



National Indicator 4: Qualitative Research Research Report

On behalf of London Civic Forum as part
of the LONDON EMPOWERMENT
PARTNERSHIP initiative



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the butcher, the baker, the candle- stick maker, the nurse, the shop keeper, the trader, the firefighter, the vet, the lollypop lady, the actor, the teacher, the webmaster, the chef, the parent, the rabbi, the cabbie, the dancer, the banker, the designer, the builder, the PA, the cleaner, the carer, the DJ, the bus driver, the printer, the carpenter, the charity worker, the musician, the administrator, the entrepreneur...It's amazing what Londoners can do when they get together.



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Foreword

This report was written by Majeed Neki, Ian Duke and Nick Pecorelli. Other TCC contributions were made in particular by Jessica Davis, David Evans and Peter Watt, who helped us refine the research process, facilitate discussion groups, and gather data.

We have also drawn openly on the research of others, including the Regional Empowerment Partnerships, Urban Forum, the Community Development Foundation, Manchester University and Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI has carried out considerable high-level statistical research which we have found immensely useful in providing a wider context for our qualitative work and helping us to focus on those areas of research in which our approaches and experience can best add value. Particular thanks are due to Andy Byrom of Ipsos MORI and Rachel Newton of Urban Forum for their assistance.

We would also like to thank Kamila Zahno of Zahno Rao Associates, who has undertaken an evaluation role on this project, for her support and interest.

Finally, we want to thank Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Hounslow and Tower Hamlets Councils, and the several others that allowed us to interview them at the scoping stage of the report.

1 Summary

This study explores some of the ways in which people define and experience 'influence' in their everyday lives within their local areas in London. It draws on secondary research, including the Values Modes segmentation system from Cultural Dynamics, interviews with senior authority figures and discussion groups with the public in four London boroughs.

A central point to emerge is that different people view influence in different ways. In order to improve the proportion of people feeling that they can have an influence on local decision making, authorities will need to understand the effect of people's different values and worldviews on the reasons why they choose to get involved in decision-making, the sorts of messages and channels that might appeal to different people, and different people's expectations of their relationship with local institutions.

The use of facilitated discussion techniques to gather views on these complex issues was successful and there is clear scope for authorities to use more informal and flexible techniques for gathering views.

Levels of trust in authorities and public authority figures are generally low, and this judgement encompasses councillors and MPs, officers and staff, and consultation processes. However, positive personal experiences are an extremely potent force. Authorities should seek to create more such experiences and ensure that these are communicated effectively and authentically by developing appropriate messages and channels.

Many people feel that they are not informed of and invited to partake in opportunities to influence. Many aspects of influence which people seek also relate to factors – such as antisocial behaviour – for which they do not see a clear link to any one agency.

The public are consistently more interested in the outcomes of their interactions with authorities, and the way that these have left them feeling, than in particular engagement mechanisms. Improving these interactions, feeding back outcomes to the public in appropriate and segmented ways, and linking this contact to ongoing involvement in local decision-making processes will be vital.

Below we set out the qualitative research methodologies employed, the background of research and prior knowledge against which the qualitative work took place, and our key findings, including detailed analysis of the stakeholder interviews and public discussion groups and a set of possible next steps for local authorities.

Project background

This document sets out the findings of a research and insight project, commissioned by the London Empowerment Partnership, into the determinants of National Indicator 4 (NI4) scores – relating to the Place Survey question ‘Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?’ Through qualitative work across a range of London boroughs, the study explored whether the idea of ‘influence’ is something to which different segments of the population relate, in what different ways they relate to it, and what factors contribute to their perceptions of whether they are able to influence.

Our research is one strand of a wider Targeted Support workstream managed by London Civic Forum as part of the London Empowerment Partnership initiative, which aims to support Local Authorities and their partners to improve the quality and functioning of their engagement with constituents. There are a range of programmes taking place, which aim to identify the specific causes of poor empowerment outcomes – as measured by Local Area Agreements, the Duty to Involve and the Comprehensive Area Assessment – that agencies face in engaging with people, and to support these agencies in making improvements.

This research also forms part of a wider group of regional and national research projects into the determinants of NI4 involving the Regional Empowerment Partnerships, Urban Forum, the Community Development Foundation, Manchester University and Ipsos MORI.

Since the publication of the Place Survey 2008, NI4 is an area that is increasingly attracting analysis. Previous studies of NI4, including research by the University of Plymouth in the South-West of England and by Social Regeneration Consultants in the North-East, have tended to focus on local service providers’ understanding of and progress towards the target. This leaves some major unanswered questions about different public perceptions of and attitudes to local influence which this study aims to explore. Additionally, no major study has yet focused on London boroughs, which sit within structures of governance and service provision that are unique in the UK.

Aims and objectives

This is a qualitative piece of work that aims to produce a useful and usable set of evidence and recommendations as the core of a ‘toolkit’ which can be used within all London boroughs. This report aims to provide an initial insight into a range of different people’s relationships with influence, in a way that will help support local authorities and their strategic partners as they move towards more segmented, nuanced ways of communicating and engaging with the public. A discussion and seminar in summer 2010 will be an initial opportunity to explore the practical implications of the research and recommendations with a view to helping authorities take action in a way that suits their needs and the needs of their populations.

TCC's background and methodology

The Campaign Company was set up in 2001 and is a specialist communications consultancy. The organisation is values driven and has specialised over a period of years in working with communities that would be considered as seldom heard or hard to reach. We work with public sector clients (250 plus) and have designed a number of nationally important research projects and interventions across our business sectors: Health, Youth and Communities. More information is given in the appendices.

Introducing Values Modes

Many organisations, public and private, segment populations by demographic factors, such as age, race, etc.

Others use geodemographic data (demographics by geography) which clusters a variety of attributes together to define the propensity of people with certain demographics and lifestyle factors to live in a defined area. Whilst this has advantages for understanding needs, its weakness is that it assumes that people of similar ages, of the same ethnicity, the same employment, or even the same purchasing habits have the same values and the same motivations that flow from those values.

In reality, however, people act from different motives. For example, someone might buy a Toyota Prius because they are passionate about the environment, someone else's primary motivation might be that lots of Hollywood celebrities have one, and for someone else it might be because it promises good fuel economy. In other words, people can exhibit the same behaviour, but this behaviour is based on different values.

Values Modes therefore takes an entirely different approach. It seeks to understand people's values and motivations. Values Modes is run by Cultural Dynamics, with whom The Campaign Company works in partnership on public sector projects. Since 1973, Cultural Dynamics have surveyed over a million people across the UK. This includes the main British Values Modes Survey, which every few years asks 1,000 questions of a sample of around 8,500 people. From this data, Cultural Dynamics have been able to track changes in values across society over time.

