have been met and I'm fully absorbed in the role.'

'The role has met my initial expectations and I have thoroughly enjoyed and gained a lot from the experience.'

Councillors:

'I now feel in the position to be able to persuade and influence.'

'I'm now able to influence decisions affecting this ward. They may be little things such as influencing the how wardens or litter pickers spend their time or getting the community involved in the school redevelopment, but they still make a difference.'

'You only get what you put in and I get great personal pride from the role.'

'You learn something about yourself which you can't put a value on.'

Special constables:

'I love being a 'special' – it's the best thing I've ever done. I feel well connected to the city and it is good to be part of the solution and not the problem.'

'I logged over 600 hours last year. I thoroughly enjoy it and recommend the role to people whenever I can.'

'I have started to interact with people in the community a lot more as a result of my role.'

Influence of the host organisation

The experience of being a school governor is considered to be closely related to the type of school and the situation it is in. Being involved in governing a high-performing school, for example, provides a very different experience to one in special measures.

Some interviewees felt that this could be equally applicable to each role. Those involved with more successful organisations generally receive better support and a more rewarding experience. This view was opposed by some, however, who saw more challenging situations as potentially providing greater reward.

Barriers experienced

The vast majority of all interviewees (83%) stated that they did not experience any barriers in taking up their role. However, one in five special constables highlighted barriers or potential barriers. These were predominantly related to recruitment and testing processes and were generally considered appropriate and desirable to maintain high standards within the service.

School governors commonly cited the wide range of issues on their agenda as providing a barrier to their effective participation. People in this role were generally more likely to refer to barriers in the past tense, as having been overcome and as part of a learning process.

School governors:

'It is always a challenge to engage new school governors, with more vacancies than volunteers. New methods have been tried out with limited success. The perception of legal culpability is seen as a barrier by many.'

'The previous headteacher didn't like parents being involved; we had to develop our confidence before standing up to this and refusing to back down.'

'The papers for meetings were often not delivered in good time. It is important that the (school) governors are well informed and prepared in order to fulfil their role.'

> *'We are not given enough time to do everything - there are too many initiatives and it can be hard for school governors to focus on the most important issues.'*

A significant number of interviewees felt that the public perception is of civic activists lacking power and the potential to have an impact. Whether justified or not, this can act as a major barrier to people taking on civic roles.

> ***Councillor****: 'Decision making isn't devolved to parish councils to any great extent and this can put people off getting involved at a very local level, in particular when they perceive the borough council as being ineffective or failing – they think 'what's the point?'.'*

Previous research (Dalziel et al.2007) has identified a perceived lack of confidence and skills as a key barrier to taking up civic roles. This is a key issue which the Take Part programme is intended to address. Predictably, it was not as prevalent amongst our sample (who by definition have overcome any barriers to become civic activists), although initial barriers commonly cited by school governors and councillors included a lack of confidence in public speaking and not knowing how systems and processes work. The formal nature of some recruitment, application and election procedures may also potentially contribute to people feeling they lack the necessary skills to take part.

Female councillors have identified childcare issues and a male dominated environment as providing barriers to them. One identified the role of councillor as not being able to accommodate maternity leave, with pregnancy generally requiring women to relinquish the role.

Whilst bureaucracy and the complexity of the relationships between public services (within the council and including their partners) is a common source of frustration, there is some evidence that this is more pertinent to councillors in their first term and those from larger councils, with those who have been in office for a longer period having learned how to navigate and manipulate the systems more effectively.

> ***School governor****: 'The jargon and bureaucracy can be difficult to get used to at first.'*

> ***Councillor****: 'It can be frustrating when you are unable to get things done quickly. However you develop contacts and ways of having an influence.'*

Financial cost

There appears to be a lack of standardisation in approaches to councillors' expenses. In some instances, councils do not pay travel expenses for training events, which can act as a barrier to taking up training opportunities and one councillor reported feeling disenchanted when refused funding for a training course that he felt would particularly enhance his ability to fulfil the role.

This relates to a broader issue of the financial costs incurred by civic activists as a barrier to involvement. Councillors and school governors can incur costs in terms of travel and childcare expenses, with the lack of reimbursement creating a potentially significant barrier to participation for people on low incomes, people who are unemployed, lone parents and disabled people who are already underrepresented (Ellis 2003).

Insufficient remuneration is also widely cited as a barrier to becoming and remaining a principal tier councillor, but there is a lack of consensus regarding how, and whether, it should be reformed (Councillors Commission 2007). The rate at which local authorities pay their councillors an allowance based on the level of their responsibility varies. In some cases this can be at a similar level to a local authority officer, raising the question of whether such payments affect motivations or experience of the role, or whether the role continues to be 'voluntary'. In other cases remuneration is not considered sufficient to attract the calibre of councillor required.

The high cost of travel for local councillors in very rural parishes is also considered a potential problem (Haberis and Prendergrast 2007), although not one that arose from this research. In fact, comparing data derived from urban and rural areas did not reveal any discernable differences in relation to the experience and attitudes of civic activists.

Time commitment

The time required to fulfil their current role was seen by many as a barrier to their taking part in additional civic activities. This was most keenly felt by those councillors in employment and special constables, resonating with a range of evidence in the annex of the community empowerment white paper that highlights that perceptions of volunteering as time-intensive acts to inhibit people (especially young people) from getting involved.

These findings are supported by the evidence annex of the community empowerment white paper which highlights time-related barriers were important reasons for not volunteering. Factors such as work commitments (59%), having other things to do during spare time (32%), and having to look after children or home (31%) were more commonly cited than reasons such as having not heard about opportunities to help (15%), having never thought about volunteering (9%), or having an illness or disability (8%).

Party political membership was seen by some to provide essential support networks that help councillors fulfil their role. Others, however, were frustrated at the influence this had over their voting or public stance on certain issues, feeling resentful at having to take a party political stance against what they consider to be the best approach for their constituents. Being in opposition was also seen as emasculating by some councillors.

Comments from councillors on barriers they have experienced:

'I would have been in a better position to help communities if we weren't in opposition. The current administration provides a barrier to achieving positive results for my constituents.'

'The role has mostly met my expectations, but has also been frustrating at times, involving extra work and more time than envisaged.'

'It takes time to make a difference but it is possible to deliver some tangible improvements that have real benefit and value for the community.'

'Whilst you always want to achieve more, it is important to be realistic about what you can do'.

When asked how long they intend to remain in their current role, 35% school governors, 49% councillors, and 37% special constables have no definite plans to step down and are happy to continue subject to their continued enthusiasm and ability to effectively fulfil the role.

However, a small percentage of school governors planned to step down once their own children had finished at the school, and a similar proportion of special constables planned to move into the regular force in the future. As a result it is difficult to ascertain the longevity associated with each role. The role with the highest response stating they wanted to continue (indicating they had no intention of stepping down) were councillors.

Whilst more than half of special constables undertook their role with an intention to pursue a career in the police, less than one in five now plan to move into the regular police force in the future. Most also wanted to remain special constables for the foreseeable future, indicating that their experience in the role is fulfilling their aspirations (making a difference and being challenged) and reducing their motivation to become a full time police officer.

Over half of interviewees (56%) were open to taking on new civic roles in the future, with some already occupying multiple roles. This was most prevalent amongst school governors (with 58% receptive to other roles), closely followed by councillors (57%) and special constables (52%).

