



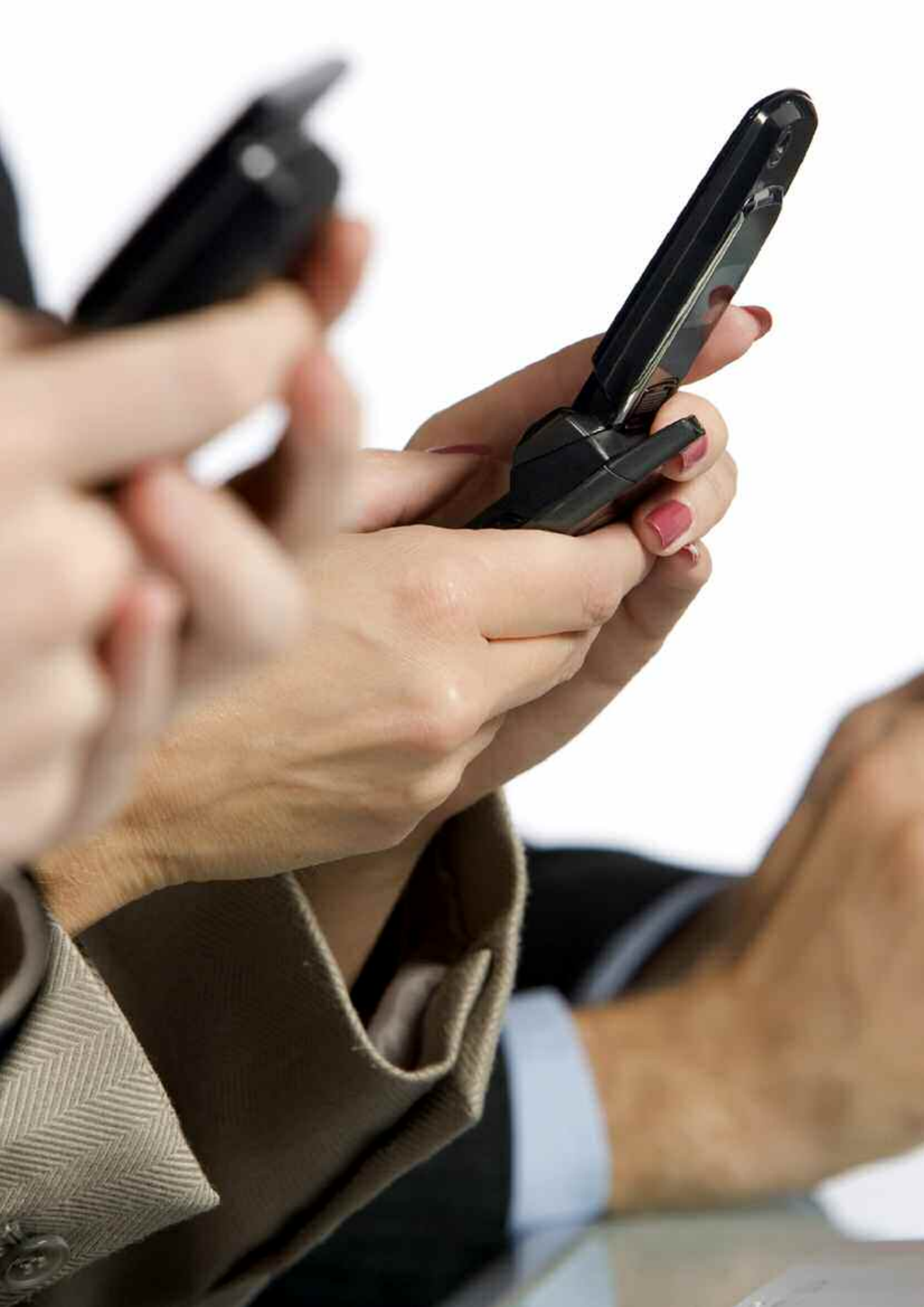
LOCAL GOVERNMENT 3.0

HOW COUNCILS CAN RESPOND TO THE NEW WEB AGENDA

AN LGiU DISCUSSION PAPER

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INTRODUCTION: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE WEB

The internet has fundamentally changed the way we work and live. The development of web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, microblogs, wikis, videostreaming and social networking sites makes it easier than ever for us all to create and share content and enables us to communicate in real time across the boundaries and hierarchies that have too often held us back in the past.

Web proselytisers foresee a wired world of collaborative endeavour in which online and offline activity seamlessly coalesce to create new forms of social and political organisation and a civic space that is defined by active participation not by passive reception.

More sceptical voices describe a shrill, fragmented public sphere in which people declaim endlessly into the ether and insulate themselves from any point of view different to their own.

We can see traces of both these futures, perhaps, though neither has quite arrived as yet. What is certain is that local government has embraced the web in a huge number of new initiatives that use these technologies creatively to engage with local people. Many of these are described in this pamphlet.

My own experience has been instructive. I'm an enthusiastic Twitter user; with a fairly respectable 500+ followers (you can follow me on @AndySawford). When I first started tweeting I wasn't sure quite what to expect. At best it seemed a rather pointless exercise, at worst terribly self indulgent: who could possibly be interested in knowing what I was doing and thinking moment by moment? In fact it's turned out to be one of the most useful tools in my working life.

Having reached a critical mass of followers within the local government community, I'm now able to use Twitter for instant consultation and feedback, when I'm chairing a conference, writing an article or meeting a minister, I've even used it to ask people what they think as I've been on the way to the TV studio to comment on local government issues.

There are three characteristics of the feedback I get that I find particularly interesting:

- Because replying is easy, it's virtually instant and has an impressive rate of return compared to traditional consultation methods.
- It's a dialogue: I reply to the people who reply to me and ideas spark off each other.
- It's non hierarchical: I treat all replies on the basis of their content not on who they're from — indeed I often don't really know who they're from.

All of these characteristics add value to the process and all of them, interestingly, could usefully be applied to offline work.

Of course in a fast moving context it's often hard to keep track of best practice or to step back and think about where we want to go next. The LGiU exists to help local government rise to the contemporary challenges. Our focus is local. This is where the real difference is to

be made. Through promoting innovation and sharing good practice, we aim to make a tangible difference in communities.

We believe that the use of new web technologies has a hugely valuable role to play in helping councils engage with and deliver to local communities. In this short pamphlet the heads of each of our four policy centres — Local Democracy, Service Transformation, Local Sustainability and Children’s Services — look at how local authorities are using the web to deliver in their areas, what lessons we can learn and where we might be going next.

Reading the essays it’s obvious that like all radical innovations the web raises questions as quickly as it answers them, but one thing at least is clear: that local government is, as it should be, at the forefront of using these new technologies to make a real difference to people’s lives.