Values Modes divides people into three main segments, each of which subdivides into four segments, making a total of twelve segments. The three main Value Modes groups are:

- Inner Directed (also known as 'Pioneers')
- Outer Directed (also known as 'Prospectors')
- Sustenance Driven (also known as 'Settlers')

To sketch each of these types briefly:

Inner Directed people or Pioneers currently account for around 40% of the UK population. The groups are dynamic and this group has seen growth since the 1960s. Inner directed people tend to be focused on self-actualisation - they want to acquire knowledge, learn about themselves and start initiatives. They are more global in their outlook, and driven by ideas and ethics. They tend to have large social networks and are happy to embrace change. Interestingly, many policymakers and senior people in organisations such as councils are more likely to be inner directed.

Outer Directed individuals or Prospectors currently form about 30% of the UK population. They are more motivated by material things, status, and being seen in the right places. Where inner directed people lead they will often follow, but for different reasons (as per the Toyota Prius example above).

Sustenance Driven people or Settlers form the remaining 30% of the population. They tend to have smaller social networks based around family. For them, everything is local, and local can be defined as a very small geographic area, even down to a street. They are more uncomfortable with change, nostalgic about the past, and respectful of tradition. They also tend to be more pessimistic about the future.

Among the questions Cultural Dynamics has asked are a set of questions that help us understand differences in people's views about change and influence, and these are covered in section 4.

3 Methodology

Our experience in developing and testing our methodologies makes us wary of seeking to draw major conclusions from statistical analysis alone, and this is particularly acute when considering a concept such as influence. The authors of *Citizens and Local Decision Making: What Drives Feelings of Influence?* (see p.12 below) note that only 26 percentage points separate the highest and lowest scoring authorities in the country in terms of NI4, 'with the majority of local authorities falling within a fairly narrow range of 23% - 35%' (p.9). Ipsos MORI are clear that, in isolation, such variations cannot convey whether or not engagement and empowerment activities have been more successful in certain areas than in others. Though the first phase of this project includes statistical elements, the emphasis of our work falls firmly on the qualitative as this is where TCC's experience and methodologies can add most value.

Though the two are closely linked, addressing the question of influence goes beyond the NI4 question itself and also beyond the particular mechanisms through which people express their opinions. Is 'having an influence' a concept to which different people relate? How do they define it in terms of their own lives and activities? And how does this link to their perceptions – positive and negative – of local institutions and their actions?

We posited that people's different values and outlooks on life might lead them to answer the NI4 question in different ways – or, more subtly, to give similar answers based on entirely different reasoning, expectations or perceptions. From our analysis emerged a case for councils and their partners to understand these issues in more depth, regarding the numerical NI4 indicator as a starting point.

Initial research

Primary quantitative research on London boroughs

Our desk-based research took the Place Survey data set for the eligible London boroughs as a starting point and set out to investigate statistical correlations between different Place Survey questions and various sociodemographic factors. The overall picture was one of very few significant or straightforward correlations between factors that might intuitively be thought to have a strong relationship with NI4, such as voter turnout and actual involvement in local decision-making structures. This will be explored further in sections 4 and 5 below.

Scoping interviews with interested boroughs

We also conducted scoping interviews with a number of those boroughs which expressed an interest in participating in the project in order to find out more about their interest in the project, their approaches to engagement and NI4 and the internal and cross-organisational structures that they had in place. This was helpful in making the final selection of test boroughs and also of great use in designing the stakeholder interview guide.

Secondary review of relevant national research

A major part of the first phase research was concerned with reviewing recent national research in the field, most notably that conducted by Ipsos MORI, and investigating the applicability of its conclusions to our research. Findings from this stage will be further explored in section 4 below.

Identification of key factors involved and development of lines of inquiry

Drawing on this initial research, we were able to identify several factors of importance in determining NI4 scores, but also to formulate some lines of inquiry that would allow us to make the best use of the qualitative research phases in probing the complex perceptions lying beyond these scores. Section 5 details the working hypotheses that we were keen to test in the field.

Selecting test boroughs

From the research conducted to date, we took the approach of grouping the interested boroughs into three categories based on a range of demographic and geographic factors. Following this, it was decided to select Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Hounslow and Tower Hamlets as the four test boroughs, which together broadly reflected important trends in London as a whole. The selection of boroughs is further discussed in Appendix B below.

Design of stakeholder interview process and carrying out of stakeholder interviews

Having identified the four test boroughs, the first phase of qualitative research involved designing a stakeholder interview guide and conducting interviews with 16 stakeholders across the boroughs, generally senior figures within the local authority and partner organisations.

Stakeholder interviews were kept very informal, with the use of open questions allowing stakeholders to comment on their views of influence in their area without pre-judging the issue. In addition to learning more about the ethos, structure and mechanisms of community engagement and service provision in each area, a key objective was to be in a position to compare stakeholders' views with the candid opinions of a range of members of the public, segmented via the Values Modes process.

The stakeholder interview guide is reproduced in Appendix F below.

Public segmentation, recruitment and discussion groups

The second phase of qualitative research consisted of recruiting members of the public segmented through the Values Modes framework and conducting 12 discussion groups across the test boroughs. Drawing on Values Modes research and our own experience, we rejected the idea of recruiting discussion group participants through existing voluntary and community groups as potentially leading to bias, not only in the views given by participants but in the worldviews and ways of thinking that lay behind them. Recruitment was therefore carried out in public locations and a gift voucher incentive advertised to potential attendees (paid to those who turned up to each discussion group after the session was complete) to attract a wider range of participants.

Another goal for us in developing the methodology for this research was to avoid the 'response bias' that can result from poorly designed or executed consultative processes, whereby respondents feel that there is a 'right' answer and try to give it rather than reflecting their true views. The discussion group guide achieved this through encouraging, rather than excluding, anecdotal and emotional responses. In addition, an innovative process using whiteboards, in which participants visually placed their opinions somewhere between a pair of opposing but not morally loaded statements, helped to clarify the relationships between different conceptions of influence.

The discussion group guide is reproduced in Appendix G below.

4 Findings from first phase research

In beginning to investigate statistical correlations between factors, we found that many aspects that are intuitively related to NI4 – such as voter turnout and satisfaction with the local Council – are, statistically speaking, more ambiguously linked with NI4 than one might expect. This implies a more complex picture of the ways in which local institutions can affect NI4.