A small but significant proportion of councillors aspired to become MPs at some point in the future. This reflects a level of ambition within those who take on this civic role to progress their levels of influence and responsibility further.

5. Training and personal development

Personal development makes a key contribution to the positive experience of civic participation. The development of new skills and attributes is seen as the major personal benefit derived by many civic activists.

The Take Part programme acknowledges personal learning and development as a key element of civic participation. It is both an investment in and an outcome from civic activism, enabling people to be effective within a civic role and contributing to their experience in a positive way.

Approaches to training differ for each of the three roles and, to a lesser extent, in each of the 19 sample areas. Whilst there is a great deal of training, much of which is targeted and well established, there appears to be little standardisation of this across different local authority areas. This is reflected in the varied effectiveness and impact of training experienced by civic activists.

The large majority of civic activists (56% of school governors, 75% of councillors, and 74% of special constables) had undertaken some form of training associated with their role. Some 9% of interviewees (around two thirds of whom were school governors) felt that more training should be available to enable them to effectively fulfil their role.

Whilst acknowledging the need for continuous development, training at the point of entry is considered particularly valuable for each of the civic roles. This can help identify and overcome initial barriers and particularly helps to build confidence. Interviewees felt the rate of progression (in terms of increasing time commitment and responsibilities) to be significant, with support required to ensure they are comfortable with this and not left feeling too overawed or out of their depth. In this context a high proportion of interviewees from each role emphasised the potential value of mentoring prior to undertaking a civic role.

Interviewees most commonly engaged with training through a menu-based programme from which they would choose to attend pre-defined events or course related to specific elements of the role. This is usually specific to their role and undertaken in a group with others in the same role.

This setting was seen as adding value by creating informal opportunities for interaction with peers and helping create and sustain social networks as well as those related to the role. Some interviewees felt it is difficult to pitch group training sessions at the right level and to accommodate a wide range of individual learning styles.

The capacity to support a continuous personal development (CPD) approach for civic activists varies across different areas and different roles, with some support

services for councillors and school governors seen to touch on this without it becoming widely established as a way of working.

The menu-based approach was seen by many as wholly appropriate to meet their needs. A number of interviewees across each role expressed a preference for a more flexible approach, however, in order to enable a more personal consideration of strengths, weaknesses and aspirations to inform appropriate training. These 'active seekers' of training were often more focused on their personal development as a central element embedded in their aspirations and experience of the role.

> **School governor**: *'I have taken up training related to community cohesion and ethnicity and diversity, although I have often seen interesting training that isn't available in the North of England.'*

> **Councillor**: *'Training and conferences often enable valuable time for networking and sharing of experiences.'*

> **Special constable**: *'I have taken bits of training when available, but am also learning from doing.'*

Mentoring is seen as very positive where it does exist. Interviewees were not generally aware of mentoring opportunities but felt they could provide significant benefits, particularly in advance of taking up a civic role. The growing prevalence of peer support and mentoring, particularly in Take Part programmes, indicates the potential for civic activists to increase their level of support to each other in identifying and addressing training and development needs.

School governors

A structured approach to training for school governors in some areas has involved development of individual training plans. These were focused primarily on identifying gaps in their existing skills in relation to the requirements of their specific role (such as chairmanship or accounting). Those who had been through a more personalised approach to training saw it as beneficial to their experience of the role.

Training delivered locally with, and bespoke to, a single board of governors was thought to be particularly effective, adding value by building shared understanding and closer working relationships.

The majority of school governors feel that they have sufficient skills and knowledge (or access to support) to adequately fulfil their role. Despite this indicating a lower demand for training, several school governors who chair their board of governors indicated that they had been required to develop a wide range of new skills in a very short space of time in order to fulfil the role.

> **School governor**: *'As chairman I feel I should be doing more to develop the other governors.'*

Experience of being a councillor is seen as helping people to be more effective in the role of school governor, giving them a valuable insight into processes, systems and networks and an ability to influence other services for the benefit of the school.

Councillors

The training provided for councillors through their councils has received mixed reviews. The majority have considered this to be rather 'ad-hoc' and often lacking in relevance or impact. Some councillors, notably individuals from higher level professional backgrounds, were extremely critical of the quality of some training.

> **Councillor**: 'I am highly critical of most training. Quite often it is complete rubbish. There needs to be more of an emphasis on CPD rather than training.'

Unlike school governors, the presence of fellow councillors at training events was not always thought of as positive with political rivalry sometimes contributing a level of distraction from the subject matter.

In some councils the expenses policy does not cover travel costs related to training events. This was highlighted as a barrier to participation by a few and was seen to indicate a low value placed on the knowledge, skills and personal development of councillors in those local authorities.

Special constables

Two special constables reported the fact that they were not allowed to undertake training whilst 'on duty'. Having to make additional time to undertake training was seen as a barrier by these individuals given their other commitments.

Unofficial mentoring is most common amongst special constables. This is generally provided by colleagues in a non-structured manner and involves accompanying them on routine tasks and taking time to explain and reflect in order to pass on experience and build confidence. This is generally seen as providing special constables with a flexible and supportive induction that progresses them at an appropriate rate towards self-reliance in situations that can often be extremely challenging. Only one special constable reported feeling there was a lack of support from colleagues and that they had faced situations and undertaken tasks for which they did not feel adequately prepared.

Peer support is also seen as particularly strong amongst special constables (most of whom cite it as the main source of support towards fulfilling their role) and is also mentioned by a smaller proportion of councillors. This would appear to be less of a factor in the experience of school governors, who generally have more limited networks and less involvement with others in the same role.

6. Links to the Take Part programme

Specific exploration of the Take Part programme was not the primary focus of this research. Whilst Take Part pathfinders have engaged with a wide range of beneficiaries, many have focused on the lower levels of civic behaviour, often seeking to engage and empower people into their first experience of civic participation or consultation. As such, the sample for this research does not enable us to draw any conclusions on the programme.

Awareness of Take Part was very low across all three civic roles, with fewer than one in five interviewees demonstrating any awareness of the programme. Awareness of local or national Take Part resources was significantly lower.

A total of 16 interviewees had engaged with their local Take Part pathfinder programme. This included eight councillors, seven school governors and one special constable. These people were broadly representative of the wider sample in terms of demographic profile, employment status, level of qualifications, length of time in their role and previous experience of civic participation.

Those who had engaged with Take Part displayed similar experiences and approaches to training and development as the rest of the sample. Only two of the 16 Take Part participants stated having received useful (non-Take Part) training to help prepare them for their role. Several were scathing about the quality of training provided through their council (and one in relation to IDeA) and a small number indicated an appetite for further training linked to accreditation, although they were not aware of exactly what or where this might be available.

Those who had participated in Take Part activities did, however, have a greater awareness of the empowerment agenda, placed a higher value on the importance of people feeling they belong to their neighbourhood and feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area. They also placed greater relative importance on people from different backgrounds getting on well together in their area, but were slightly less likely to feel that they belong to their own neighbourhoods (with several citing strong connections to broader communities of geography and interest).

Those civic activists who had been involved in local Take Part pathfinder activities consider this to have reinvigorated their approach and made them more effective in the role. All were extremely positive about their experience, the quality of activities in which they participated and the need for such a programme to promote and enable civic participation. As such, there may be scope for these people to act as more official advocates for Take Part as well as promoting its benefits through their immediate networks.