Andy Sawford
Chief Executive, LGiU



CHAPTER 1: FROM E-DEMOCRACY TO 'HERE COMES EVERYBODY' — A SHORT HISTORY OF GOVERNMENT AND THE INTERNET

How we got here

The internet is the signature technology of our time. From its beginnings in the American military and academic research establishments of the 1960s it has grown to become an integral part of the daily life of billions of people around the world. The internet itself is simply a network of networks, millions of computers communicating with each other through a standardised technology known as the Internet Protocol Suite.

This network supports a range of applications. The first to really enter public consciousness perhaps was email, which (though we may sometimes regret it) has fundamentally altered our ability to communicate, particularly in working life.

The other key moment in the Internet's emergence into popular consciousness came with the invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners Lee in 1991. The web harnessed the power of the internet by using it to support a network of hyper text documents, thus giving it a public face and making possible the online world we now know.

Today more than 1.6 billion people across the world have access to the internet and in Britain 43 million people or 70 per cent of the population are online.¹

Throughout its short life the web has created great expectations: from the realisation of George Birkbeck's dream of "the universal diffusion of the blessing of knowledge", to limitless possibilities for entertainment and commerce. These aspirations are to a large degree rooted in the web's potential as a 'generative' technology, that is one in which the user is also the designer, able to create content and develop innovative new uses.

We are all familiar now with the shift in recent years towards web 2.0, the 'second generation' of the web in which this generative potential begins to be fulfilled. In simple terms this is the shift from Amazon: the web allowing us to do more efficiently something we already understood (buying books), to Wikipedia, blogs, YouTube or Twitter: the web allowing new forms of user driven content to emerge.

But the web is not just about shopping, news and pornography. Since its infancy it's also been touted as an instrument of democratic engagement and renewal. As we shall see the history of web democracy mirrors that of the web as a whole, in its shift from supply model to co-productive models.

e-democracy 1.0

Building on a typology set out by Stephen Coleman and John Gjtze in a report for the Hansard Society, we can identify at least four potential aspects of e-democracy.²

- Direct or plebiscitary democracy mediated through the web, or a weaker version of this: the use of the web to facilitate participation in representative democracy, for example through the use of e-voting.
- Government using the web to communicate with the public and assess public opinion, to which we might add using the web as a means of accessing government services.
- Online communities or civic networks constituting an active part of civil society.
- Online public participation in deliberative policy making.

The first two categories fit into the service delivery web 1.0 model (the Amazon equivalent), the second two are a much more web 2.0 vision of an interactive, generative politics.

In 1999, the Labour government set up the office of the e-envoy to: “improve the delivery of public services and achieve long term cost savings by joining-up online government services around the needs of customers.”³ The language reveals the assumptions behind the policy: the internet would provide a faster, more efficient and cheaper way for services to be delivered from the government to the people.

The office of the e-envoy was eventually replaced by the e-government unit which in turn was wrapped up into the Cabinet Office, but to large extent the service delivery function has been a success, as anyone who has recently renewed their passport, arranged a rubbish collection or taxed their car through sites like DirectGov and Info4Local will know.

On another of the e-envoy's strategic priorities, “facilitating participation in the democratic process: making it easier for people to collect public information, follow the political process, discuss and form groups on political issues, scrutinise government and vote in elections”, progress has been decidedly more mixed.

Electronic voting remains mired in controversy, but if web 1.0 took government to the people through the provision of information and services, the beginnings of web 2.0 began to bring the people to government. Interestingly, however this has predominantly happened through initiatives originating outside government.

Most notable of these have been the immense contribution of the MySociety family of websites, including TheyWorkforYou, WriteToThem and HearFromYourMP. These allow people to hold their MPs to account, report local problems to their council or send petitions to Downing Street.

These are powerful tools, uniquely deliverable through the web, which create a far richer and more ongoing conversation between government and the people than can be exercised through the ballot box. The fact that the Number 10 petitions site has collected more than eight million signatures must surely indicate that it responded to a latent desire to speak out.

But although these sorts of initiative create the conditions for an invaluable exchange of information, it's not clear that in and of themselves they address the second two forms of e-democracy identified above: the creation of civil society networks online and the involvement of the public in deliberative policy making.

Could we have expected more? The web may have enabled richer and easier dialogue between citizens and government, but if the nature of web 2.0 is to enable new forms of social innovation and collaborative action then could we not have expected a more transformative impact on democracy?

All the more so because away from the corridors of government a revolution has been going on.

Democracy 2.0

The last few years have seen a proliferation of web 2.0 technologies: blogs, video sharing sites, twitter, data mash ups, social networking sites, all of these allow the user to become an active creator of content not simply a passive recipient of it. The writer and innovation consultant Charles Leadbeater has described this as the logic of With.

He writes: "If the culture that the web is creating were to be reduced to a single, simple design principle it would be the principle of With [...] The ethic of the web 2.0 world is create, connect, combine and collaborate. The underlying principle of doing things with people rather than to or for them will breed very different organisations, services and experiences in virtually every field."⁴

As Leadbeater points out, this logic of With is increasingly dominant in many areas of our lives, particularly culture, entertainment, education and social organisation. The forms of online democracy we have examined so far provide information to people, services for people and even ways to hear from people; but they do not allow government to do things with people.

It's worth asking why this matters. Mark Twain famously observed that to a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail. Just because we have a suite of web 2.0 technologies why should we try to apply them to the process of governance? What is the problem we are trying to solve?

There are three compelling reasons why a politics of engagement and collaboration is becoming essential. First, long term social challenges such as climate change, social cohesion, mass migration or ageing populations are characterised by their complexity, scale and unpredictability. These are not problems that government can solve for us. They will require individuals and communities to work together to find sustainable solutions.

Second, we are entering an era of severely constrained public finances. A fiscal tightening of 6.3 per cent of national income is forecast over the next two Parliaments. In real terms this is likely to mean severe reductions in public sector spending. This will not only reduce the scope of services that the state delivers, but will require us as citizens to play a more collaborative role in the provision of these services.

Finally, the current revelations over MPs expenses and the public outrage they have generated seems to have crystallised an increasing dissatisfaction with our system of representative democracy and the concentration of power in the hands of a governing class.

These challenges generate a series of fundamental questions: about the nature of citizenship, about the role of the state, about rights and responsibilities and about how we

live together. Responding to them will require us to find new ways of working and living together, new forms of connection and new models of civic organisation.

The most important task for any new politics then is to find new ways to build social capital, to reinvest in and develop the sorts of public relationships that allow communities to pool their creativity and intelligence and generate collective action.

It would be foolish to pretend that the web can do this alone, but equally we should not ignore its power as a tool. The sort of transformations the web promises contest the functions of government at least as much as they supplement it. They give people the ability to connect easily and across boundaries and to coalesce around issues, offering what Clay Shirky has called “organisation without organisations”, and allow people to negate the informational and organisational advantages that have traditionally allowed the state to monopolise collective action.

