

Revitalising Democracy in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

The Report of
Assembly South

January 2016

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Executive Summary

Assembly South was a citizens' assembly for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

- A citizens' assembly is a gathering of citizens who are chosen randomly (with stratification) to be representative of the local population.
- They meet over a period of time to discuss and make recommendations on a particular issue. Their work comprises three phases: they learn about the issues on their agenda and the options available, consult with experts and witnesses holding a diverse range of views, and then deliberate on the issues in order to reach decisions.

Assembly South is part of a project called Democracy Matters that ran two citizens' assemblies: Assembly South based in Southampton and Assembly North in Sheffield. The project has two objectives:

1. To assess whether creating citizens' assemblies could strengthen democracy in the UK and to build knowledge on how such assemblies might best be run;
2. To investigate what members of the public in England think about devolution when they are given the opportunity to learn about and debate the issue in depth.

The Assembly focused on how the Hampshire and Isle of Wight region should be governed.

- It comprised 23 citizens and 6 councillors from the Solent and Isle of Wight area and met over two weekends in October and November 2015.
- It was an opportunity to respond to the document *Devolution for the People of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: A Prospectus for Discussion (HIOW Prospectus)* that had been submitted to central government by the leaders of the 15 local authorities, the two Local Enterprise Partnerships and the two National Park Authorities within that area.
- Assembly members heard from signatories of the *HIOW Prospectus* as well as from representatives of other viewpoints. They developed considerable knowledge and understanding of the issues and options before reaching conclusions.

In summary, Assembly South made the following recommendations:

- The Assembly is evenly split on its support for the current *HIOW Prospectus*.
- Any regional body should cover the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) area (as set out in the *HIOW Prospectus*)
- The first priority of a regional body should be the integration of health and social care (currently not part of the *HIOW Prospectus*).
- The first preference is for an elected assembly (rather than the government's favoured option of a directly elected mayor).
- The Assembly also generated and voted on a range of propositions on how they should be governed locally.

Detailed analysis of the work of the Assembly will take some time. It is nevertheless already clear that the Assembly has demonstrated that regular citizens are ready, willing and able to engage with complex policy and governance debates when given appropriate support and opportunity.

Introduction

Assembly South was part of an important new experiment in how to organise democracy effectively. It consisted of a group of 23 citizens and 6 councillors from the Solent and Isle of Wight area who met in Southampton over two weekends in October and November 2015 to discuss the future of local governance. The aim was to select the citizens randomly to be broadly representative of the local adult population. During the two weekends, they learned about the different options, consulted with advocates of a range of views, deliberated on what they had heard, and formed recommendations.

Assembly South was one of two citizens' assembly pilots organised by Democracy Matters, a collaboration of university researchers and civil society organisations¹ supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. The second pilot assembly, Assembly North, ran over the same period in Sheffield and has produced its own report.

These pilots had two objectives:

1. To assess whether the creation of citizens' assemblies could improve the operation of democracy in the UK and to build knowledge on how such assemblies might best be run;
2. To investigate what members of the public in England think about devolution when they are given the opportunity to learn about and debate the issue in depth.

Assembly South was particularly timely: in September 2015, the leaders of the 15 local authorities, the two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the two National Park Authorities (NPAs) that cover Hampshire and the Isle of Wight submitted *Devolution for the People of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: A Prospectus for Discussion with Government* (HIOW Prospectus) to Central Government. This proposal (which had not been ratified by the local councils) became a central topic of discussion amongst Assembly members.

The main outcomes of Assembly South are that members were evenly split on their support for the current devolution proposals. Their recommendation is for a regional body that covers the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) area and prioritises the integration of health and social care. Their first preference is for an elected assembly.

A key finding of the research team is that randomly selected citizens are ready, willing and able to engage with complex policy and governance debates when given appropriate support and opportunity.

¹These include the University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, the University of Westminster and the Electoral Reform Society.

This report sets out the background to the creation of Assembly South. It describes the Assembly in terms of its composition and working methods. It then presents a detailed outline of the Assembly's discussions and recommendations. It concludes by briefly reflecting on lessons learned and next steps.