> ***Councillor***: *'Take Part courses helped me learn how to take a step back and break down issues in order to address them one step at a time.'*

> *Councillor*: *'Having seen people gain confidence through the course, I am sure that this type of activity encourages people from the street to aspire to get involved in their community.'*

The case studies and quotes integrated in this section provide some insight into the personal nature of the experiences, impacts and barriers overcome through Take Part activities.

Take Part case study (school governor)

School governor X wanted to have more involvement in her child's education, make a real change in the school and to facilitate better support to children with special needs. Underwhelmed by the standard of training she received upon becoming a school governor, she felt disempowered and unable to realise her aim or overcome barriers to her effective engagement and contribution in the role.

She sought further training in order to gain confidence and improve her skills and approach as a school governor. Through the council she became aware of the local Take Part programme and decided to sign up for the *Women's Voice* course. As a result she now feels more empowered, better able to contribute and keen to continue her personal development and increase her level of input in the role. The course helped her to realise that she does not have to wait for others to put things into motion and she now feels more confident in challenging perceptions, convention and authority whilst retaining a balanced perspective. She has since come to better understand how the education system works, using this knowledge for the benefit of her daughter and other local children.

Once it was explained to them, those who were not aware of the Take Part programme generally saw value in what it is trying to achieve and thought it important to help recruit well prepared civic activists. However, many questioned whether Take Part pathfinders have sufficient profile to be effective.

> *School governor*: *'There is always a struggle to recruit school governors, particularly if you want them to reflect an appropriate cross section of the community. People demonstrate a sense of fear and feel that they do not have enough to contribute. Any support to help overcome that is welcome.'*

Consultation highlighted the appetite for, and perceived effectiveness of, mentoring and learning opportunities for civic activists. A high proportion of interviewees emphasised the potential value of mentoring prior to taking up a civic role. Take Part pathfinders provide such opportunities, although the level of awareness amongst interviewees has limited the likelihood of them accessing or contributing to these.

Take Part case study (school governor)

School governor Y had given a great deal of personal and professional time to supporting the parent-teacher association for the school before she was asked to join the board of governors by the headteacher.

At first she found the role far more difficult than she had anticipated, struggling with the educational jargon and an assumed knowledge of the teaching and the education system. The role was taking far more of her time than she had anticipated and she felt unprepared and unable to continue in the role.

She approached her local Take Part pathfinder for some advice and was provided with mentoring, peer support and guidance that built her confidence and refined her approach to the extent she now feels more effective and positive in the role and plans to continue as such.

A small number of interviewees felt that the focus of local Take Part programmes on a specifically defined geography might be a barrier to engaging people in metropolitan areas. A potential civic activist might be more likely to become aware of the programme whilst at work or travelling between areas than near where they live.

> **Councillor**: 'My ward is my family, but the city is my family too. The Take Part programme needs to have more consistency and be on more of a big picture level…in order to maximise longer term benefits.'

As illustrated by the case studies, school governors appear to have had particularly positive experiences of Take Part activities, which are cited as enabling them to overcome barriers that may have been otherwise insurmountable. This is particularly interesting given the degree to which the role of school governor is seen to increase the appetite for civic participation and open avenues to undertaking new civic roles.

Take Part case study (school governor)

Participant Z relocated seven years ago and sought to continue her previous level of activity in the local voluntary and community sector. Having encountered some challenges in negotiating with the local authority whilst doing so, she enrolled with the local Take Part programme in order to learn new skills and more effectively liaise with public sector organisations.

The local Take Part programme contributed significantly to improving her confidence and raising aspirations to move into a civic role. It enabled her to

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develop new and practical approaches and techniques; in particular how to exert influence and ask questions in a manner that avoids conflict. This had an empowering effect as well and has provided mechanisms to cope with some of the stress and frustration experienced in a civic role.

The training was described as enjoyable and informative and the participant would not hesitate to recommend it to others wishing to build their confidence, skills and knowledge in order to move into civic roles.

Only one person consulted had any meaningful understanding or experience of Connecting Communities programmes (in the Portsmouth area).

7.   Civic activists and the empowerment agenda

The majority of civic activists across all three roles displayed very little awareness or understanding of the Community empowerment white paper and related policy initiatives.

Less than half (46%) of respondents were aware of the empowerment agenda. 29% stated they were vaguely familiar with the agenda and only 17% showed a clear understanding of what it means. Almost half of those who did demonstrate awareness and understanding attributed this to their professional background rather than through their training or involvement in a civic role.

When asked to comment on the empowerment agenda (usually after it was explained to them), almost all felt that it was worthwhile in principle. The importance attributed to empowerment by civic activists is therefore far higher than their overt awareness of the agenda and the way in which it is communicated.

> *Comments from councillors on the empowerment agenda:*
>
> *'Local democracy is a good idea, but we need to ensure this does not generate local vigilantes'*
>
> *'It is a good idea to get people more involved. It benefits them and us'*
>
> *'The option to take part should always be there. It is important to engage and inform people well, but different levels of awareness and enthusiasm amongst residents make it difficult'*

Whilst there is broad acknowledgement of the value of empowering communities to play a more active role, there is limited appreciation across the civic roles of how they (individually or collectively) contribute to, or are affected by, this agenda.

Those who did have an appreciation of the empowerment agenda were asked about their perception of awareness of it amongst their peers. School governors and special constables thought this unlikely to be high. Councillors also cited a lack of understanding amongst their peers, with several viewing their resultant lack of buy-in as providing a significant obstacle to realising empowerment objectives and outcomes in their local authority areas.

Councillors tend to be more aware of the empowerment agenda (63%), which is perhaps understandable given their role and the guidance that has been specifically aimed at them in relation to it. However, with the exception of those councillors who had held a relevant portfolio, there was very limited councillor awareness of the Community empowerment white paper.

'Engaging the community is challenging and you need to use different mechanisms. Ward surgeries don't always work well but some councillors tend to persist with what they know and are comfortable with.'

Almost half of school governors had some awareness of the agenda, but only three special constables had any real awareness. This may reflect the kind of backgrounds from which school governors are recruited, as their role would appear no more inherently linked to the empowerment agenda than that of special constable.

Attitudes to empowerment

A very small proportion of interviewees did not see value in local communities accessing and participating in decisions that affect their local area.

The language and terminology used can also be seen as a barrier to engaging with the agenda. The terms 'civic activist' and 'empowerment' would require definition for most and acted as a barrier. Engaging interviewees on the same issues, but in terms of 'getting people involved in their communities' generated a more positive response, in many cases inciting real enthusiasm and impassioned support for the principles of community empowerment.

Those in the sample did not generally think of themselves as civic activists and mostly defined themselves by their specific roles. Whilst they saw a clear link between their role and community benefit, they did not necessarily consider themselves 'empowered' to take on or fulfil the role (although they clearly were). Improved skills and confidence were regularly mentioned when reflecting on personal experiences, but many considered their capacity for this to be somehow inherent, something that they had and which was grown, 'triggered' or catalysed by certain circumstances. Although they may not have acknowledged it, the catalyst was the result of empowerment, whether by specific advice, support, training or simply experience gained over time.

Being a councillor or school governor is generally seen to have increased the connection between people and their communities and contributed to their scoring against questions in section F of the consultation template (annex 2).

Special constables are more cynical about empowerment, the need for people to get on well together, for people to feel part of their neighbourhood and to influence local decision making. A small number of councillors also indicated that their civic role made them view their communities in a less positive light.