In his book *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky highlights examples of how the web has placed real, effective power in the hands of citizens, whether it's students in Belarus organising demonstrations via flashmobs, or groups of Facebook users forcing Barclays to change their charging policies. In each case collaborative, non-hierarchical co-ordination online creates powerful coalitions who are able to initiate real world offline action and change.⁵

So the democracy that the web enables is participative, decentralised and non-hierarchical. It enables the sort of civil networks that give life to our third aspect of e-democracy. But it can also be unfocused, unaccountable and inconsistent and we need to take these problems seriously.

A casual perusal of the comments thread on any of *The Guardian's* Comment is Free pages will soon disillusion us of the notion that the web is an idealised space of high minded civic interaction. Moreover, as Cass Sunstein has argued, the way in which one searches and reads the web, primarily through links between pages, inevitably means that silos emerge and there is a danger that people end up locked in ever smaller circles of discussion with people who already share their views.⁶

We also should not forget that there are still many people who do not have access to the net and who must not be disenfranchised.

These problems represent some of the difficult edges in this debate. We still do not know with any certainty how to manage deliberative participation on the web, how to capture the light and not the heat, how to systematically allow good powerful ideas to emerge from chaotic processes, or how to break down web silos. Our final form of e-democracy, the web as a space of public deliberation and policy making remains a work in progress.

We do know however, that where answers have arisen to previous problems the web has posed they have come not from some central planning but from an open source process of innovation. If we believe in the need for collective, generative policy responses to the great challenges of our age then we must also believe in the power of collective, generative processes to address their own methodological difficulties. We have to accept that this process will be fuzzy, even messy, and that we have to keep faith with iterative, potentially frustrating processes because they lead to more resilient outcomes in the end.

So the core challenge now is not to understand how formal government can use the potential of the internet but to find ways for these different spheres of democratic engagement to work together to produce a vibrant civic sphere and to think through how we extend the collaborative, 'with' logic of the web into all our political interactions on and off line.

The role of local government

Local government has a critical role to play in this as the branch of formal democracy that sits closest to real people and real communities, that deals with people's local concerns and that helps people shape the places in which they live.

Already we see local government using web 2.0 technologies in a huge variety of innovative and effective ways. Discussion forums like Ask Bristol and Wherellive.org in Barnet give local people the opportunity to talk to each other about the issues that they identify as important. Councillors use blogs and, increasingly, Twitter to share their thinking, update the community on their activities and get instant feedback and, as of January 2009, 21 councils in the UK used Facebook Fan pages to communicate with the public.⁷

So much is already happening and the local focus, more manageable scale and responsiveness to context means that local authorities are much better placed to generate meaningful online engagement than national government. This is only part of the picture however.

If, as we have argued above, we need to move towards a new, participative style of politics, then councils will be at the forefront of facilitating this at community level. To a large extent this is already the direction of travel in local authorities, underlined by new duties to involve and to promote democracy and emphasised by increasingly tight public finance. Councils all round the country are getting excellent results from neighbourhood charters, ward budgeting, planning for real and other participation techniques.

In implementing this agenda, the real import of web 2.0 is not in the end about the use of online tools, but rather in the extension of the web's collaborative, participative logic to all of the council's activities.

What's next?

LGiU is working with councils across the country to find new ways of engaging citizens in the democratic process. As we adapt to a changing political landscape it's impossible to know with certainty exactly what forms of interaction will emerge. But we can identify some key lessons from the journey so far.

- **Free people to innovate:** allow council staff and community members to be driven by their passions. Online engagement tools don't require massive IT infrastructures or budgets, they can be pulled together from free web tools. If people want to build something, let them.
- **Try everything:** it's no good waiting for the perfect tool. We're in an era of restless technological change and if you try and work out exactly how to match tools to the job, the tools (and possibly the job) will have changed before you even get started.

- **Be open about what you're doing:** particularly where it is experimental and be clear about what worked and what didn't.
- **Allow good ideas to emerge:** wherever they come from and however much they disrupt established hierarchies or ways of working.

Finally, and most controversially perhaps, think web, even if you're nowhere near a computer!

Jonathan Carr-West
Head of Centre for Local Democracy

Notes

- 1 www.50x15.com/en-us/internet_usage.aspx; www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe
- 2 Stephen Coleman and John G; tze, *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*, Hansard Society 2001
- 3 <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-envoy/index-content.htm>
- 4 Charles Leadbeater, *The Art of With*, 2009
- 5 Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, 2008
- 6 Cass Sunstein, *Republic.Com 2.0*, 2007
- 7 www.askbristol.com; www.whereilive.org; www.tweetyhall.com;
<http://www.lgeoresearch.com/status-of-uk-local-councils-facebook-fan-pages-and-groups-as-of-16th-january-2009>



CHAPTER TWO: WHO'S SERVING WHO? HOW THE INTERNET IS TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICES

Older people

'Staying connected' — social networking for millions of young people fulfils precisely that. But staying connected is perhaps even more important for older people — connected to their families, communities and to the wider world.

Older people, like everyone else, have always been networking — at work, in the pub, in clubs, with friends. Web social networking isn't really very different. Can social networking and the web be powerful tools to enhance the quality of life for everyone, regardless of age?

The web can provide much needed information about services, facilities and what is happening locally. Older people use the web to pursue their interests, to explore the news, to do home shopping, to renew library books. The web also helps people to keep up with their families, through email, but also, increasingly, through networking sites. Social networking can be stimulating and keeping mentally active is crucial as we get older.

Some older people are losing out on the benefits of the information society, but crucially, society is losing out as well. We know older people are our most active citizens — as volunteers, carers, and voters. The web has huge potential to give people a stronger voice by getting people involved who, for example, may find it difficult to get to meetings, but who have fierce opinions. The web can strengthen older people's already vital contribution to civil society.

Sixty-three per cent of 55 to 64 year-olds use the internet, but only around 30 per cent of over-65s. An Age Concern survey found that only one in six people aged 55-plus have used a social networking service such as Facebook Skype Twitter or YouTube. Older people, however, are the fastest growing group of internet users. It is clear that age itself is not a barrier.

So what are the barriers to much greater use, especially among the 70-plus generation? Clearly, home use costs can be a problem for many. Older people who have not used the web at work can be unsure what the web can do. Some people, though motivated to get online, lack confidence. Some are worried about security online. And others do not think it is relevant to their lives, especially social networking.

Some people say they are 'just too old'. Research has shown that a significant proportion of older people who are not currently using digital technologies say that they expect to remain that way.

There are clear issues of access and design. Sites are usually designed by young people. They need to be much more usable for people with vision or hearing problems. They can be confusing and hard to navigate. What can councils do? Think creatively for a start. Providing free web access in libraries may be positive for many, but for some older people who want to learn more about and use the web, busy libraries are not appropriate places. Councils can

(and a few do) support digital mentors and help to set up chatrooms for older people. Engaging older people is a crucial aim for councils — using the web as a tool must be a no brainer.

American research seems to show that taking part in social networking could help people live longer, providing they network online with younger people. Being with younger people makes older ones more active — and activity boosts their lifespan.