Detailed analysis of the Assembly's work will take some time and will be presented in subsequent reports. It appears clear to the Democracy Matters research team, however, that the Assembly was a tremendous success. We therefore look forward to advancing the citizens' assembly model further as a part of the democratic system in the UK.

The Background to Assembly South

The introduction set out the two core goals of the Democracy Matters project. This section offers some background to these two goals: why did we choose to organise citizens' assemblies, and why did those assemblies focus on the subject of devolution?

Why a Citizens' Assembly?

The issue of how best to engage citizens in democratic processes is pressing. Dissatisfaction with existing democratic systems is widespread, participation in elections is below historical levels, and the quality of public debate is low. Supporters of existing systems suggest that, in complex and diverse societies, it is not possible to hear the voice of every citizen on every issue, particularly where many citizens may have limited interest, information or understanding. Meanwhile, critics of current arrangements argue that most citizens (and particularly members of minority groups) are poorly represented and that opportunities for democratic engagement should be both extended and deepened.

What is a citizens' assembly?

A citizens' assembly is a group of citizens who gather to deliberate on an issue.

The members are not self-selected: they are chosen randomly, with stratification, to ensure they are broadly representative of the population as a whole.

Discussions are structured so that members can consider issues in depth and learn about a wide range of options and views before reaching conclusions.

Such assemblies have been used as part of democratic processes in Canada, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Citizens' assemblies offer one solution to this challenge. They bring together a random selection of citizens who are broadly representative of the wider population. These citizens learn about the issues under consideration, hear evidence from experts and other interested parties, deliberate amongst themselves and then come to recommendations. Such assemblies ensure not only a diversity of experience and perspectives, but also deep and considered engagement with complex policy issues among citizens. In some cases, their recommendations provide political leaders with guidance by identifying new alternatives or options, and in others, they become the focus of direct forms of democracy (e.g., referendums).

There are also practical advantages to citizens' assemblies. Through random selection they can give voice to less politically active citizens who are hard to access in usual public consultation processes. Further, assembly members are generally asked to consider the full range of arguments available to decision-makers, and their

deliberations approximate how a diverse community might respond to complex political issues if they were more fully informed.

Citizens' assemblies have been conducted on single issues (such as electoral reform) in Canada and the Netherlands and on multiple constitutional issues in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish case led, most notably, to a referendum and subsequent changes in the law on same-sex marriage.

Most citizens' assemblies have involved citizens only. However, the Irish assembly was innovative by including one-third politicians among the members, which may have increased the political impact of assembly recommendations. In recognition of the growing interest in both of these approaches in the UK, the Democracy Matters project tested both designs: Assembly North comprised citizens only; Assembly South included citizens and local councillors.

Why Devolution?

Assembly South focused on devolution because this is a highly topical constitutional issue in much of the country today. 'Devolution deals' are a major plank of government policy. They entail significant constitutional reshaping, but have so far been driven mainly by concerns about economic development, particularly in the north of England. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority was the first to agree to a devolution deal with the previous coalition government in 2014 and additional powers (including in health and social care) were announced in 2015. A number of further devolution deals have been either proposed or finalised across England, including in Sheffield, Liverpool, West Yorkshire and Cornwall.

These deals are negotiated between central government and leaders of local authorities. The government typically (but not always) requires an elected mayor as a precondition of a deal. However, the announcement of an agreement between the Chancellor and city region leaders does not immediately constitute new arrangements: public consultation and support from local councils are needed for a final deal. Critics claim that these deals have been made behind closed doors, that local leaders will use party discipline to ensure that they are 'done deals' and that any consultations will be superficial. Advocates say that the practicalities of negotiating between levels of government mean they cannot be carried out effectively in public and that the coming months will provide an important opportunity to consult and strike stronger deals.