As illustrated in figure 13 overleaf, all but one person consulted considered it important that people feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood. Over 90% of civic activists placed some degree of importance on a sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood (figure 14), with only one councillor again disagreeing. Interviewees commonly linked a 'sense of belonging' with also feeling 'safe and

secure' in their neighbourhood and as a fundamental requirement for community cohesion.

Comments from councillors on the importance of a sense of belonging:
'There is not much cohesion in the neighbourhood. The more people you meet the more you become aware of this.'

'The role of councillor makes me feel like I need to be seen to be doing more, although I have always had a sense of responsibility and commitment to my local neighbourhood.'

'I felt a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood a long time before becoming a councillor.'

A number of respondents also suggested that a feeling of belonging could increase a resident's desire to engage in civic participation. This line of discussion revealed the true extent to which civic activists understand and engage with the empowerment agenda. This painted a picture of greater commitment to this agenda than was indicated through their earlier responses to more direct questioning. This may be due to the terminology used (i.e. 'empowerment') or the fact that they had not previously considered the issue in any detail and were only just beginning to process their thoughts on it during the interview.

Figure 13. How important is it for people to feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood?
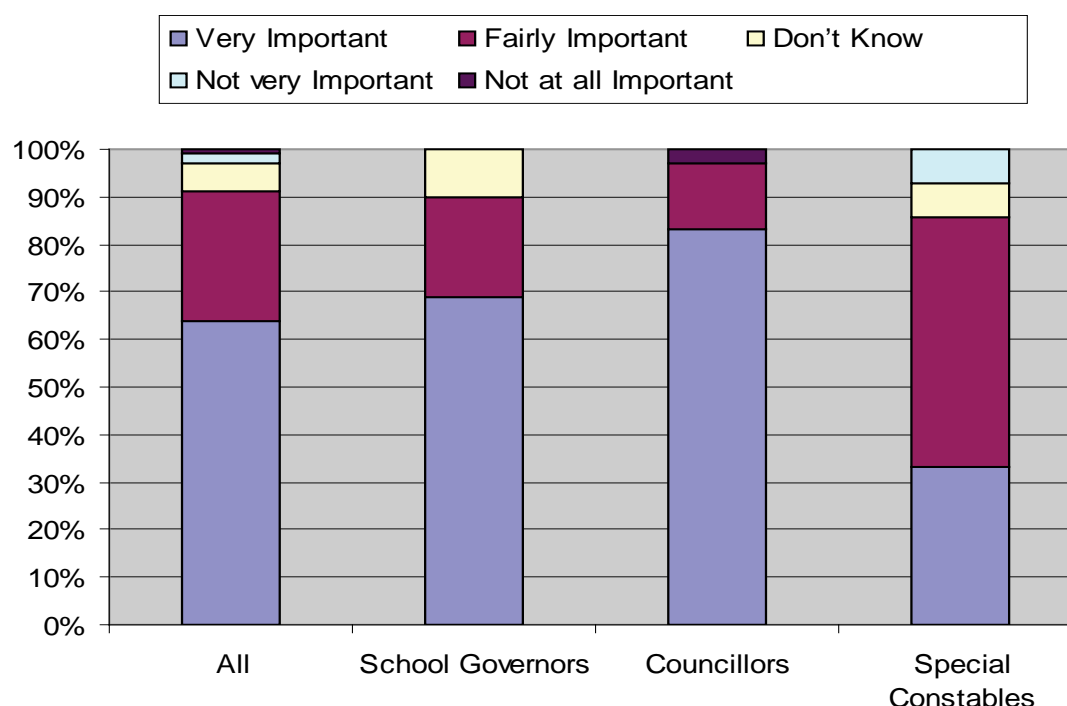
Figure 14. How important is it for people to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local community?
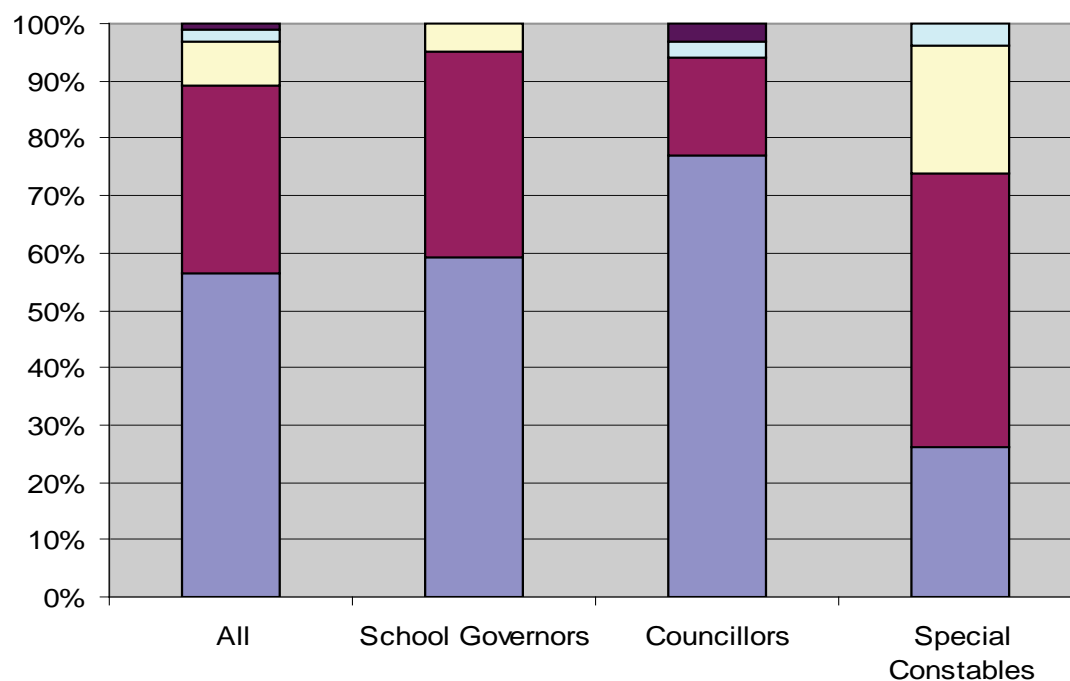
Figure 15. How important is it for people from different backgrounds to get on well with each other in the local area?
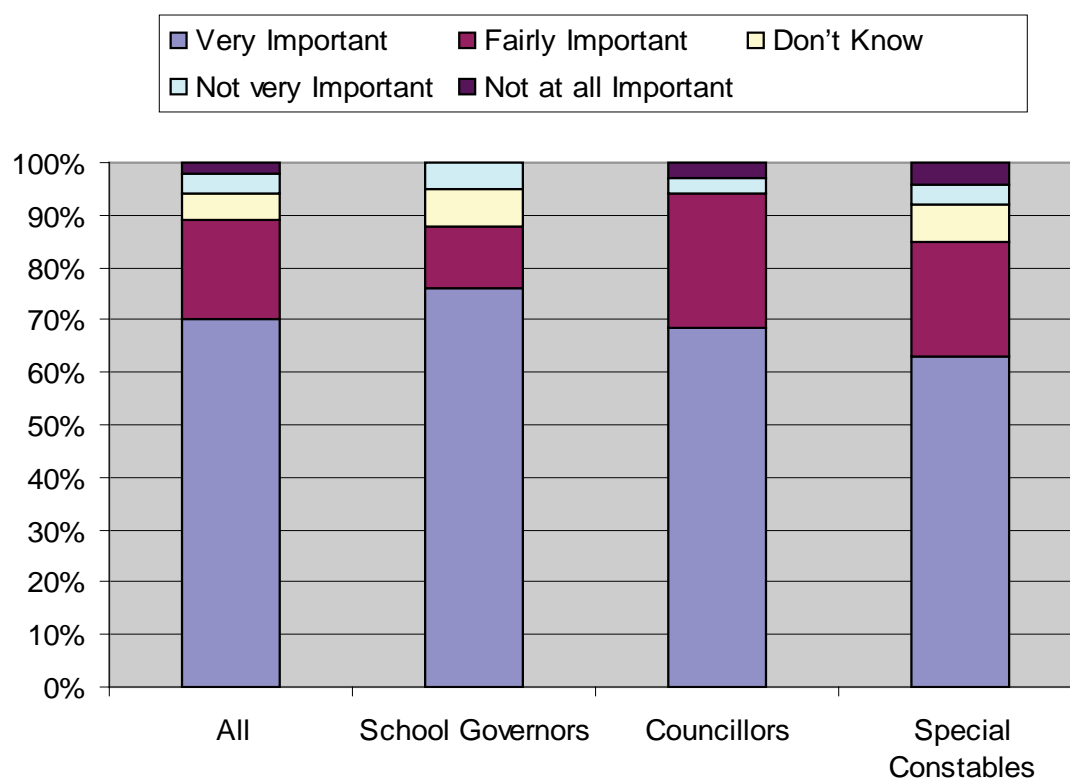
Figure 16. How important is it for people to feel satisfied with their local area as a place to live?
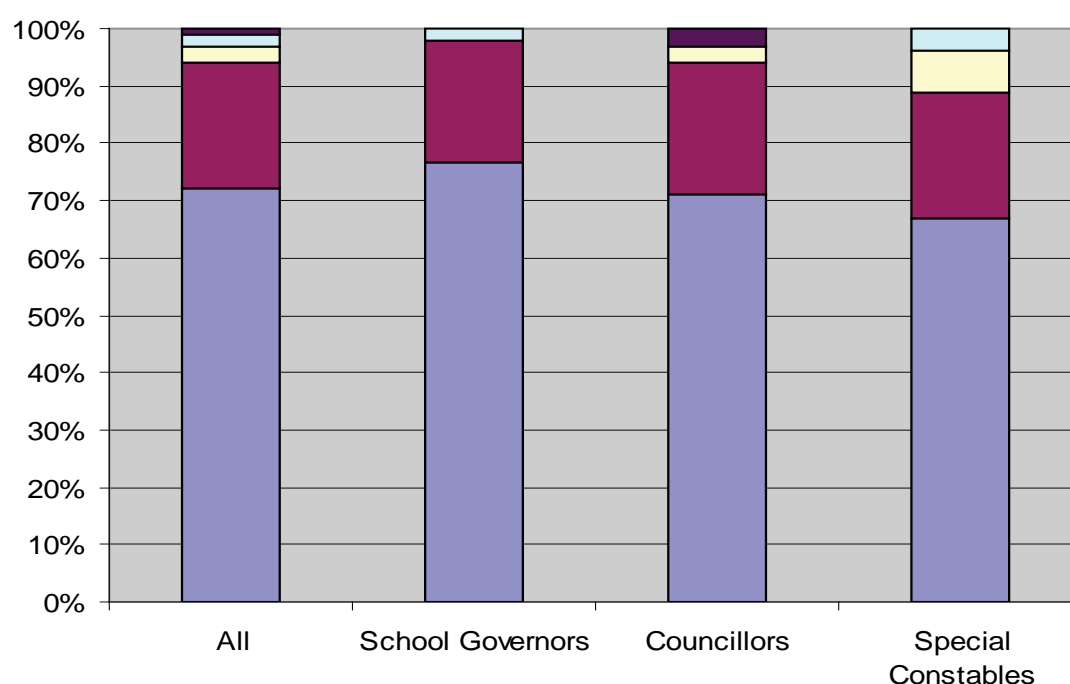
89% of civic activists placed some degree of importance on people's involvement in local decision making, with nearly 80% of councillors suggesting it is 'very important'.