Intergenerational work is happening in lots of places. More can be done to use the web expertise of young people and the life experience of older people to work together. We know from the LGiUs Centre for Children's Services project on social networking for young people that young social networking users find their parents being on Facebook embarrassing, but can welcome grandparents.

US research again shows that in the under-24 age bracket, women outnumber men in most social networks, but by the time we get to the 45-54 age group, men are outnumbering women. So councils need to be especially encouraging older women to tweet, sign up to social networking sites and to blog.

We need councils to campaign to widen awareness of the web's potential; to promote access and to increase skills; to involve older people in web design; and to build confidence.

There are many challenges here — to enhance the quality of life of older people and to reduce social and digital exclusion, whilst resisting the temptation to use technology as a substitute for ways of engaging and communicating, rather than an exciting additional tool. And, of course, there is really little point in opening up channels to let people speak directly, but then failing to listen. Councils will have to accept that older citizens may use digital means to campaign against council proposals, and some issues will raise a lot of heat, and sometimes, anger.

The digital picture is evolving very rapidly. There is already an explosion of sites in the US aimed at people aged 50-plus. People in their 50s and 60s today are increasingly familiar with the internet. More and more services will be provided online. Technology will make personalised services more universal.

The real issue now is how to reduce the digital divide — we have a growing problem — whilst more and more people will be online, those who are not will be more isolated, and this is likely to be largely the elderly.

Many older people are among the 'information poor', and this must be tackled — information is power. But a growing 'democratic divide' could prove even more harmful. As we use the web increasingly to express our views and make the state listen to us those without access will feel and be more and more marginalised.

Councils are the obvious leaders in making sure this does not happen if the commitment to an inclusive and people-centred democracy is to be a reality.

Janet Sillett
Policy Analyst, Centre for Service Transformation

Localising criminal justice

CHAIRMAN: I would ask each of you very briefly to tell us, if there was one thing you could change, if you could push the button and make a change today, what it would be.

MS CASEY: I would want relentless information about what happens to criminals fed back to communities in a coherent and proper way. Relentless. Over and over and over.

Louise Casey

*Government Neighbourhood Crime
and Justice Advisor*

The LGiU and the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group have been running an inquiry into justice in communities. Of all the arguments we heard in the course of our inquiry, some stuck out. Louise Casey's plea for relentless information is one of them.

You might argue that we have too much information about crime, and adding to the media coverage of negative and frightening issues will only encourage fear of crime and entrenched belief that society is in decline. But what Casey wanted was something different from what we have today — information about the consequences of crime.

We regularly inform communities of local crime problems, profiles and problem solving activity. However, within the community profiles, we fail to provide meaningful and reassuring information regarding offenders and offences brought to justice as a result of action taken to resolve crime problems... those within local communities are typically more interested in what happened to those apprehended for the spate of criminal damage offences on their estate last month. This is the type of low level, local information that communities frequently request and this is the type of information that inspires confidence in the CJS at a local level.

Bedfordshire Police

There is a lot happening at the local level about providing information — sometimes amazingly detailed and interactive information, about crime at the local level. And local doesn't just mean local authority level — but down to neighbourhoods, below even ward level.

A fun map to play with is the Metropolitan Police's map which uses Google Maps technology to show comparative crime rates down to areas as small as a few streets across. This same approach to crime mapping is being rolled out across every police force area up and down the country. See <http://maps.met.police.uk/>

But the criminal justice system is not keeping up. The Ministry of Justice has launched a consultation on a new website where members of the public can look up the sentences that have been given to individuals, or for a group of people according to the crime. But it is clearly early days. The format is clunky and the average person faced with a list of unfamiliar names charged with crimes which do not make it clear what actually happened, will not be reassured that justice is being done. There is also the ongoing issue of timeliness:

Currently victims are entitled to receive information about their case within specified time periods... however, the current system is, in our opinion, too slow... For example, the Witness Care Unit is reliant on receiving information from the Courts Service before it can inform the victim that a defendant has been released on bail. The time allowed for this

means that a number of days could pass before a victim is informed of important decisions... We also think that there is scope for the CJS to look at how it could provide information to victims and witnesses about their case online.

Victim Support

In the inquiry report, we will be calling for a radical devolution of justice to the local level. As part of this debate, there must be a significant focus on information. But we also need to think about how we make information come alive.

Why does this matter? The British Crime Survey shows that the risk of being a victim of crime has fallen 22 per cent between 1995 and today.⁸ But the majority of the public continue to think that the risk of being a victim of crime is increasing. Just telling people they are wrong is not enough. One important way to tackle this is to change the criminal justice system. Louise Casey's research for the Cabinet Office showed that lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is linked to both fear of crime nationally and locally.⁹

One thing we should give more thought to is the potential of social networking. While it sounds frivolous to talk about blogging and justice in the same sentence, there is a serious issue at heart. In recent years the capacity and influence of local papers has dramatically decreased. But they used to provide a valued service in reporting the outcomes of local trials. While it isn't local government's role to provide local journalism, filling the gap left behind might be something worth considering.

What social networking would offer is the chance to add views, stories and opinion to reporting of trials and sentencing. Justice is contentious, and the public should have a way to express their perspective on how justice is served. They don't need to have the last word, but a more open dialogue about what happens to people who offend would be a breath of fresh air into the system.

Social networking would also provide the opportunity to hear positive stories. Somerset County Council created a panel to provide restorative justice — a source of many heartening stories that remind us change can happen:

A 14 year-old boy smashed up an old lady's fence. He appeared in front of the panel and the agreement was that the young man would restore the fence to its former glory and paint it. The materials were supplied by the community fund and the young man did the job – he is still doing a gardening job for this lady 18 months later.

A few stories such as these once in a while would do our communities a lot of good. Councils and their partners up and down the country are delivering change, and social networking might be the way to get people talking about it.

Amelia Cookson
Head of Centre for Service Transformation

Notes

8 www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html

9 www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2008/080618_fighting_crime.aspx



CHAPTER 3: THE INTERNET AND LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

The environment as a political issue has found its way into all our lives. New attitudes to climate change, recycling and biodiversity loss have not been the result of revolution fomented by sweeping popular movements.

Instead, the increased importance of environmental issues has been a slow information and communication-led adjustment in attitudes. Given the organic and viral nature of this adjustment it has been argued that the modern environmental movement would not have been possible without the internet. The argument to support this case has three elements.

First, the environment is very complex and we know very little about how it works so only an enormous information network can bring together the vast amounts of disparate knowledge required to better understand it.

Second, environmental activism is a product of recent generations beginning in earnest in the 1970s. These activists have grown up with the internet and used the new technology to organise.

Third, as climate change clearly demonstrates, the environment is global and no respecter of national boundaries or cultural regions. The internet mirrors the complexity and interconnectedness of the natural environment.