In September 2015, the 15 local authorities, the two Local Enterprise Partnerships and the two National Park Authorities that cover Hampshire and the Isle of Wight submitted *Devolution for the People of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: A Prospectus for Discussion with Government (HIOW Prospectus)*. At the time of this report, the *HIOW Prospectus* is still under consideration by the Government. Assembly South provided a

timely opportunity to offer insights into the views of citizens on the local implications of devolution.

Assembly South: Composition and Working Methods

Two aspects of a citizens' assembly are crucial to any judgements about its success: the degree to which its members are representative of the broader population in their area; and the degree to which their work fosters informed, considered thinking about the issues in hand. We address these two points in this section.

Who Participated in Assembly South?

Assembly South comprised citizens from the Solent and Isle of Wight area. This area was chosen to ensure a mix of locations (urban and rural; different local authorities) and reasonable ease of access to Southampton where the Assembly took place. The objective was to have 45 participants:

- 30 citizens selected randomly to fill various socio-demographic characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity and political persuasion;
- 15 local councillors from different political parties and councils.

The project team did not necessarily expect to achieve this objective as members were not offered an honorarium and there was no established avenue for Assembly outcomes to have direct political influence (both features of citizens' assemblies in other countries). However, the project was able to offer hotel accommodation, meals and compensation for travel costs.

On the day before the first Assembly South weekend, 31 citizens and 14 councillors had indicated that they would attend. However, on the first weekend the Assembly was made up of 29 participants:

- 23 citizens broadly representative of gender and political persuasion;
- 6 councillors (2 Con, 1 Lib Dem, 2 Lab and 1 UKIP from 5 different authorities in the Solent area).

For the second weekend, three citizen participants and one councillor were unable to attend because of illness. One other councillor failed to attend.

Citizen participants were selected from the YouGov online panel. Invitations to complete an initial survey were sent to all members of this panel in the Solent and Isle of Wight area (around 4,000 people). This survey asked general questions about attitudes towards politics and whether respondents would be interested in taking part in a citizens' assembly. Respondents did not know what the topic of the assembly would be, and so were not able to opt in or out on that basis. A second survey of those who initially expressed interest provided more detail on the assembly and asked if they

would be available to attend on the proposed dates. Finally, those who responded were contacted by telephone via YouGov to explain more about the event and to answer any questions.

The final sample of citizens was broadly representative in terms of gender and political persuasion. However, because the response rate to the filtering survey was low, it was not possible to meet quota targets to ensure that the assembly was representative in terms of age or ethnic background. Members also displayed, on average, higher levels of political interest than the general population, although the group included many who were not already engaged in formal party politics.

The local councillors – drawn from city, borough and district councils in the Solent region – were invited to participate by the Southern Policy Centre and were selected to be broadly representative of the balance of elected officeholders across the region. It is not clear yet why the majority of councillors (9 out of 14, with one replacement arranged at the last minute) who agreed to participate failed to attend.

As part of the project, we will be conducting further research into the demographic characteristics of who participates in citizens' assemblies and what can be done to ensure participants are more representative of local and national populations. We will also be exploring why some local councillors committed to the process, but did not then follow through by attending the weekends.

What Did Assembly South Do?

Both assemblies were structured into three phases: learning, consultation, and deliberation/ decision. This was designed to ensure that final recommendations were carefully considered and well informed. Successful discussions of this kind require three resources: access to information, expertise, and diverse viewpoints; capacity for inclusive, considered deliberation; and a strong sense of community among members. We worked hard to build each of these.

In order to provide background information, the academic team prepared a set of detailed briefing papers that introduced the issues that the Assembly would be discussing. These were vetted by a range of experts with varying perspectives to ensure neutrality. Assembly members were given copies at the start of the first weekend; the papers were also posted on the Assembly website, where they remain freely available.

Building upon this foundation, members received interactive talks by academic team members during the first weekend outlining the current local government system and various reform options. Members then heard from witnesses with diverse backgrounds, who expressed a very wide range of views. Witnesses at the first weekend were

selected by the academic team to represent as far as possible the range of options that are currently advocated.