Figure 15 (previous page) shows how important civic activists perceive it to be that people from different backgrounds get on well with each other. Nearly 90% placed some degree of importance on this. Many respondents highlighted the importance of positive experiences (of people from different backgrounds working and living together) being communicated effectively in order to negate an often negative picture painted by the media. Councillors also highlighted the impact that this has on social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Councillors in racially diverse areas or areas with a high proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents saw this as particularly important and acknowledged the challenges they face in representing people from different backgrounds to themselves as an area where support is required.

Figure 16 (previous page) illustrates that nearly 95% of respondents stated that feeling satisfied with your local area as a place to live had some degree of importance, with at least two thirds of respondents from across the civic roles stating it was 'very important'.

Influence of civic activism on how people feel about their local area

Table 2. How strongly do you feel part of your neighbourhood?					
Role	Very strongly	Fairly strongly	Don't know	Not very strongly	Not at all strongly
All	**39**	35	10	14	2
School governors	**45**	31	12	12	0
Councillors	**51**	31	6	11	0
Special constables	15	**44**	11	**22**	7
To what extent do you think that being in your role has affected your answer above?					
Role	Very strongly	Fairly strongly	Don't know	Not very strongly	Not at all strongly
All	16	**35**	2	15	**32**
School governors	14	36	2	12	36
Councillors	20	**43**	0	20	17
Special constables	15	22	4	15	**44**

From table 2 it can be seen that councillors generally had a very strong connection with their local neighbourhood (83%). 63% of councillors suggesting that their view on this had been affected by their role. It is worth noting that scores of 65-75% are seen as representing a reasonable performance in most local authority areas[3].

Just over 16% of respondents felt they were 'not very strongly' or 'not at all strongly' a part of their immediate neighbourhood. There is some (limited) cross-over between these people and those who stated their civic role was not located in their own local neighbourhood. Several of these interviewees felt greater attachment to communities of interest or places that were wider than their immediate neighbourhood.

Table 2 illustrates that 75% of interviewees feel that their civic role has influenced them 'very strongly' or 'fairly strongly' in relation to how they feel about where they live.

> **Councillor**: *'I have family roots in the area and returned to live here 25 years ago. Being a councillor has helped me to feel part of the community, to be included and make a positive contribution.'*

A number of interviewees suggested their role had increased their levels of interaction within their local community and boosted their sense of responsibility

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[3] Results for National Indicator 2 published from Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009

and civic pride. Those who did not see their role as impacting on their answer here frequently attributed this to their clearly separating their civic role from their 'normal' citizenship.

Table 3. Do you agree that you can influence decisions in your local area?					
Role	Definitely agree	Tend to agree	Don't know	Tend to disagree	Definitely disagree
All	**31**	**40**	7	17	5
School governors	**45**	29	10	14	2
Councillors	29	**60**	0	9	3
Special constables	11	33	11	**33**	11
To what extent do you think that being in your role has affected your answer above?					
Role	Very strongly	Fairly strongly	Don't know	Not very strongly	Not at all strongly
All	16	**37**	4	21	23
School governors	12	27	2	29	29
Councillors	26	**57**	0	9	**9**
Special constables	8	27	12	23	31

Local area agreements (LAAs) express an area's priorities for a three year period as agreed between local and national government. Table 3 demonstrates how civic activists feel in relation to national indicator (NI) 4, which is selected as a local area agreement target in 13 of local authority areas in our sample. Cornwall, Dudley, Exeter, Lincolnshire, Portsmouth and Redcar and Cleveland were the exceptions, not having included NI 4 in their LAA, although the data shows no discernable differences in relation to the experience and attitudes of civic activists in these areas.