Of course, it's not possible to consider environmental issues in isolation. There are strong bonds between business growth, poverty, religion, education, democracy, culture, health and natural resources. This interdependence is reflected in the political concept of sustainable development most often articulated as 'development now which does not constrain the ability of future generations to develop'. The implementation of sustainable development is now understood to require the simultaneous progression of economic, social and environmental goals. It would be hard to imagine how sustainability could be realised without the information super highway.

Information on its own is never enough though. As social animals we crave interaction and opportunities to communicate. Whereas previously an activist in Surrey could learn about the existence of a cocoa farmer in Ghana, the development of web 2.0 and the increased reach of the internet mean that the activist and the farmer can exchange information, build a relationship and even start campaigning together. Take this to scale and you have sophisticated, interactive, global network based upon multiple relationships and sources of information.

The impact has been and will continue to be enormous. The information and support to activists that the internet provides don't just fuel political debate they inform the choices that all of us make. Economists have long argued that consumers need perfect information in order to make rational choices. There is already on the market an iPhone application that has information on products, allowing a shopper to quickly check the provenance of their purchases. We have already seen how this checking process is becoming more sophisticated.

Starting with simple badges such as GM Free or Dolphin Friendly then moving on to the broader 'fairtrade' or 'organic'. The informed consumer genie is out of the bottle and the thirst for further information on carbon footprints, salt content, fat content, fluoride content and local produce will need to be satisfied by existing or new products.

Daniel Goleman, in his new book *Ecological Intelligence*, thinks that it is only a matter of time before we want and get whole life cycle assessments for products, which include environmental and social costs and benefits.¹⁰

In addition to products, people want to know more about the organisations they are dealing with. We have been through a period of 'greenwash' where large companies made unsubstantiated claims about their ethical behaviour. The classic example being Nike, which was embarrassed to find, and at first denied, that it used child labour. Nike had a corporate social responsibility policy and teams of staff selling a positive message but reality caught up with it. Now Nike is recognised as leading the fight against child labour globally. Businesses realise that they have to walk the walk.

Councils are just as vulnerable to this policy/practice dissonance. Many local authorities have great looking environmental strategies but are slow to reach the implementation phase. At the moment public feedback on environmental performance of councils is quite benign, topic specific and not well organised. Councils bid for environmental Beacon status and travel to London to pick up awards for running green projects.

However, there is a lesson from the higher education sector. A couple of years ago the students got organised, through the web, and started judging the universities by *their* criteria, not the criteria the universities preferred in their 'Green Gown' scheme. The effect was immediate. It's only a matter of time before communities get organised over the web and start passing judgment on a council's green credentials, this is bound to be an uncomfortable process.

Now companies find that there is nowhere to hide and use of the internet by campaigners means that a piece of bad behaviour in a remote corner of China can become a global headline in hours. Local authorities may feel that they have a head start on 'evil multinationals' and indeed they do. However, they don't have a waiver. The public expect high standards of public bodies.

It has taken a bit longer but the public sector is now active in the supply chain of goods and services. Local authorities are being judged on their purchasing choices and indeed many have led the way particularly on fairtrade and promoting fairtrade towns. There is pressure from central government to implement sustainable procurement and support is offered by the Office of Government Commerce and the Sustainable Development Commission.

The internet can be a powerful tool to hold a council to account. For example, information on the biodiversity of land zoned for development can be sourced and shared with planning objectors or examples of good practice in comparable cities can be used to shame councils into better practice. Rather than respond defensively to the effects of new information, it would be better to embrace and even work to provide the information for citizens to use.

Friends of the Earth recently launched a campaign called Get serious about CO₂. The target for this campaign is local authorities. It is asking for more money and more support for councils so they can do things like improve public transport, insulate more homes and install

green energy. The mechanism driving the campaign is an online petition, a website that allows campaigners to upload pictures and an email to politicians. It's all web based.¹¹

The Green Party eschews paper communication and prefers electronic. Where it is in power it is acting to reduce the carbon footprint of delivering services. In this endeavour it is supported by IT companies that see the opportunities for technology and the internet to make services more efficient.

Similarly, councils should work hard to gather information from the internet that supports their decisions and informs the electorate. This information need not just come from the usual suspects of scientists, geographers, historians and local enthusiasts. To truly realise sustainability the arts community should be contributing with opportunities for artists, designers and performers to describe, explain and illuminate the challenges and solutions.

The internet can be a powerful learning tool for councillors and staff. It can be used to identify good and bad practice elsewhere, facilitate learning opportunities and communicate that learning to the electorate.

Councils can make much more of the interactive properties of web 2.0. Home pages can be used to run polls, encourage blogging, create online communities and provide support to existing groups. For example in Hampshire there has been rapid growth of a grassroots movement called 'The Greening Campaign'. The challenge for the council has been to support this group without stifling it; interactive web tools are helpful in this regard.¹²

There are potential risks associated with the use of new technology. The IT equipment needed for internet provision is not without environmental impact in its production and the waste that it generates. As the United Nations Environment Programme website makes clear, "manufacturing computers is materials-intensive; the total fossil fuels used to make one desktop computer weigh over 240 kilograms, some 10 times the weight of the computer itself. Substantial quantities of chemicals (22 kg), and water (1,500 kg) are also used".¹³

Councils are far more likely to be involved in the management of waste streams from computers. A disposal route for old computers from council recycling schemes has recently been exposed in India, which involved the use of child labour and the open air burning of computers releasing harmful toxins. It is likely that this story first broke on the internet.

The internet uses electrical power and so has its own carbon footprint. In January *The Times* published a report stating that "performing two Google searches from a desktop computer can generate about the same amount of carbon dioxide as boiling a kettle".¹⁴

As it turns out, the figure (7g of CO₂ per search) related to a prolonged search using old inefficient computer hardware. Google was quick to point out that a one-hit Google search taking less than a second produces about 0.2g of CO₂. It does add up but it's hard to know how it compares with the old way of finding things out (phone calls, trips to the library and the maintenance of paper archives).

Recently, the state of California has phased out the use of text books in schools and replaced them with electronic resources available through the web. Though mainly driven by cost cutting, it's an example of how the web can reduce the carbon footprint of activities, provided of course that the materials are not immediately printed out.

It has been argued that the use of the internet removes the need for travel and drives efficiencies. This is debatable; the counter argument is that the internet creates new social connections that then require travel to meet as a next step. It is probable that a step change in video conferencing technology is required before the internet significantly replaces face to face meetings.

It's certainly true though that the internet provides many opportunities for councils to reach out and interact with their community. At the LGiU we are developing a website to promote community carbon trading.¹⁵

The idea is that the council establishes a local market in carbon emissions. Community groups such as sports clubs, churches, small businesses, even whole streets can sign up on the website and then start reducing their emissions and trading.

The internet can manage the whole process remotely but most councils piloting the model want to optimise the chance to meet groups, provide support and reward the winners. Some are considering rewards using local currencies such as the Lewes pound. These local currencies require the use of the internet to function properly.