To maximise opportunities for effective and inclusive discussion, the assembly alternated between small-group discussions chaired by facilitators and whole-group plenaries, including presentations. Engagement with witnesses varied between plenary Q&As and 'speed dating' (witnesses visiting small groups). Both pilots also helped members engage with the issues between and after the two weekends through a closed Facebook group that continued discussions and raised questions.

We worked hard to build community, forge a constructive culture, support deliberation and ensure retention between meetings. We embedded a range of team-building activities into the weekends. Early in the first weekend, Assembly members discussed the values that should underpin their working methods. The support team aimed to address any problems or concerns raised by Assembly members.

Thirty per cent of the Assembly contributed to the Facebook group. While this figure may seem low, it is above the 20 per cent that is the standard engagement result for online communities.

Assembly South's schedule is summarised below.

Weekend 1: Learning and Consultation

Saturday (10–17.30)	Sunday (9.30–15.00)
<i>Morning</i>	
Getting to know each other (small group)	Reviewing options (small group)
Setting values and ground rules (small group and plenary)	Generating questions (small group)
Experience of local government (small group and plenary)	Hearing and questioning witnesses* (plenary)
	Generating further questions (small group)
<i>Afternoon</i>	
Local government now (lecture)	Question time with witnesses (plenary)
Expectations of local government (small group and voting on priorities)	Reflections on options (small group)
Options for reform: devolution deals, regional assemblies, neighbourhood decentralisation (lecture and small group)	Requests for further information (small group and plenary)

* Witnesses: Cllr Stephen Godfrey (Leader, Winchester City Council); Cllr Steven Lugg (Chief Executive of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils); Mike Smith (ex-Director Finance and Executive Director, Southampton City Council); Dr Joannie Willett (University of Exeter)

Between the weekends, the support team pursued Assembly members' questions and requests for further information. This was assisted by the House of Commons Library and the Southern Policy Centre. Responses were posted on the Facebook page or

presented at the second weekend. The composition of the witnesses at the second weekend stemmed directly from members' requests.

Weekend 2: Further Consultation, Deliberation and Decision-Making

Saturday (10.30-17.00)	Sunday (9.30-15.00)
<i>Morning</i>	
Thoughts since Weekend 1 (small group and plenary)	Voting on devolved body
Recalling options and HIOW devolution prospectus (lecture)	1. Objectives
Hearing from witnesses** (plenary)	2. Geography
Witness speed dating (small groups)	3. Governing structure
	Revisiting hopes and fears (small group and plenary)
	Open space (small group and plenary)
<i>Afternoon</i>	
Hopes and fears for devolution (small group)	Voting on open space statements
Prioritising objectives for devolved body (small group and plenary)	How can we take the message out? (small group and plenary)
Geographical scope of devolved body (small group and plenary)	Reflections on the process (small group and plenary)
Governing structure of devolved body (small group and plenary)	Results of votes

** Witnesses on topics requested by participants: Mike Emmerich (ex-Chief Executive of the Manchester think tank New Economy on Manchester devolution deal); Clr Roy Perry (Leader, Hampshire County Council and signatory of the HIOW devolution prospectus); Dr Matt Ryan (University of Southampton on devolution around the world); Prof. Gerry Stoker (University of Southampton on democratic accountability); Willie Sullivan (Director of Electoral Reform Society Scotland on Scottish devolution).

Assembly South's Recommendations

Assembly South focused on the question of how Hampshire and Isle of Wight should be governed. In the second weekend, the Assembly considered its preferred characteristics of any new devolved body that might be created above the level of current local authorities. Discussions were structured around three broad areas:

- *Priorities*: If a devolved body is to be created, what should its priorities be?
- *Scale*: If a devolved body is to be created, what area should it cover?
- *Structures*: If a devolved body is to be created, how should decision-making be organised?

The small group discussions generated options for each of these issues that were then voted on at the beginning of the final day of the Assembly.

In addition, members took part in an 'Open Space'. This allowed them to suggest issues that they felt had not been discussed in enough depth in the Assembly. Small table discussions generated topics and there were two rounds of discussions led by specific members who had suggested the issue. Other members could move to any discussion that was of interest. Each open space discussion generated a proposition that was then voted on by the Assembly as a whole to ensure that there was broad support.