As shown in table 3, over 70% of civic activists either 'definitely agree' or 'tend to agree' that they can influence decisions in their local area. To put this in context, only 25-30% of 'normal' residents on average feel able to influence local decision making (DCLG 2009b). Only 5% of civic activists stated that they did not feel able to influence local decision making at all.

Of the civic roles, 89% of councillors felt able to influence decisions, which was more than school governors (74%) and significantly more than special constables (44%). Some 83% of councillors considered their role to have affected this answer. This is substantially more than the 39% of school governors who linked their influence on local decision making with their holding of their civic role.

Table 4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?					
Role	Definitely agree	Tend to agree	Don't know	Tend to disagree	Definitely disagree
All	20	**53**	15	11	1
School governors	29	50	7	14	0
Councillors	9	**63**	17	9	**3**
Special constables	22	44	26	7	0
To what extent do you think that being in your role has affected your answer above?					
Role	Very strongly	Fairly strongly	Don't know	Not very strongly	Not at all strongly
All	6	30	6	12	46
School governors	3	29	5	18	45
Councillors	9	35	9	9	38
Special constables	8	23	4	8	58

73% of respondents felt that in their local area individuals from different backgrounds get on well with each other. The response was broadly similar across the civic roles with 66% of special constables and 79% of school governors agreeing. Most civic activists consider their view of this not to be affected by their civic role.

Table 5. How satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?					
Role	Definitely agree	Tend to agree	Don't know	Tend to disagree	Definitely disagree
All	44	37	9	8	3
School governors	50	29	12	5	5
Councillors	40	37	9	14	0
Special constables	41	49	4	4	4
To what extent do you think that your role has affected your answer above?					
Role	Very strongly	Fairly strongly	Don't know	Not very strongly	Not at all strongly
All	9	32	4	13	42
School governors	13	23	5	15	45
Councillors	9	47	0	12	32
Special constables	4	27	8	12	50

81% of civic activists were fairly or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Again councillors were the most satisfied, as well as being the only group where the majority of individuals (56%) thought their views were affected by their civic role. Comments suggest that this is affected by councillors being better informed about local services and community events as well as the sense of personal pride and well-being they derive from their role and relationship with their community.

> **Councillor**: *'There needs to be a system for communities to feed into the decision making process and, importantly, to also receive some reward for doing so.'*

> **School governor**: *'Getting involved brings you out of your shell and gives you good training for the rest of your life. The role also helps you to challenge things and empowers you. It is definitely a good way of developing confidence in women.'*

8. Conclusions and discussion points

Summary points

Although there is some degree of variance between the individual roles, there are a number of key trends that chime with the *Citizenship survey* and the *Audit of political engagement* (2008) to define general characteristics of civic activists as being:

- Christian (66%)

- white (83%);

- almost all qualified to at least secondary school level (94%)

- qualified to university level (special constables less so) (67%)

- employed (councillors less so) (65%)

- male (school governors less so) (57%)

- over 50 (57%).

There are a wide range of motivations for becoming a civic activist. These are generally closely related to an individual's aspirations and what they want to get from the role. Over time, however, these aspirations can change and the benefits people derive from their experience in a civic role often vary from those they had initially envisaged. What keeps them in a role is not always what motivated them to take it up.

Personal aspiration or interest (such as career progression or the desire to improve the education of children in the family), a sense of obligation and issue-specific factors (commonly related to the provision or threatened closure of public services or community facilities) were all cited as key factors motivating people to take up a civic role, with a personal approach and invitation also having a significant influence. Whilst individual motivations are varied and personal, key themes were identified as being:

- to 'give something back' to the community

- to gain influence (in order to improve the school or community)

- to undertake challenges in order to realise personal development

The role of school governor acts as a greater catalyst to further civic participation than that of councillor or special constable. Whilst this may be a factor of lower time commitment, there is evidence to suggest that positive experience in the role is acting to motivate and influence school governors to increase their participation and consider other civic roles in the future.

The majority of councillors interviewed had significant previous experience of civic participation. Most cited satisfaction obtained from their past experiences as reinforcing key motivations and contributing to their growing commitment,

influencing them to both take up and continue in the role. Positive experiences, such as personal development or a sense of having made a difference, were cited as motivation for increasing levels of civic participation across all three roles.

Of the three civic roles, special constables were the least likely to have primarily altruistic motives for taking on their civic role. Whilst some did see it as a way of 'giving something back' to the community, most took on the role in order to gain experience needed to join the regular police force. Special constables were also particularly motivated by the personal challenges involved in undertaking their role and envisaged (and experienced) a high level of personal development and satisfaction as a worthwhile reward.

Councillors and school governors generally take on roles within the communities in which they live whilst special constables more commonly fulfil their role in communities other than their own and commonly see their role as incompatible with the ability to lead lives as 'normal citizens'. There were also a small number of councillors who represented a ward with which they felt a strong connection (through previous residence or work) but did not live in. In many ways they felt less connected to their local community than the area they represent. These instances suggest that empowerment and citizenship agendas need not necessarily be focused on linking people with civic roles in their immediate localities.

Personal learning and development is acknowledged as a key element of civic participation and empowerment. It is both an input (applied to fulfilling a civic role) and an outcome from civic activism, enabling people to be more effective within a civic role and contributing to their experience in a positive way.

Whilst acknowledging the need for continuous development, training at the point of entry is considered particularly valuable for each of the civic roles. This can help identify and overcome initial barriers and particularly helps to build confidence. Interviewees felt the rate of progression to be significant, with support required to ensure they are comfortable with this and not left feeling too overawed or out of their depth.

There appears to be little standardisation of training across different local authority areas. This is reflected in the varied effectiveness and impact of training experienced by civic activists. Mentoring opportunities (particularly prior to undertaking a civic role) and personalised training plans were considered to be effective, although awareness and provision of these is generally lacking.

The routes through which people progress into, within and between civic roles can be more important than the training and support they receive in helping to ensure that they fulfil them effectively. Interviewees felt that a rapid rate of progression into more complex roles (or those requiring more commitment) could lead to people feeling overawed or out of their depth.

Civic roles are perceived as becoming increasingly professional. Whilst this is generally seen as positive, there is a danger it could be off putting for new volunteers or could limit the length of time people stay in the roles.

Discussion points

Recognising it in themselves is a prerequisite for those in civic roles to promote and facilitate empowerment more widely. In order for existing civic activists to promote greater civic participation, those in civic roles require opportunity to reflect on their experiences, formalise their consideration of the empowerment agenda and define how they might contribute to taking it forward. This is a key element of the councillors' community leadership role.

Civic activists perceive a need for a programme to encourage greater involvement in civic roles and raise awareness of related opportunities and benefits. Whilst Take Part pathfinders would appear to deliver this, their lack of profile was felt to limit their scope to fulfilling this need at the present time. Given the positive experience of those who had engaged with Take Part, there may be scope for these people to act as more official advocates for the programme as well as promoting its benefits through their immediate networks.