Google Earth can be used as simple interactive Geographical Information System. There are adaptations of the software that allow a local authority to identify local facilities. Furthermore, making the site interactive allows the public to add information on wildlife sightings, locations of crimes, pollution incidents and community group buildings. Eventually, this facility could be automated.

When this mapping works well the councils and the community can build a multi layered picture of the area that is jointly owned and a resource for all. This mapping can grow beyond one council boundary to neighbouring councils and even facilitate twinning around the world.

In conclusion, if we are to develop sustainably, high quality social, economic and environmental information is a precondition to better informed choices about the products and services we buy and the organisations we choose to deal with. The internet has the potential to revolutionise the amount and the nature of information that the electorate holds about a council and its activities. The internet is just technology. It's how we use it that matters. But the choices we make about the way we build the internet and then ask it to perform functions are already having environmental impacts.

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Notes

10 Daniel Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence: How Knowing the Ecological Impacts of What We Buy Can Change Everything*, 2009

11 www.foe.co.uk/community/campaigns/climate/get_serious_20187.html

12 www.greening-campaign.co.uk

13 www.unep.org

14 http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/article5489134.ece

15 www.carbonlimited.org



CHAPTER 4: HOW CAN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES HELP ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEMOCRATIC ACTIVITY?

Declining participation of young people in local and national politics presents a real cause for concern. The average age of councillors in the UK is 58 and fewer than two per cent of councillors are under 30.

This does not mean that young people are apathetic. While they are less likely to be involved in traditional forms of participation, the Hansard Society audit of political engagement shows 67 per cent of 18-24 year-olds are still interested in local issues. Young people are more likely to be involved in types of informal activity, in particular online social networking; we already know that they spend, on average, two hours a day on the internet.

The LGiU's Children's Services Network (CSN) is running a project on social networking sites and youth participation. In partnership with Practical Participation at www.timdavies.org.uk, a number of other specialist consultants and representatives from 30 local authorities, this LGiU project provides some useful insights into the mass phenomenon of social networking sites and the opportunities they present for engaging young people in democratic activity.

This chapter will draw on the work of this project to chart the rise and rise of social networking sites (particularly among young people), provide examples of how social networking is already being used and demonstrate some key opportunities to re-energise local democracy and improve consultation on children and young peoples' services.

New ways of communication

With their great popularity, social networking sites offer a new avenue for communication, enabling local authorities to communicate with a wide range of users with different interests and different ages and backgrounds.

A recent Ofcom report found that 42 per cent of children and young people aged between 8 and 17 who use the internet had set up a profile on a social networking site.¹⁷ Even with minimum age restrictions of 13 or 14 years on most sites, 27 per cent of children aged between 8 and 11 were aware of social networking sites and had set up their own profiles.

For these reasons, the use of social networking sites for youth engagement must be underpinned by secure and safe processes (see below).

The recent example of the London-based demonstration against knife crime is a case in point. Organised by and for young people on Facebook and Bebo, this turnkey event showed that young people can and will harness the power of new technologies to mobilise themselves on issues of direct impact and meaning to them.

In the US, the website MyBarrackObama.com presents another striking example of how effectively social networking sites can be used for political mobilisation in general as well

as the unprecedented engagement of hard-to-reach groups such as young people who were previously politically inactive.

Social networking sites have become a mass phenomenon across the globe, with communities such as Facebook, MySpace and Bebo reporting user figures in the hundreds of millions. Having joined these communities, people are able to publish multimedia content about themselves, their interests and concerns. The table below gives user numbers for the most popular social networking sites in the UK.

Current social networking sites UK user statistics — most popular social networks on UK PCs

Rank	Social Network	Unique PC Audience (000s)	% internet reach	Mobile Internet Rank
1	Facebook	8.912	27.5	1
2	MySpace	5,200	16	2
3	Bebo	4,507	13.9	3
4	Windows Live Spaces	2,957	9.1	4
5	Friends Reunited	1,595	4.9	6
6	BBC Communities	1,556	4.8	10
7	Flickr	1,482	4.6	—
8	Photobucket	1,203	3.7	—
9	Flixster	1,194	3.7	5
10	Yahoo! Groups	904	2.8	8

Source: Nielsen Online, UK, Q1 2008. E.g. On average 8.9 million Britons visited Facebook via their PC (=28% of all Britons online) each month in Q1, 2008. Facebook is also the most popular social network on the mobile.

The way in which people communicate with one another has reconfigured the landscape. The graph below illustrates how, when it comes to online communication, the use of social networking sites now exceeds the use of email.

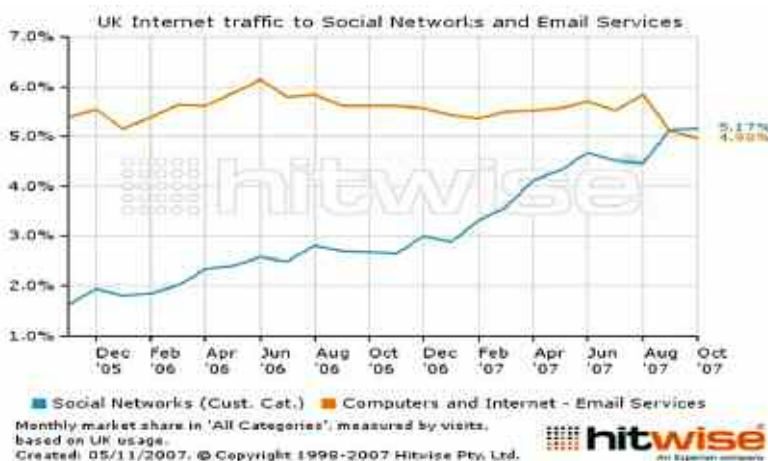
Comparison of UK internet traffic to social networking sites and using email

Updated information demonstrates that the crossover was in December 2007, when the majority of people wishing each other a happy Christmas did so using online social networks rather than email.

Social networking has its origins in 15 years of online networking and web 2.0 technology is now accessible to people all over the world who share information and content on a day-to-day basis.

The Communities and Local Government *Online Social Networks Research Report* (published in October 2008) cites research from Nielsen Online indicating that Facebook, YouTube and Second Life are the fastest growing sites in terms of total UK minutes.

Comparison of UK internet traffic to social networking sites and using email



How are young people using social networking sites?

Davies and Cranston list useful information on the various ways in which young people are engaged in social networking sites.¹⁸ They explain how, just as physical spaces are used in many different ways and individuals' experiences of physical space will vary, so young people's use and experience of social networking sites will vary.