Demographic and geographic factors

The strongest statistical correlations were with demographic and geographic factors, explored in more detail below. In terms of perception data, however, we did note a positive correlation across the eligible London boroughs between NI4 scores and the extent of respondents' agreement that they are very well or fairly well informed about how they can get involved in local decision making. Through the use of regression analysis modelling, MORI finds that this factor accounts for 12% of the variation between NI4 scores.

Ipsos MORI's report, 'Getting to grips with engagement', on which we drew heavily during the first phase, sets out the results of a national statistical analysis of National Indicators, demographics and associated data from the Place Survey and its precursors. Its authors conclude that 63% of the variance in NI4 scores between areas can be attributed to four factors:

- the ethnic diversity of an area
- levels of international in-migration
- the region of England in which the area is situated
- the 'urbanity' of the area: the proportion of people living in dense urban clusters.

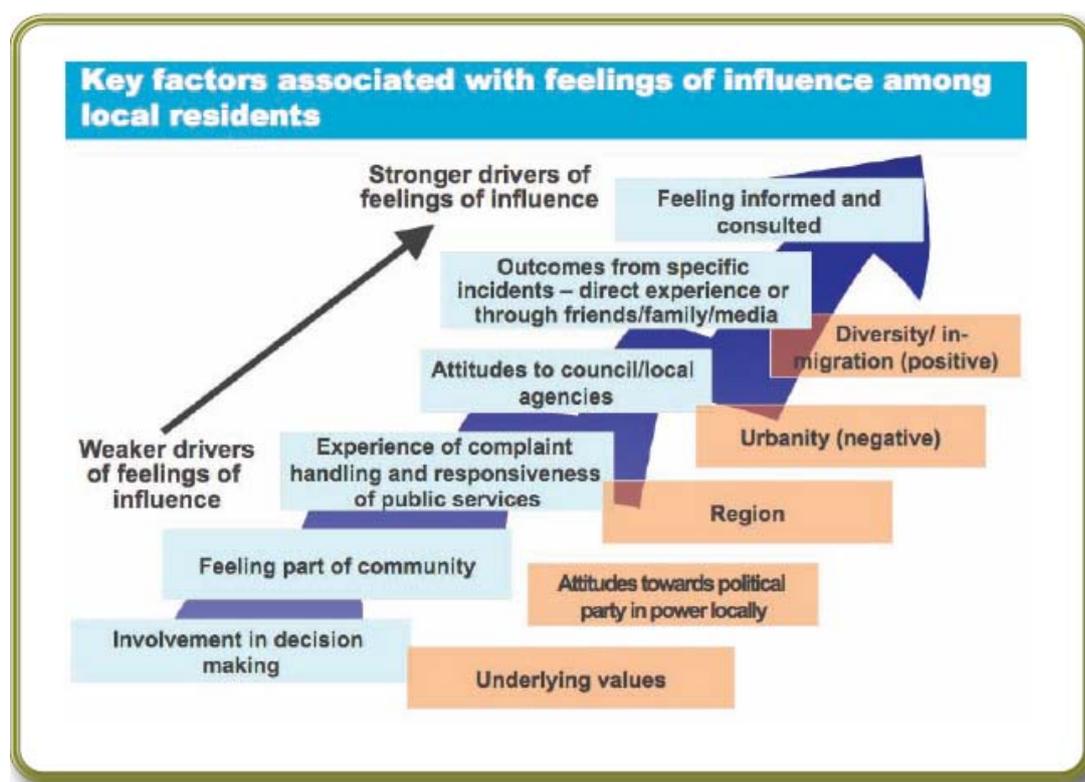
This had a significant influence on the combination of boroughs chosen. Our analysis showed urbanity as relating most pertinently, in the London context, to the differential between inner and outer London. Outer London boroughs, typically, score lower on measures of NI4 (as well as NI1, the extent to which respondents agree that 'people from different backgrounds get on well around here', and residents' satisfaction with Councils). A table of relevant data is given in Appendix B below.

Though age was not a factor identified in particular by Ipsos MORI, we found some relationship between age and influence in the Place Survey data and in previous research. Over 65s have regularly scored lowest on measures of perceptions of influence in the Place Survey, the Citizen Survey and other similar exercises.

Perception data

A key document emerging towards the end of our research period was *Citizens and local decision making: What drives feelings of influence?*, a quantitative and qualitative study commissioned by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) and carried out by Urban Forum, Ipsos MORI, and the Institute for Political and Economic Governance at the University of Manchester. This brings together much of the statistical research in the field, drawing on Ipsos MORI's previous work to assess correlations between perception datasets from the Place Survey and elsewhere. The authors conclude that NI1 on community cohesion, NI2 on feelings of belonging to one's local neighbourhood, NI5 on satisfaction with one's area as a place to live, and NI7 on whether the conditions are in place for a 'thriving third sector' all show little or no correlation with NI4, even though cohesion, belonging, satisfaction and the strength of the third sector might all be seen as intuitively very much related to influence. This emphasises the need for a subtler approach that investigates individual attitudes, values and motivations.

The summary chart included in the CDF study draws together findings from the quantitative and qualitative parts of the work and resonates in many places with our own analysis:



Source: *Citizens and Local Decision Making: What Drives Feelings of Influence?* p.4

This useful summary highlights several themes that bring us closer to understanding how different people conceptualise influence. For instance, the weight attributed by respondents to their experiences of trying to get a response from a public service (which, in our experience, also account for a large proportion of the 'specific incidents' raised by members of the public in interviews and discussion) evokes a 'reactive' conception of influence. What bearing does this have on those same respondents' attitude to 'proactive' local mechanisms, such as

neighbourhood forums or citizens' panels, that stakeholders associated most readily associated with 'engagement'? Our discussion group process was designed to probe these sorts of questions further and explore the role of 'underlying values' in more depth.