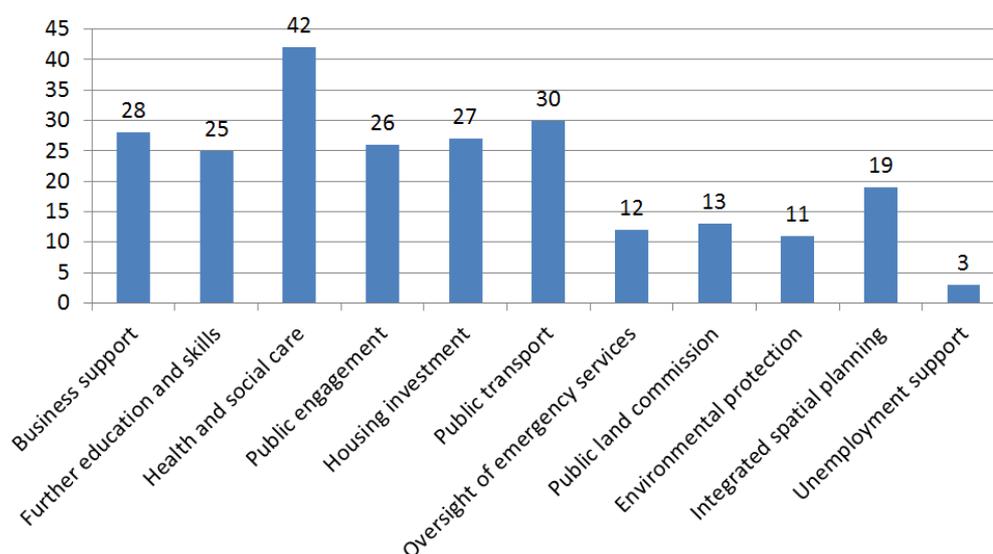
Finally, assembly members were also asked to consider whether they would support the *HIOW Prospectus* if a referendum were held tomorrow on the proposal.

The results of the votes are explained below.

Priorities for a devolved body

Assembly members generated a list of potential priorities from the powers of existing devolution deals and devolved nations in the UK. The top five priorities generated by each table were then collated into a ballot. Participants were given 10 votes to allocate to any of the priorities (i.e. it was possible to concentrate or spread votes). Figure 1 shows the spread of votes.

Figure 1. Voting on priorities for a devolved body



The top priority is clearly ‘Health and social care: integration to ensure responsiveness to local needs’. It is notable that this is *not* part of the *HIOW Prospectus*. Across the English devolution deals, only Greater Manchester has come to an agreement with central government to devolve responsibilities in this area of policy.

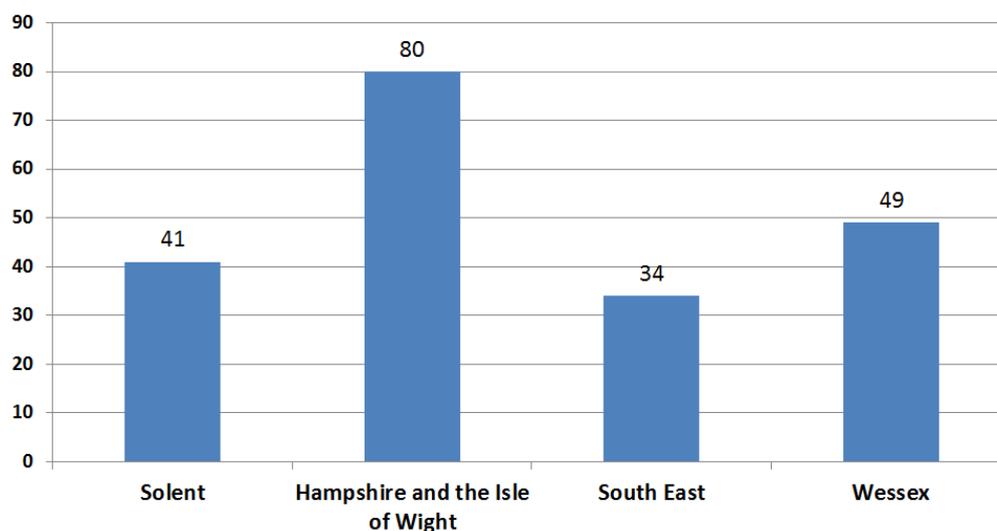
Five other policy areas were closely bunched in terms of preference (in order of priority):