However, they make the point that broadly, social networking sites are places where young people:

- **spend a lot of time:** Withers and Sheldon found that young people spend upwards of two hours a night on social networking sites.¹⁹
- **communicate with existing friends:** the most common use of social networking sites among young people (over 91 per cent according to Ofcom)²⁰ is to keep in touch with, and continue conversations with, existing friends and peers. The social networking site space is an extension of physical conversation space for many young people in this constantly connected generation.
- **express themselves:** young people express their personalities and beliefs by creating profiles, sharing media, affiliating to groups and exchanging messages. Social networking sites are spaces to identify formation and exploration and for personal and political expression.
- **exchange messages:** many young people use the inboxes provided by social networking site messaging systems in preference to email, as only allowing messages from their friends list keeps the inbox relatively spam free. Young people also use the public messageboard features on social networking sites to leave messages for each other, often commenting on each other's creative work, discussing shared experiences or arranging their social lives.
- **organise and collaborate:** from using groups to alert friends to a lost mobile phone and using event-organising features to promote parties, to starting significant campaigns such as the US school students' walk-out in protest at immigration legislation, social networking sites provide a collaboration and organisation platform for young people
- **consume media, hang out, interact with bands and brands:** many social networking sites are highly media driven, rich in audio and video, and watching or listening to content through social networking sites is replacing TV and radio for many young people. Entertainment created specifically for social networking sites has recently emerged, with the Kate Modern interactive soap opera on Bebo creating regular three-minute episodes which users can interact with. Most social networking sites are funded by advertising and young people are likely to be targeted by a lot of advertising during their time using the sites and services.

How are local authorities using social networking sites to enable participation?

Children and young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them; this is laid out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Every Child Matters, the Children Act 2004, and Youth Matters.

Their participation is fundamental to achieve change to improve services and to ensure the best outcome for them as expressed in the Every Child Matters outcomes for children framework: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and economic wellbeing.

There is of course the very real problem that local authorities face in involving those children and young people that have difficulty in accessing children's services. The gap across all five outcomes between the most disadvantaged, often most vulnerable, children and young people, and their peers, the 200,000 children and young people not in education or training provide stark and disturbing evidence of this.

The following examples provide important information for local authorities and their partners in the involvement of children and young people in the democratic process.

- Hear by Right, a standards framework for the participation of children and young people 2008, is an initiative of the National Youth Agency in conjunction with the LGA. It includes some reference to online tools as a means of engaging young people, with a view to improving services for all local people.
- The use of social networking sites provides an important opportunity to involve the very children and young people that have proved to be hard to reach. Savvy Chavvy, the social network site for traveller children provides a good illustration of this. ('Chavvy' in this case is a Romany term of affection for a young person.) This online network for young gypsies was set up in February by Nathalie McDermott of On Road Media and already has more than 1,000 members. The site has won a community award for its ability to enable young people to share their culture and feel less isolated.
- Youth workers in Devon are actively engaging young people through their groups such as a young parents group, *Don't judge us before you know us* and Get your voice heard! The sites are set up and maintained by the youth workers to establish and maintain communication with groups of vulnerable young people across Devon to support young people's expression of their views, their participation in instigating change and deliver opportunities to have their views heard by decision makers within Devon County Council, Devon Childers Trust, Devon Youth Service and Connexions.

Young carers have historically been difficult for local authorities to support. There is a lack of mechanisms to enable the systematic collation of information on young people caring for relatives or siblings. Yet we know that the numbers are increasing. Norfolk County Council has successfully applied web 2.0 technologies to meet the needs of young carers in their area.

While social networking sites provide opportunities for local government and its partners to involve children and young people in the democratic process, there remain concerns that the

use of social networking sites to engage children and young people may not produce sufficient results to merit changing services.

Or, as is the case with using the internet for any type of evidence base, it may be difficult to prove that those using the sites to communicate their views on a service are really representative of sufficient young people to justify changes to services.

Social networking sites can be used alongside other methods such as questionnaires, surveys in schools or youth clubs, face to face interviews, focus groups, youth parliaments, national reference groups and committees.

Risk management when using social networking sites

It is vital to consider safety when using social networking sites. However few safety issues are insurmountable and responsible adult engagement through the local authority is likely to make them safer.

Keeping children and young people safe in an online environment

Local authorities using social networking sites should be conversant with the work of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), a leader in the field of online safety. Likewise IT providers should be subject to the same scrutiny as anybody else within services that work directly with children, including the use of CRB checks.

Training and development for the children's workforce

Argyll and Bute council has banned teachers from Twitter. The ban followed the inappropriate use of the site by a teacher who used it to criticise pupils. Yet blanket bans, however understandable, are rarely the best way forward and are usually unworkable. What we really need here is a code of professional ethics for working with social network sites.

We must equip, enable and train the children's workforce to understand and utilise this relatively new phenomenon safely and with professionalism.

Where next?

The LGiU project on social networking sites and youth participation is currently drafting guidance for local authorities already using social networking or thinking about engaging children and young people through the use of social networking sites.

The LGiU social networking sites project has also initiated sub groups along the following themes:

Joint commissioning

In each area a Children's Trust is accountable for the development of a local Children and Young People's Plan. This plan sets out the actions required for improving a series of established 'outcomes' for children and young people including 'staying safe'.

The joint commissioning process determines the way in which all the partners involved in the Trust purchase services. Bearing in mind that children and young people should be consulted on the design of such services, this project seeks to embed the use of social network sites in the joint commissioning of children's services process.

The idea is to apply the use of sites to actively engage children and young people in the commissioning process and realise the potential of new technologies to engage children and young people that find children's services hard to reach. Partners in this project include Leicester City, Kent, Milton Keynes, Darlington and Salford.

Children in care and social networking sites

This group is committed to finding ways to apply web 2.0 technology to actively engage children and young people in or leaving the care system, to improve their outcomes through the provision of effective and familiar discussion dialogue and collaboration online spaces. Partners involved in this project are Birmingham and Merton.

Shepherding Change

This refers to a proposed application, which resembles a virtual pet, to encourage the involvement of young people in consultation through councils' website. Users will be encouraged to download the application on their social networking site profiles.

At present we are considering the first pet to be a sheep. The user is made aware that this application is a consultation device and that to keep the sheep 'alive/healthy' it must be fed with answers periodically. Norfolk County Council, Stevenage Borough Council, Darlington Borough Council and South Hams District Council are all involved in this proposal.

The use of social networking sites for safeguarding

The LGiU is now exploring the application of web 2.0 technology to enable all practitioners working with children and families to communicate with each other and the families they support on the issues involving that family.

The idea is to equip health and social workers, teachers, and representatives from the voluntary and community sector with a secure network where they can exchange thoughts and information on the children and families that they support, often in real time. This group includes work with FutureGov consultancy in conjunction with interested Directors of Children's Services and representatives from CEOP.

Social network application group and participation toolbox

This group will produce a toolkit for use by local authorities and its partners when working to engage young people in local democracy. Partners in this group include local government representatives from Kirklees, Stevenage, Medway, Gateshead, Wiltshire, Blackburn, Southampton, Nottingham, West Berkshire and Wiltshire and Practical Participation.

A fundamental shift in approach

Instead of the classic top down approach in which adults frame the way young people are able to communicate their ideas, the social networking sites have the potential to enable young people to shape dialogue and bring a new dynamic to local democratic participation.