Trust

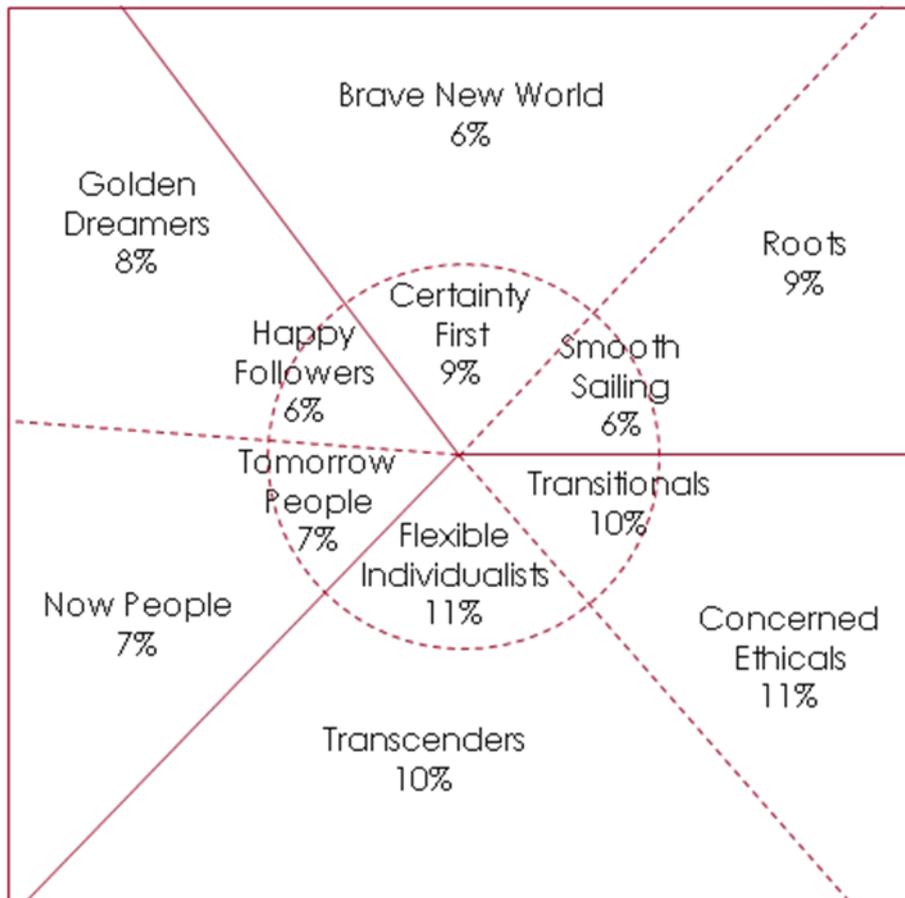
The strongest four factors identified in the CDF report as impacting on perceptions of influence could all be said to rest on the idea of trust. The Executive Summary of the report notes that 'Feelings of influence were also linked to whether agencies had delivered on promises. Broken promises decreased trust in institutions' (p10). The 2008 Demos report *State of Trust*, which included extensive qualitative work, has been a key sounding board in developing this report, describing trust as 'one of the most important assets that a governing institution can possess. Its presence helps to foster democratic participation, economic success and public sector efficiency. Its absence can lead to grinding battles between the state and its citizens, and sometimes to an outright refusal to participate in government activities' (p9). Demos' work included an extensive qualitative element and is referred to below.

Linked to this, we also looked at recent poll-based research on attitudes to politics. The Hansard Society's *Audit of Political Engagement 7* notes that '50% of the public report believing that MPs spend their time "furthering personal and career interests"' (p7) and that only 10% believe that most MPs 'represent the views of local people in the House of Commons'. We were interested to probe this further in the discussion groups in particular.

Values

Through our understanding and use of Values Modes, we considered possible links between the statistical correlations identified by MORI and underlying values. For example, might new migrants have different value sets from longstanding populations? Might they view influence differently?

The following diagram shows a breakdown of the 12 values sets, subtypes of the three major groups:



The diagram is split into three sections corresponding to the major groups, with Pioneers / Inner Directed filling the bottom right third, Prospectors / Outer Directed in the third to the left, and Settlers / Sustenance Driven in the top right third.

The qualitative work did not seek to categorise people using these subsets as the small numbers of people involved would not produce useful data. However, it is useful to note Cultural Dynamics' analysis that people belonging to the subtypes depicted around the edges of the diagram are more likely to hold stronger views, and so to an extent to set trends, than those in the middle. Understanding such dynamics can therefore help local authorities not only to adjust their messages to communicate more effectively with different segments of the population, but also to consider who might be best to carry those messages.

The British Values Modes survey asks 1000 questions about scenarios, beliefs and experiences to build up a composite picture of a respondent's values. By analysing the pattern of responses, Cultural Dynamics is able to cluster sets of questions together to identify distinct 'attributes' or character traits. A respondent's answers to a cluster of questions can be aggregated and expressed as a percentage score.

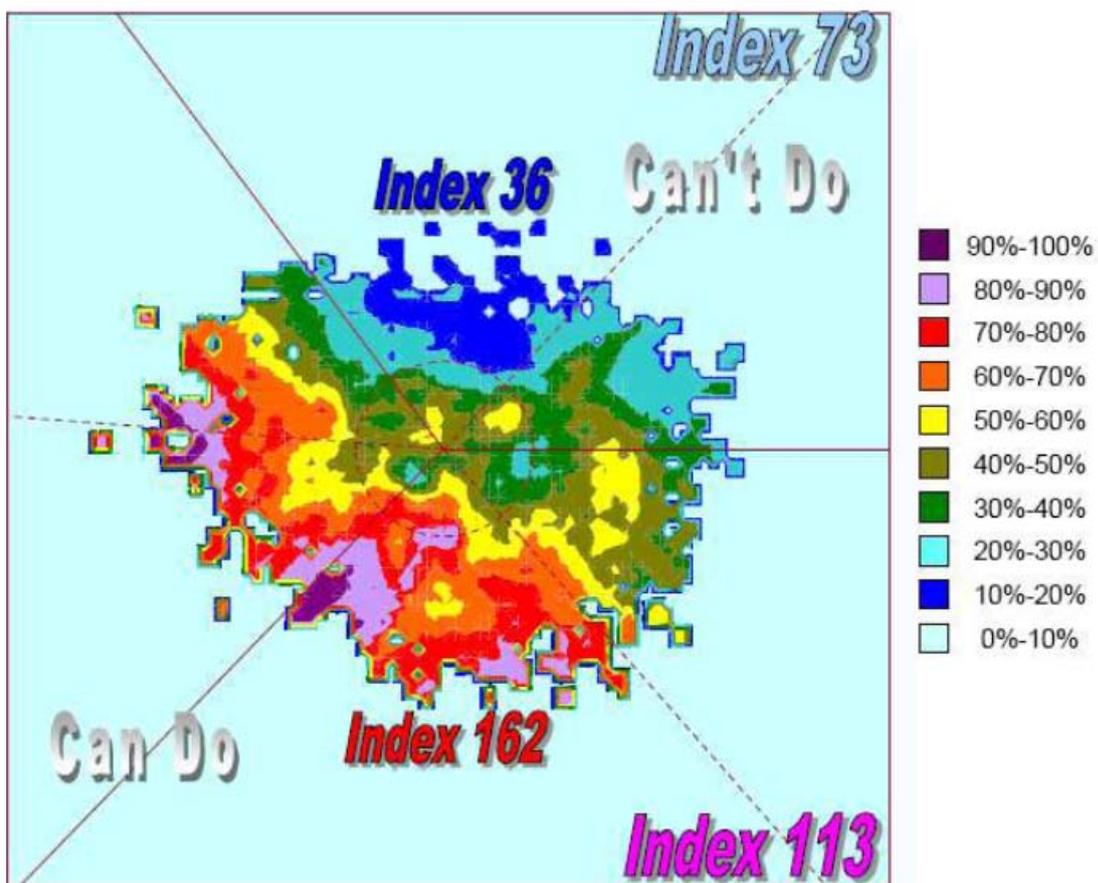
Below we discuss some of the attributes that help us understand more about how values might relate to feelings and interpretations of influence. The terrain maps that accompany the explanations correspond to the diagram above. Using different colours, they depict the propensity of people in different Values Modes groups to agree with particular sets of statements.