- Public transport (providing the framework for more effective, accessible and integrated public transport).
- Business support.
- Housing investment (investment in housing that responds to local needs).
- Public engagement (to ensure shared decision-making and transparency).
- Further education and training.

The scale of a devolved body

Assembly members selected four geographical areas from their small group discussions to put to a vote. Preferential voting was used, with members ranking the possible options between 1 and 4. First votes were weighted as four, through to the fourth vote weighted as one (known as a standard Borda Count). The results of the vote are in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Voting on geographical scale of devolved body

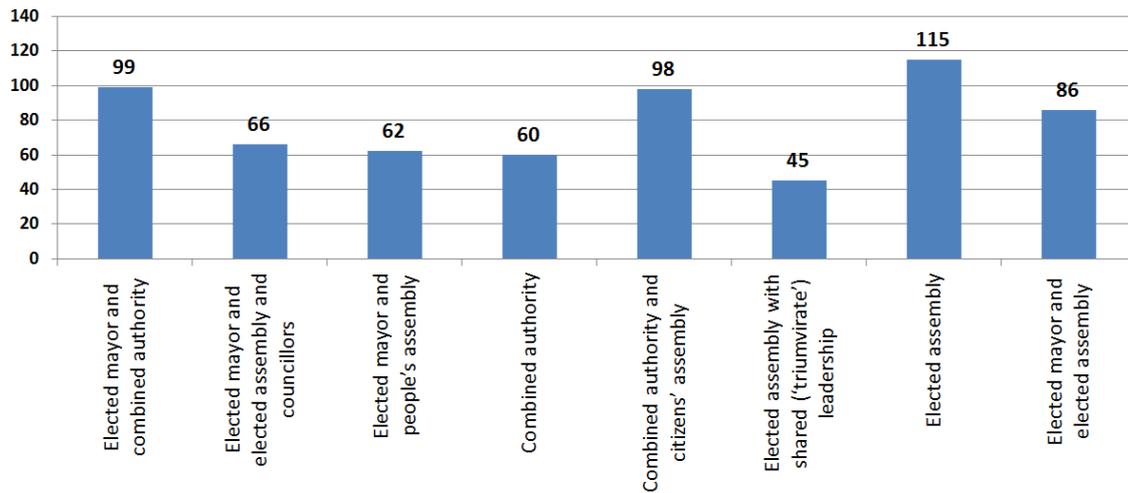


The obvious favoured option on geographical scope is Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: the area covered by Hampshire County Council and the three unitary authorities of Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton. This is a clear endorsement of the geographical area promoted by the *HIOW Prospectus*.

Decision making structures of a devolved body

The small group discussions on decision-making structures generated 8 different governance structures, indicating the extent to which Assembly members were creative in thinking about issues such as democratic accountability. A preferential vote was used, ranking the possible options (identified by the groups) between 1 and 8. The results in Figure 3 are generated by weighting the first preference as eight points through to eighth preference (where chosen) as one point (standard Borda Count).

Figure 3. Voting on decision making structure of devolved body



The favoured governing structure is a directly elected assembly ('An assembly made up of representatives elected by the public – the assembly then selects its leader'). This arrangement is not on the Government's agenda currently. The second choice is the Government's preference that it is requiring in most devolution deals: elected mayor and combined authority ('Mayor directly elected by the public; and a body made up of leaders of local councils'). An innovative design is third by only one point: combined authority and citizens' assembly ('A body made up of leaders of local councils; and an assembly of randomly selected citizens').