The language and terminology used can provide a barrier to engaging with the empowerment agenda. The terms 'civic activist' and 'empowerment' are seen as rather exclusive. Engaging interviewees on the same issues, but in terms of 'getting people involved in their communities' generated a more positive response, in many cases inciting real enthusiasm and impassioned support for the principles of community empowerment. Forthcoming policy from the new government has the potential to create a new set of terminology. In this context, presenting the empowerment agenda in an accessible way will be important to effectively engage people in civic participation or towards taking on civic roles.

More coherent and consistent approaches to training would be of benefit to current and potential civic activists. Whilst it may not be possible or desirable to standardise training approaches, there may be an opportunity to promote good practice, particularly relating to mentoring and peer support, and integrate Take Part pathfinder training with that provided through council and police support services.

The relationship between locality and civic activism is more complex than is currently represented in much of the literature relating to the empowerment agenda. The common assumption that people are most likely to be civically active in the area where they live is challenged by many. This research highlights a rationale for looking beyond the local neighbourhood (or even the local authority area) to more flexibly recruit, encourage, support and facilitate civic activism and link into a broader range of communities of interest and affiliation that do not correspond with traditional boundaries.

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Annex 1: List of interviewees by role and location

Local authority area	School governor	Councillor	Special constable	Total interviews
Bradford City	2	1	2	5
Brighton and Hove City	2	2	0	4
Burnley	2	2	2	6
Cornwall	2	2	2	6
Doncaster	2	2	3	7
Dudley	2	4	2	8
Exeter City	2	3	2	7
Hertfordshire County	2	4	1	7
Lincolnshire County	2	2	2	6
London Borough of Southwark	2	2	2	6
London Borough of Sutton	0	2	1	3
Northumberland County	2	2	2	6
Nottingham City	2	4	2	8
Portsmouth City	2	2	1	5
Redcar and Cleveland	2	2	1	6
Salford City	2	2	1	5
Stoke-on-Trent City	4	3	2	9
Thurrock	4	1	0	5
York City	3	1	2	6
Total	**41**	**43**	**30**	**114**

Annex 2: Consultation tools

Consultation interview with councillors

A. Your background and previous experience

1. Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job, prior to becoming a councillor have you:

	YES	NO
Been a member of a group making decisions on local health or education services		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to regenerate the local area		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to tackle local crime problems		
Been a member of a tenants' group decision-making committee		
Been a member of a group making decisions on local services for young people		
Been a member of another group making decisions on services in the local community		
Been a member of any other type of voluntary or community group		
Other: specify		

2. Overall, about how often over the last 12 months have you volunteered [given unpaid help] to any groups, clubs or organisations?

Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job	TICK one only
At least once a week	
Less than once a week but at least once a month	
Less often	
I give unpaid help as an individual only and not through groups, clubs or organisations	
I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months	
Don't know	

B. Becoming a councillor

3. How long have you been a councillor? How many elected terms does this represent? Do you have a cabinet position?

4. Is this your first civic role (ref those listed in Q1)? If not, what was your first civic role and what motivated you to take that role? Have you held an elected post before?

5. Have your parents, friends and/or siblings had a civic role? If so, which? Was this an influence on you taking a civic role?

6. What motivated you to become a councillor and what were your aspirations of the role? (what did you want to get from the role/ expect the experience to be like?)

7. Did you receive any training to prepare you for this civic role before you took it on? If so, was it accredited training? (note details)

8. Has being a councillor met your expectations? *Please explain*.

9. How long do you intend to remain in this role?

10. Are there any other roles you might consider seeking in the future? (*Link to list in question 1*).

11. What has been the impact of being a councillor on you? Your family? Your community?

12. Have you accessed any other training and development opportunities since becoming a councillor?

13. What main challenges have you experienced in fulfilling the role of local councillor? What help is available to address these, and how do you rate this support?

C. Experience of the *<name>* Take Part pathfinder programme

14. Did you engage with or receive support from the *<name>* Take Part pathfinder programme? How would you rate the support (if any) received?

15. How familiar are you with Take Part resources available to residents? Locally? At the national level? (*This will need to be refined as per each case study area*).

16. (*Having explained the local pathfinder and what it offers*) What do you think about the pathfinder and how might it influence local people to take civic roles?

17. Since taking up this role have you increased or decreased your level of participation or involvement in other areas of community life? Has it affected the extent to which your family and friends play an active part in community or civic life?

D. Political party membership (*explain we are looking to see if political party membership impacts on people undertaking civic roles*).

18. How long have you been a member of your political party? To what extent did party membership influence the decision to take up this role?

   (*If an Independent cross reference with Q6 above re motivation*)

E. The empowerment agenda

19. How familiar are you with the Connecting Communities programme (*ask this if there is a Connected Communities programme in their area*)? Do you have any direct engagement with the programme / programme staff?

20. How familiar are you with the empowerment agenda? (*explain what this is, with reference to encouraging people to be more active as citizens, strengthening local democracy and, if appropriate, the* Communities in Control *white paper*

21. How important is it for people to feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

22. How important is it for people to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

23. How important is it for people to feel that in their local area people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

24. How important is it for people to feel satisfied with their local area as a place to live?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

F. Your local area

[The area within 15-20 minute walking distance from your home]

25. How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?

Very strongly (5)	Fairly strongly (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very strongly (2)	Not at all strongly (1)
To what extent do you think that being a councillor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments:				

26. Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a councillor has affected your answer above?				

Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

27. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a councillor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

28. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

Very satisfied (5)	Fairly satisfied (4)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Fairly dissatisfied (2)	Very dissatisfied (1)
To what extent do you think that being a councillor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

29. Is there anything else in relation to your experience of being a councillor or the <name> pathfinder that you would like to share?

Consultation interview with school governors

A. Your background and previous experience

1. Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job, prior to becoming a school governor have you:

	YES	NO
Been a local councillor (for the local authority, town or parish)		
Been a member of a group making decisions on local health or education services		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to regenerate the local area		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to tackle local crime problems		
Been a member of a tenants' group decision-making committee		
Been a member of a group making decisions on local services for young people		
Been a member of another group making decisions on services in the local community		
Been a member of any other type of voluntary or community group		
Other: specify		

2. Overall, about how often over the last 12 months have you volunteered [given unpaid help] to any groups, clubs or organisations?

Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job	*TICK one only*
At least once a week	
Less than once a week but at least once a month	
Less often	
I give unpaid help as an individual only and not through groups, clubs or organisations	
I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months	
Don't know	

B. Becoming a school governor

3. How long have you been a school governor?

4. Is this your first civic role? If no, what was your first civic role and what motivated you to take that role?

5. Have your parents, friends and/or siblings had a civic role? If so, which? Was this an influence on you taking a civic role?

6. What motivated you to become a school governor and what were your aspirations of the role? (what did you want to get from the role/ expect the experience to be like?)

7. Did you receive any training to prepare you for this civic role before you took it on? If so, was it accredited training? (note details)

8. Has being a school governor met your expectations? Please explain.

9. What process did you go through to secure this role? How would you rate the process for becoming a school governor?

10. Have you faced any barriers in securing the role of school governor? How have you addressed these barriers?

11. Have you faced any barriers in undertaking the role of school governor? How have you addressed these barriers?

12. How long do you intend to remain in this role?

13. Are there any other roles you might consider seeking in the future? (Link to list in question 1).

14. What has been the impact of being a school governor on you? Your family? Your community?

15. What, if any personal development opportunities, have you had opportunity to access since becoming a school governor?