Self Efficacy

Self efficacy – the sense that you can accomplish something if you put your mind to it – is a belief that is strongly held by less than one third of the population. This belief in action is not evenly spread across different values groups in our culture.

The terrain map below clearly shows that Prospectors were particularly likely to agree with statements in the British Values Survey that related to self-efficacy, whilst Settlers were particularly likely to disagree.

From this, it seems reasonable to assume that the extent to which the different Values Modes groups believe they can influence decisions varies markedly. The phrases 'Can Do' and 'Can't Do' are given for illustrative purposes.

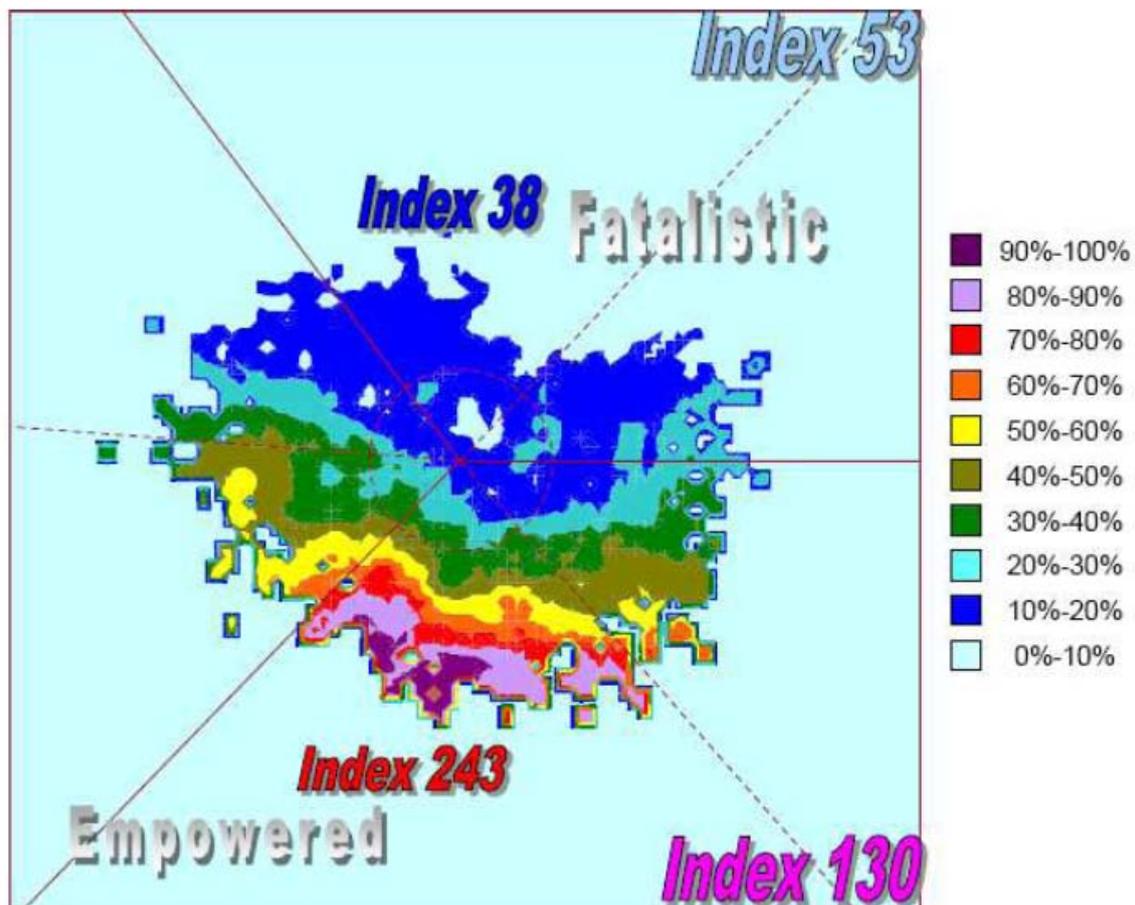


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Fatalism

To give deeper insight into the powerlessness felt by Settlers, Cultural Dynamics have asked a range of allied questions that highlight this factor. One question measures a general fatalistic approach to life – the opposite of Self Efficacy. The terrain map below starkly presents the difference between the Pioneer and Settler viewpoints. Taken together with the Self Efficacy map, this may suggest that methods of community engagement – which are often devised and promoted by, and in a way that tends to appeal to, Pioneers – will have greater or lesser success depending on the actual values of the local community.

The map presents the range of values types that strongly disagree with the fatalistic approach to life. Cultural Dynamics research has shown that people who “strongly” agree or disagree with a measured statement or question are most likely to act upon it. In this instance, those that strongly agree with statements implying fatalism will be least likely to do anything when offered a “choice” about what happens in their community or life.