The results are sensitive to the form of voting system used. If only first preferences are taken (first past the post), then the combined authority and citizens' assembly option is the most popular (by one vote). Under an alternative Borda Count, the second and third options are reversed.

Further reflections on local governance: results of the Open Space

The following propositions were generated by Assembly members through the Open Space discussions. All received assent from the Assembly and are presented in order of popularity. Many are contrary to current Government policy. [Figures for 'agree'/'disagree' are in brackets – 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'don't know' are not included]:

- There needs to be greater capacity for collaboration and effective partnerships between public agencies (24/0);

- Local government need to support and resource the use of all possible channels to motivate public participation (23/1);
- In public consultations, it is important to take care to be clear about the meaning of terms and purposes that are to be discussed (22/0);
- Central government should set a minimum level of standards for service delivery, leaving room for local autonomy (22/1);
- If there is an elected mayor, there should be a system of recall (21/2);
- High levels of public participation promote good quality decision-making in local government (20/1);
- There needs to be greater equality and consistency in the devolution of powers (20/1);
- Local councils should be elected under some form of proportional representation (18/4);
- If there is an elected mayor, they should take on the responsibilities of the Police and Crime Commissioner (17/3);
- Costs should not exceed the costs of running services under existing arrangements (17/6);
- We need a system of local government where more independents stand for local office, reducing the power of political parties (16/5);
- If there is an elected mayor, they should be elected by transferable vote (14/3);
- The focus of devolution on organisations means that we are not starting from the perspective of people and their different needs and wishes (10/0);
- Any new body that is created should be able to challenge austerity, including the capacity to raise local business rates (10/2);
- If there is a new devolved authority, Hampshire County Council should be abolished (10/5).

Response to the current *HIOW Prospectus*

Assembly members were evenly split in their support the proposal that is currently under consideration by central government: *Devolution for the People of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: A Prospectus for Discussion*. Precisely 50 per cent voted in favour of the *HIOW Prospectus*, with the same number against.

Lessons Learned about Citizens' Assemblies

Detailed analyses of the operation of Assembly South and the lessons that can be learned will take some time to complete and will be presented in future reports. For now, we offer observations that are based on feedback from Assembly members and the impressions of the members of the Democracy Matters team.

The first and most important lesson is that the participants in Assembly South were willing and able to deal with highly complex contemporary governance issues. By their own assessment, all members agreed that they had 'learned a lot' during the process, while many went out of their way to write strongly complementary statements in the final survey at the end of the final day. The Democracy Matters team was deeply impressed by the extent of members' commitment and the quality of their engagement during the weekends.

Second, one of the rationales for including councillors as members of Assembly South was to understand how their participation affects the deliberations of a citizens' assembly. In the survey of participants at the end of each weekend, we asked members whether one or more people in their small group had tended to dominate the discussion so that others found it difficult to contribute. At the end of the first weekend a third of members stated that such domination was present in their small group discussions, a figure far higher than Assembly North where there were no councillors present. Observation of the groups (to be confirmed by further analysis) suggests that citizens often deferred to the councillor on their table when faced with challenging questions on local governance. At the end of the second weekend, however, the perception of domination amongst members had dropped significantly. There are a number of explanations for this change: the small groups were reshuffled and rebalanced in the second weekend; facilitators were more experienced in ensuring fairness in participation; and participants had grown in confidence and knowledge by the second weekend and were less likely to allow others to dominate.

Third, the importance of considering *how* witnesses provide evidence to Assembly members became clear across the two weekends. One of the advantages of citizens' assemblies is that members hear from witnesses with a range of different opinions. In the first weekend, a traditional witness format was used: witnesses presented their case for 5 minutes; participants worked in groups to generate questions; selected questions are then answered in a plenary session. This relatively formal format is controlled by the Chair, with most participants simply observers and relatively few questions can be answered. The second weekend experimented with 'Witness Speed Dating'. This worked in a very different way and changed the power dynamics noticeably. Again, witnesses presented their case in 5 minutes; and participants generated questions in small groups. But then the witnesses circulated round each table with 8 minutes at each one.