As so many young people are actively engaged in social networking, it is no longer permissible for local authorities to expect young people to 'come to us'.

Using social networking sites is a case of going to where young people are. It can also provide a powerful means of peer marketing and promotion that can enable a participation opportunity to reach a wider range of young people.

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Notes

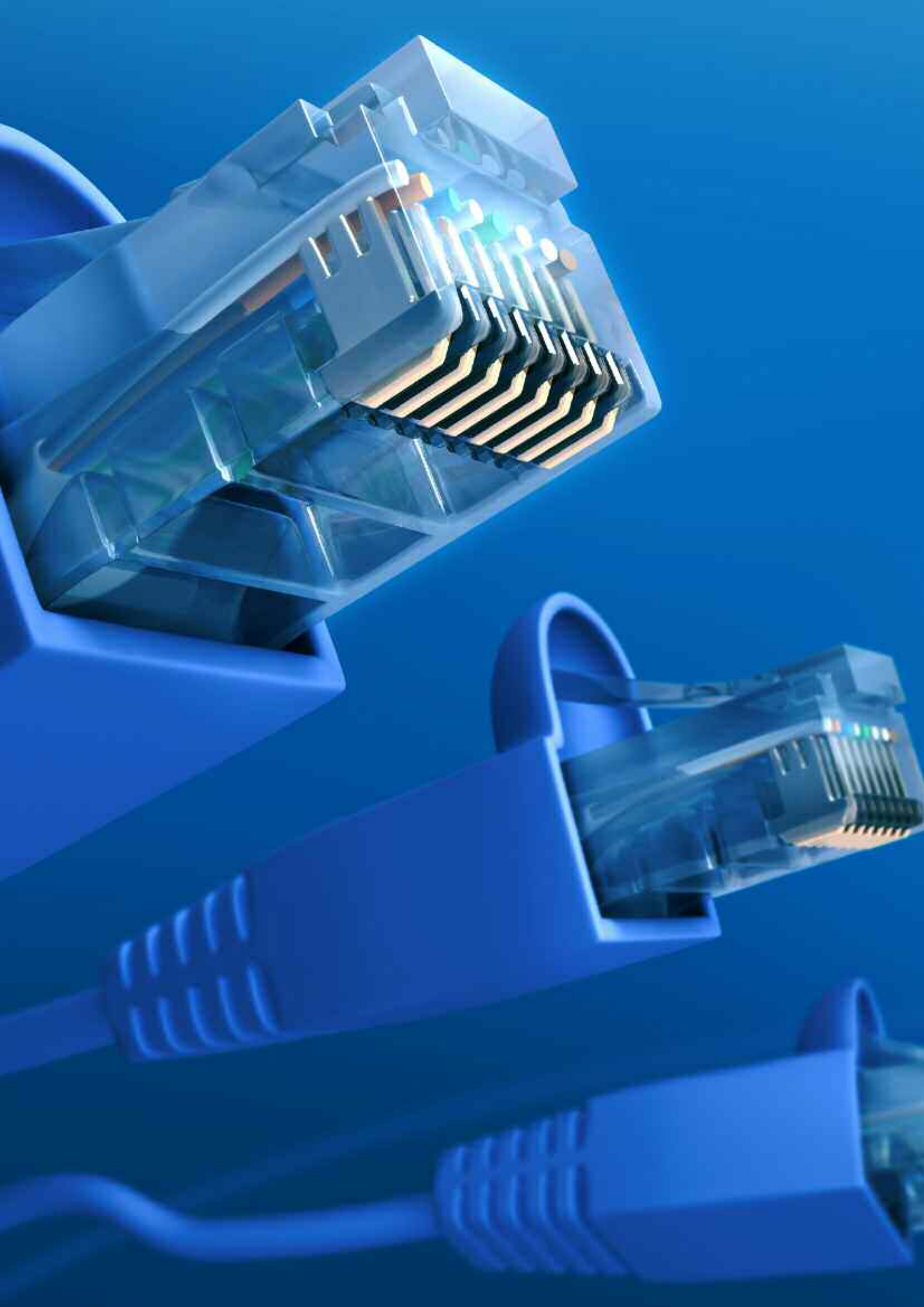
16 Hansard Society, *Audit of Political Engagement 4*, 2007

17 Ofcom, *Social Networking: a quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use*, 2008

18 Davies, T & Cranston, P, *Youth Work and Social Networking: How can Youth Work best support young people to navigate the risks and make the most of the opportunities of online social networking?*, 2008

19 Withers, K & Sheldon, R, *Behind the Screen: The hidden life of youth online*, IPPR, 2008

20 Ofcom, *Ibid*



CONCLUSION

These papers highlight the huge amount of creative work going on in councils across the country to use social networking, blogs, Twitter and other web 2.0 technologies to promote local democracy and deliver services to local people.

Indeed such is this variety that it is difficult to draw general conclusions from it. We can see though that local government is leading the way in the use of new technologies and is particularly strong in connecting online and offline activity.

As part of our work to support future innovation in local government, particularly unlocking the potential of new technology to deliver real improvements to services and in communities, we are making the following recommendations:

- Councils should encourage staff at all levels to use web 2.0 technologies and should ensure that IT policies support this aim.
- Access to the internet remains a live issue. The Government's recent Digital Britain paper contains a commitment to making high speed broadband available to all households by 2012, but councils have a key role to play in encouraging take up. Older people should be a key focus for these efforts.
- Central government should recognise and support good practice in the use of new technologies in local government
- Councils need to use the web more proactively to engage communities around environmental issues, but this commitment must be backed by online transparency about the environmental impact of the council's own activities, estates and supply chains.
- Councils need to use social networking technologies to engage young people. At the very least they need to allow access to social networking sites from council IT systems.

In more general terms we can see that there are few hard and fast rules about the use of web 2.0 technologies. Different tools apply in different ways to different problems at different times. Nonetheless, we can see some common factors for success in the examples gathered here. It's important to be open minded, experimental, willing to engage in dialogue and to question (or allow others to question) existing hierarchies and ways of working. Achieving successful outcomes will involve uncertainty and productive chaos along the way and it is essential to adopt a mindset that is comfortable with this way of working with people. Collaboration is becoming a more vital currency than control.

In time it will become redundant to talk about 'using the web' as these techniques and tools become fully integrated into the way in which councils work. But it's vital to mainstream the mindset as well as the technology and ensure that the best aspects of the web — open, collaborative, non hierarchical and thus, ultimately, democratic — are central to all our activities online and off.

The LGiU is the largest, most influential think-tank and representative body operating in the space between Town Hall, Whitehall, Westminster and communities. Now in its 26th year, the LGiU continues to make a significant impact on public policy. In 2008 the LGiU was awarded the Public Affairs News award for think-tank of the year.

Our mission is to strengthen local democracy. Four policy centres — Service Transformation, Local Sustainability, Local Democracy and Children's Services — ensure that the LGiU's focus is on how councils and partners can deliver positive results and genuine impact for empowered communities.



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