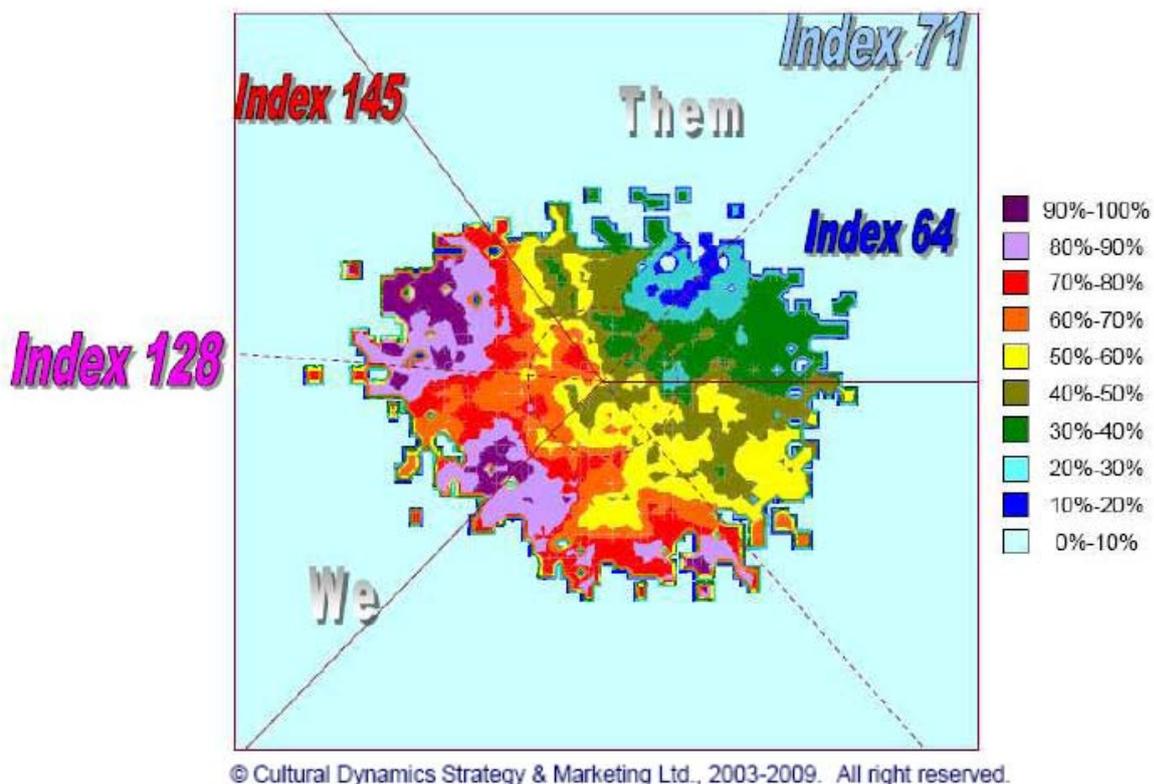
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Connectedness

Another way to understand the different values sets is to look at the distribution of those who feel most connected to their communities and know what is happening through reading local news and talking with others. This attribute is prevalent in two of the three values systems in Britain.

As with the other maps, the attribute of 'connectedness' is not evenly distributed and members of the more fatalistic Settler group are least likely to score highly on this attribute. They perceive themselves as less connected to the wider communities in which they are living. Life is circumscribed by internal boundaries, not by geography. The Cultural Dynamics data show that they tend to view life in terms of 'them vs. us', feeling that life is giving them a raw deal. This is particularly true of the 'Roots' values group (see diagram above).

Many formal engagement processes may depend on a sense of local connectedness to attract participants. This raises questions about the potential pool of people willing to get involved in local decision-making and whether this can be expanded by applying a better understanding of differences in values.



5 Developing working hypotheses and lines of inquiry

Through our preliminary work, we arrived at the following ideas, assertions and tensions which our research set out to test. These fell into two main categories.

What does 'influence' mean? Multiple conceptions of influence

The NI4 question in the Place Survey is phrased ambiguously and leaves a great deal of room for individual interpretation – a key reason why qualitative work in this area is vital. We posit that recognising what different people mean by 'influence', and in what contexts it is important to them, can help local authorities to help people feel more influential.

Key dynamics of influence that we identified from previous research, preliminary interviews with local authority engagement officers and our cohesion experience included the following:

Dynamic	Question
Reactive / proactive	Do people seek to influence to have a specific problem or issue addressed, or to make change and shape future outcomes more widely?
Representative democracy / grassroots action	To what extent are elected members such as councillors and MPs trusted as conduits of influence, as compared to 'doing it yourself'?
Representative democracy / managerial democracy	How does the public relate or compare the ability to access elected representatives with the ability to take part in consultations?
Service provision / democratic participation	How do people relate the quality and value for money of service provision to their ability to have a say on local affairs, and do people prioritise one over the other?
Institutional / individual	Are people more likely to associate having influence with voluntary or community groups, or with individual efforts?
Being heard / being obeyed	If someone has been listened to or has engaged in debate but a decision different from the one they advocated has been taken, do they feel that they have had an influence?
Influencing authorities / influencing others	Do people feel that they can influence other people in society as well as local institutions, and how do the two relate?

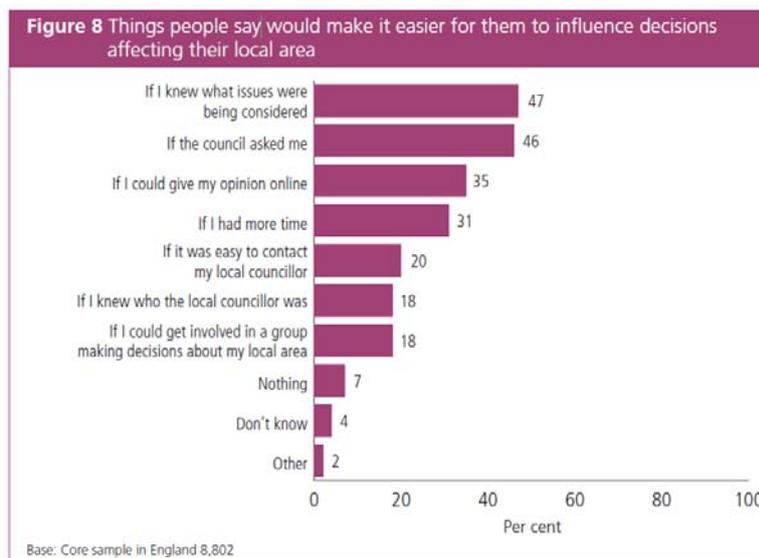
The middle section of the discussion group topic guide was developed with the particular objective of probing these dynamics.

Factors affecting perceptions of influence levels

A key objective of both the stakeholder interviews and the public discussion groups was to identify the factors which, participants thought, affected how locally influential they and others felt themselves to be. Our previous work with local authorities and our initial research suggested a number of lines of inquiry:

Being informed about opportunities for involvement

In our initial quantitative analysis of Place Survey and related questions, the proportion of people agreeing that they are 'well informed' about opportunities to have their say locally had a strong correlation with feelings of influence. This was corroborated by Ipsos MORI's *People, Perceptions and Place* report, with 'If I knew what issues were being considered' and 'If the council asked me' being the top two factors cited by Citizenship Survey respondents as improvements that would make it easier for them to influence local decisions:



Source: *Citizens and local decision-making: what drives feelings of influence?* p.27

Through the qualitative stage of the work, we aimed to explore how perceptions of being well-informed, and their effects on perceptions of influence, varied across different groups within the population.