16. Do you have children in the school where you are a school governor?

C. **Experience of the** <*name*> **Take Part pathfinder programme**

17. Did you engage with or receive support from the <name> Take Part pathfinder programme? How would you rate the support (if any) received?

18. How familiar are you with Take Part resources available to residents? Locally? At the national level? (This will need to be refined as per each case study area).

19. (Having explained the local pathfinder and what it offers) What do you think about the pathfinder and how might it influence local people to take civic roles?

20. Since taking up this role have you increased or decreased your level of participation or involvement in other areas of community life? Has it affected the extent to which your family and friends play an active part in community or civic life?

D. **Political party membership** (*explain we are looking to see if political party membership impacts on people undertaking civic roles.*

21. Which political party are you a member of? How long have you been a member? To what extent did party membership influenced the decision to take up this role?

E. **The empowerment agenda**

22. How familiar are you with the Connecting Communities programme (ask this if there is a Connected Communities programme in their area)? Do you have any direct engagement with the programme / programme staff?

23. How familiar are you with the empowerment agenda? (explain what this is, with reference to encouraging people to be more active as citizens, strengthening local democracy and, if appropriate, the *Communities in Control* white paper

24. How important is it for people to feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

25. How important is it for people to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

26. How important is it for people to feel that in their local area people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

27. How important is it for people to feel satisfied with their local area as a place to live?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

F.   Your local area

[The area within 15-20 minute walking distance from your home]

28. How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?

Very strongly (5)	Fairly strongly (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very strongly (2)	Not at all strongly (1)
To what extent do you think that being a school governor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments:				

29. Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a school governor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

30. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a school governor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

31. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

Very satisfied (5)	Fairly satisfied (4)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Fairly dissatisfied (2)	Very dissatisfied (1)
To what extent do you think that being a school governor has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

32. Is there anything else in relation to your experience of being a school governor or the <name> pathfinder that you would like to share?

Consultation interview with special constable

A. Your background and previous experience

1. Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job, prior to becoming a special constable have you:

	YES	NO
Been a local councillor (for the local authority, town or parish)		
Been a member of a group making decisions on local health or education services		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to regenerate the local area		
Been a member of a decision-making group set up to tackle local crime problems		
Been a member of a tenants' group decision-making committee		
Been a member of a group making decisions on local services for young people		
Been a member of another group making decisions on services in the local community		
Been a member of any other type of voluntary or community group		
Other: specify		

2. Overall, about how often over the last 12 months have you volunteered [given unpaid help] to any groups, clubs or organisations?

Excluding anything that was a requirement of your job	_TICK one only_
At least once a week	
Less than once a week but at least once a month	
Less often	
I give unpaid help as an individual only and not through groups, clubs or organisations	
I have not given any unpaid help over the last 12 months	
Don't know	

B. Becoming a special constable

- How long have you been a special constable?

- Is this your first civic role (ref those listed in Q1)? If no, what was your first civic role and what motivated you to take that role?

- Have your parents, friends and/or siblings had a civic role? If so, which? Was this an influence on you taking a civic role?

- What motivated you to become a special constable and what were your aspirations of the role? (what did you want to get from the role/ expect the experience to be like?)

- Has being a special constable met your expectations? Please explain.

- How long do you intend to remain in this role?

- Are there any other roles you might consider seeking in the future? (Link to list in question 1).

- What has been the impact of being a special constable on you? Your family? Your community?

- What, if any personal development opportunities, have you had opportunity to access since becoming a special constable?

C. Experience of the Take Part pathfinder programme

- Did you engage with or receive support from the <name> Take Part pathfinder programme? How would you rate the support (if any) received?

- How familiar are you with Take Part resources available to residents? Locally? At the national level? (This will need to be refined as per each case study area).

- (Having explained the local pathfinder and what it offers) What do you think about the pathfinder and how might it influence local people to take civic roles?

- Since taking up this role have you increased or decreased your level of participation or involvement in other areas of community life? Has it affected the extent to which your family and friends play an active part in community or civic life?

D. The empowerment agenda

- How familiar are you with the Connecting Communities programme (*only ask this if there is a Connected Communities programme in their area*)? Do you have any direct engagement with the programme / programme staff?

- How familiar are you with the empowerment agenda? (*explain what this is, with reference to encouraging people to be more active as citizens, strengthening local democracy and, if appropriate, the* Communities in Control *white paper*

- How important is it for people to feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

How important is it for people to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

How important is it for people to feel that in their local area people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

How important is it for people to feel satisfied with their local area as a place to live?

Very important (5)	Fairly important (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very important (2)	Not at all important (1)
Comments/why				

E. Your local area

[The area within 15-20 minute walking distance from your home]

How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?

Very strongly (5)	Fairly strongly (4)	Don't know (3)	Not very strongly (2)	Not at all strongly (1)
To what extent do you think that being a special constable has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments:				

Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a special constable has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

Definitely agree (5)	Tend to agree (4)	Don't know (3)	Tend to disagree (2)	Definitely disagree (1)
To what extent do you think that being a special constable has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

Very satisfied (5)	Fairly satisfied (4)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Fairly dissatisfied (2)	Very dissatisfied (1)
To what extent do you think that being a special constable has affected your answer above?				
Very much (5)	Quite a lot (4)	Don't know (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
Comments				

Is there anything else in relation to your experience of being a special constable or the Southwark pathfinder that you would like to share?

Annex 3: Research method

The study team completed 110 stakeholder consultations via face to face and telephone interviews. The sample consisted of 42 school governors, 40 councillors and 28 special constables and was drawn from the following local authority areas where Take Part pathfinder programmes run:

- Bradford City
- Brighton and Hove City
- Cornwall
- Dudley
- Doncaster
- Exeter City
- Hertfordshire County
- Lincolnshire County
- London borough of Southwark

- London borough of Sutton
- Northumberland County
- Nottingham City
- Pendle
- Portsmouth City
- Redcar and Cleveland
- Salford City
- Stoke-on-Trent City
- Thurrock
- York City

The scoping phase involved the study team undertaking desk research to establish an overview of each of the 18 pathfinder areas. This was based primarily on information obtained through initial contact with the local Take Part pathfinder officer and subsequently supplemented by further information from relevant local authority officers.

The scoping phase also involved mapping the presence of national indicator 3 (civic participation in the local area) and national indicator 4 (people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality) using the LAA Tracker developed by Government Office London (Local Government Improvement and Development 2010).

A sampling framework was established to manage the balance of interviewees across the different roles and areas. This involved interviewing at least one person from each of the civic roles in every area and no more than four from any one role in any area. Within this framework the sample was essentially self-selecting, with involvement invited via their Local Authority, police force or Take Part programme. This process involved cooperation from a large number of officers and their assistance is much appreciated. Despite this, the study team was not able to engage with any school governors in the London Borough of Sutton or with any special constables in Thurrock.

Engagement took the form of semi-structured interviews, based on an agreed template and undertaken on a confidential basis either by telephone or face to face. A total of 115 interviews were undertaken. Lasting between 45 minutes and an hour and a quarter, these

followed a consistent format whilst allowing for the exploration of personal insight and experience and any locally specific issues.

The qualitative element of this evaluation is necessarily based on the views of those interviewed and as such is subjective. Every care has been taken to conduct this research openly, thoroughly and professionally and to explore the justification for any comments made.

The research period also spanned a general election and a change in government, with the pre-election period causing some disruption in primary data collection and a level of uncertainty in relation to the political and policy context.