Members knew that they only had witnesses with them for a short time and so demanded succinct answers. And they were able to follow up if those answers were not acceptable. Members embraced the opportunity to question witnesses directly, while the extent to which participants felt empowered after this exercise was noticeable and the activity received highly positive comments.

Fourth, the Open Space organised on the final day also proved a positive innovation. Although the agenda for the Assembly was open for discussion, it was primarily driven by the interests of the research team. Having focused on the *HIOW Prospectus* and the potential characteristics of any new devolved body, members were given space to discuss issues that they felt had not been given enough time in the Assembly. Members who suggested topics then led the discussions with other members also interested in that particular issue. Some groups were large, others only contained two members, but it gave space for these conversations to take place. Each group produced a proposition that was then voted on by the whole Assembly to gauge whether there was broad support for the statement. Again, there was positive feedback on this activity.

Finally, Assembly South highlighted important issues around the future sustainability of citizens' assemblies at local government level. Although more effective from a democratic perspective than many other consultation mechanisms, they remain expensive. Quality deliberation takes considerable time. Members deserve to be treated well during that time, requiring good hotels, meeting facilities, food, and refreshments, all of which come at a cost. The success of Assembly South depended on a large team of student facilitators and helpers who gave their time freely, but who would not be available on a regular basis. Involvement in a citizens' assembly is also time-consuming for its members and there were retention challenges in Assembly South (although most related to illness). These challenges highlight the need for careful consideration of timing and choice of topics for future assemblies, as well as consideration of scale and resources. However, the success of the Democracy Matters citizens' assembly pilots demonstrates that the conditions for future sustainability at the local level are worthy of further examination.

What Next?

As outlined previously, Assembly South is a key part of a wider project – Democracy Matters – that has two objectives: to investigate the value of citizens’ assemblies as part of democracy in the UK; and to contribute to debates about devolution in England. While detailed analysis of the Assembly’s work will take some time, the initial impression both of Assembly members and of the Democracy Matters team is that it operated successfully. Its conclusions therefore deserve to be listened to by politicians, in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, national government, and beyond.

Since the conclusion of the Assembly’s formal work, citizen members have contacted local representatives, engaged local community groups, and spoken with friends and family about the current devolution proposals and the assembly’s recommendations. Councillor members have presented the assembly’s recommendations in council meetings about the HIOW Devolution prospectus. This report will be an important element in communicating key findings to local councils and other interested parties.

Although the citizens’ assembly is an experiment in democratic practice, we wanted to ensure that, as well as learning as much as possible about what works best, it has as much impact on the real world as possible. To do this the project team made contact with a range of democratic practitioners ranging from NGOs, parliamentarians, government ministers and civil servants, highlighting the importance of the work that was being carried out by the assembly. The political relevance of this was demonstrated by the attendance and keen engagement of local MP Alan Whitehead and Leader of Hampshire County Council Roy Perry. This was in addition to endorsements of the process by several local Members of Parliament, party representatives and the formal participation of several local councillors as Assembly members.

The Assembly’s work will continue throughout 2016. Further workshops are planned that will involve Assembly members, politicians, policy officers and civil society groups. And, in the coming months, detailed analyses of the Assembly will be conducted and published in publicly accessible reports, practitioner guides and academic publications.

In addition, in early 2016, the Democracy Matters project will bring together the members of Assembly North and South in a single event. The purpose is to celebrate both Assemblies’ achievements and share their outcomes with politicians, practitioners and the media across the UK. This event will be held at St George’s House, Windsor Castle, and the organisers of Democracy Matters are deeply grateful for their hospitality.

Acknowledgements

The Democracy Matters team is led by Professor Matthew Flinders (University of Sheffield). The Academic Director of Assembly South was Professor Graham Smith (University of Westminster). Other members of the team are Professor Will Jennings, Professor Gerry Stoker and Dr Paolo Spada (all University of Southampton), Dr Brenton Prosser (University of Sheffield), Dr Alan Renwick (University College London), Katie Ghose and Edward Molloy, (both Electoral Reform Society).

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