Experiences and expectations of involvement

A number of factors from our analysis suggested that the feelings of those who have been civically involved about their experience of involvement has a major bearing on how influential they, and others, subsequently feel. Intuitively it seems that those who are more involved will report more influence; however, neither MORI's analysis nor our own have suggested any correlation between NI4 and the proportion of people who report having been involved in local decision-making (NI3).

This leads to the hypothesis that the experience of those getting involved, on average, was unlikely to lead to the feeling that involvement has afforded them much influence over local

decisions. The fact that communities with higher proportions of migrants are more likely to report higher levels of influence may relate to this – having been in the UK for less time, on average, than other residents, they are perhaps less likely to have had an experience of interacting with local institutions which leaves them feeling disillusioned. It is possible that others who have been more likely to have been involved thus far are less likely to feel influential, and it is interesting to note that, although there are many plausible reasons for this, the over 65s have regularly scored lowest on measures of perceptions of influence in the Place Survey, the Citizen Survey and other similar exercises.

This raises the related issue of people's expectations. If a person enters into a transaction with a local institution, or an engagement opportunity, with high expectations of the influence that they will be able to exert, and these expectations are then not met, that person is less likely to regard themselves as influential than someone interacting in a similar way but whose expectations were lower.

We were keen to raise this hypothesis of experience as a double-edged sword with stakeholders, probing beyond their professional influence to discuss how influential they feel, given their knowledge of the relevant structures and systems, when acting in the role of a private resident. We also posited that there were likely to be significant differences in the views emanating from different segments of the population within the public discussion groups, in terms of how likely they were to have experienced involvement, their general impressions of the quality of their experience and the ways in which these factors affected their belief in their ability to influence.

Worldview

In TCC's experience of developing and using the Values Modes methodology, it has often been the case that communications and opportunities for interaction have been met with vastly varying reactions throughout the population, because they had not been designed with regard to the differing worldviews and motivations of different segments of the public.

The senior stakeholders we interview across a range of projects tend to be Pioneers, thinking about motivations and incentives in inner-directed ways. We posit that the way that many engagement opportunities and mechanisms are communicated and managed is generally more amenable to people with more Pioneer and, to an extent, Prospector traits than to those who are closer to the Settler typology. This can lead to the profile of participants in such engagement being less representative of the community as a whole, and reflective of communities with longstanding resentments and tensions, than it could be.

In their 2008 report, *State of Trust*, Demos draws on 20 discussion groups in four local authority areas. Stating their thesis that 'beyond the broad factors that make up institutional kinds of trust, different members of the public want very different relationships with their local authority' (p.12), they set out a segmentation framework that takes this into account:

'I haves: Self-sufficient, busy and focused on work and entertainment, this group wants high levels of customer service on the rare occasions when they interact with the council.

I have nots: Isolated and dependent, this group resents the fact that it needs public help for basics such as housing and benefits. They would like to be treated as consumers, but are frequently frustrated by the public sector's failure to meet their needs effectively.

We haves: Wealthy activists who are often dedicated to improving the quality of their local area, this group has low expectations for itself, but expects public services to improve the lives of others.

We have nots: Housing estate activists who see collective action as a way to improve their lives, this group often sees itself as 'going into battle' with the council for a fair share of resources.' (pp.12-13)

This has proven a useful point of reference in relation to the Values Modes segmentation, with clear parallels between the two.

6 Testing the hypotheses

In Section 5 we set out a range of hypotheses in two broad categories:

- What does 'influence' mean? Multiple conceptions of influence; and
- Factors affecting perceptions of influence

These hypotheses were developed through the quantitative research and background reading described in Section 4. These were tested through the stakeholder interviews and public discussion groups. Below we set out the outcomes for each of these two aspects of the research, before drawing wider findings in Section 7.

Stakeholder interviews

What does influence mean? Multiple conceptions of influence

6.1 As might be expected, there was no single view emerging on what influence meant, given the variety of people interviewed, the differing geographies and contexts, and the relative newness of influence as a key concept in the policy context. However, there were several points of commonality and agreement. Below we set out common themes and prevailing views emerging from stakeholders. We do not seek to imply that there was always a consensus from stakeholders around the views in each of the following paragraphs, but suggest that the below provides a 'best fit' which is representative of the views expressed.

6.2 Stakeholders felt that the majority of residents seek **reactive** influence in order to get a specific problem or issue addressed. A much smaller minority seeks **proactive** influence to make wider changes and will seek to get actively involved. The numbers seeking proactive influence tend to vary from community to community. Some areas experience great apathy towards structures associated with proactive influence (see below) whereas in others there is a greater tradition of proactive involvement.

6.3 Some of those interviewed stated a growing tendency for people to bypass **representative democracy** and formal, traditional engagement structures and attempt to exert influence in other ways, most typically by lobbying key decision-makers (directly, through a third party or through a recognized community such as a faith group) or by using a wide variety of media to stimulate **grassroots action**. Those doing so are very much in the minority, and tend to be younger, but it is felt that there are an increasing number of people who are not particularly ingrained in formal mechanisms and see the world differently. There is recognition that informal approaches can be more effective, and that by **influencing others**, residents can in turn **influence authorities**. It was felt that such approaches are consequently likely to become more common, and that this presents a key challenge for the future.

6.4 Examples were cited of more wealthy households opting out of public services and purchasing services traditionally provided by the public sector from private companies. Whilst

this has traditionally happened in the field of education, examples are becoming more widespread, including security services and refuse. This was characterised as a response to people not getting the service they wanted and so deciding to bypass public services altogether.

6.5 There is unease among elected representatives about their role. This reflects the changing nature of the relationship between elected representatives and citizens. It was also felt that there was no measure of confidence in elected representatives, with turnout rates at elections being a poor proxy. The overall impression is that confidence in elected representative is falling, although the approach and actions of individuals can make a significant difference, especially in visible leadership positions.

6.6 Councils are responding to this, and are considering or implementing a variety of new approaches aimed at improving service response, involving citizens in shaping services and establishing the role of elected representatives as community leaders. Such approaches are largely embryonic and some councils are further along in their thinking than others. There is also a level of uncertainty about the potential impact of national regime change and public funding cuts, although in some cases the latter is a key driver for change. As far as it goes, the trend can be seen as progressive, with stakeholders citing examples of 'managed' engagement mechanisms where citizens' influence is clearly limited, and future plans to make these less managed, more fluid, more transparent and even more accountable.

6.7 When stakeholders were asked whether they felt that they themselves could influence as private citizens, the majority were unsure. Whilst recognizing that their knowledge of the system gives them an advantage, it also meant they were more realistic about what could be achieved. Some felt that they could have limited influence; most felt that there needed to be a wider movement for change to happen. Influence was therefore most associated with **collective or institutional** action rather than **individual** action.

6.8 Part of this assessment seemed to be linked with how stakeholders defined influence. Most defined it as making a change, having an impact or getting what you want at least some of the time. Influence therefore tended to be more about **being obeyed** (i.e. getting the change or impact you are after) more than simply **being heard**. An obvious block to this was competing influences and demands within a borough. A number of stakeholders spoke about the tension between responding to grassroots demands and meeting top-down policy objectives, further complicated by other factors such as limited resources.

Factors affecting perceptions of influence

Being informed about opportunities for involvement

6.9 Service providers are providing an ever more diverse range of engagement mechanisms, and this trend seems only likely to increase with moves to close the gaps between services

and citizens, and to establish elected representatives in community leadership roles. To summarise, mechanisms mentioned by stakeholders can be categorised as follows:

- Open consultation
6.10 One-off opportunities for residents to influence by giving their opinions about an issue, a service, an options appraisal, etc. Consultations tend to be used as part of a wider process to inform decision-making. Paper survey-based consultations most readily come to mind, but increasingly, consultations can be more elaborate, event-based and/or online.
- Selective consultation
6.11 Bodies such as citizens' panels, convened from those interested but generally controlled in order to make them demographically representative, and refreshed regularly to ensure fresh views. These are usually one-off or annual events for which participants are selected. They could include prioritising spending within annual budgeting processes, or looking at issues from a resident's perspective through citizens' juries on a particular subject. Such bodies can also be used to evaluate engagement mechanisms, for example through residents' 'mystery shopping'.
- 'Question Time'
6.12 Opportunities to raise issues and question decision-makers in open sessions. The topics discussed are often driven by attendees, and can therefore be quite diverse. Question Time style events can be one-off or regular, and can prove attractive to certain groups (such as business owners) who feel that such events provide an opportunity to raise issues directly with the right people.
- Statutory or customary democratic structures
6.13 These are mechanisms that form part of the way an organisation does business, as set out within its Constitution or similar governing documents. For instance, many councils have area forums or committees, which residents can attend to join discussion around issues affecting a ward or group of wards and, in some cases, allocate limited funding streams to spend. Other council committees, such as full Council meetings, Cabinet or Executive meetings and any Planning committee structures, are also open to the public and can provide an opportunity to raise issues and receive a reply from councillors. This category also includes councillors' and MPs' surgeries.
- Complaints, Councillor Call for Action, petitions, scrutiny
6.14 These are standardized mechanisms (some statutory) by which individuals or groups seek to hold decision-makers to account for decisions already made, or trigger formal review mechanisms.
- Localized decision-making structures
6.15 These are structures where local people make decisions about priorities and resources, such as police ward panels, tenant & resident associations or regeneration

partnerships. The form and content of such structures varies hugely, but the crucial point of this category of engagement mechanisms is that residents make the final decisions.

- Partnership structures, boards and theme groups

6.16 These are strategic level structures within and across institutions such as primary care trusts, police forces and councils that bring together representatives from several sectors that make up a community, often but not always including residents, to discuss and influence strategic agendas. In the majority of cases such structures do not have executive decision-making powers, which will lie with particular organisations, but can influence the policy agenda. Residents' voices, if included, will be among numerous voices that are heard.

6.17 There was a wide divergence of views across boroughs, but also within boroughs between different services, about the effectiveness of different types of mechanisms in engaging people. In some cases, meetings and similar opportunities were well attended, in others recruitment was more difficult (apathy being a key reason cited) and in some cases it was clear that opportunities were not being well advertised.

6.18 There was also recognition that the numbers involved in formal mechanisms (other than one off consultations or complaints) were relatively small. Even where structures are progressive and support residents in having a genuine local influence, it is only a very small proportion of people who will get involved and there is therefore a question about how those outside such structures are able to influence.

Experiences of involvement

6.19 There was a broad consensus among stakeholders that the experience of attempting to influence needed to be improved. Evaluating event-specific experiences is a separate project being undertaken through the London Empowerment Partnership, and we therefore concentrate here on more macro-level factors. There were a number of such factors cited that we categorise as follows:

- Consultation and engagement by default

6.20 A number of examples were cited of some services undertaking consultations as a 'tick-box' exercise with no intention of taking note of responses. In other cases, there were significant and successful efforts to engage, but without any defined mechanism to show how the results or findings affected strategic thinking. Views are therefore collated in a vacuum, with little chance of inducing any change or impact.

- Managing influence

6.21 One of the challenges for public services is responding to multiple masters with differing agendas. There is often a tension between bottom-up and top-down approaches that has traditionally meant that citizen influence has been 'managed'. In essence, this means that citizens who do engage are limited in the decisions they can

influence, more so than is often stated.

- Transparency and feedback

6.22 There is broad recognition that too often, those who express views do not receive information about what happens as a result, even in situations where there is a change or an impact. This can apply as much to resolving specific issues of concern as it does to influencing activity more widely. It is widely recognised by stakeholders that this is a key weakness.

- Direct versus indirect

6.23 A further factor in terms of perception of influence is whether the influence is achieved directly or indirectly. Whilst some people may seek to influence through others, it was felt that the more direct the influence, the greater the perception of influence. This is a particular challenge for the third sector, which seeks to influence decision-makers on behalf of community and voluntary groups. Citizens who have influenced through these mechanisms may not perceive themselves to have had an influence – even if their views have been passed upwards and had an impact on decisions – as they do not experience this directly.

Worldview

6.24 There was a large degree of consensus among stakeholders across boroughs that it is useful to have a measure of influence, but that as currently measured, this may not be as meaningful as it could be. There are a large amount of variables, including many beyond local control such as the attitudes and actions of the national media; the terms used mean different things to different people; and many aspects of the issue are not measured – not least the actual influence that individuals and communities exert in local decision-making.

6.25 A core element within our hypotheses is that a significant factor in determining perceptions of influence is the way in which individuals view the world around them more generally. This is also true for the way in which interventions to improve perceptions of influence are received. Service providers universally accepted the Values Modes framework as intuitively correct, and believed that it should prove a useful analytical tool.

Public discussion groups

What does influence mean? Multiple conceptions of influence

6.26 As with the stakeholder interviews, responses within the public discussion groups varied from person to person and from area to area. It is here that Values Modes become an important analytical tool in helping to draw out coherence in the narratives prevailing among different segments of the community. Below we set out the common themes and prevailing views from the discussion groups, using excerpts from the groups to bring the analysis to life.

For each quote from a participant, we identify their Values Modes segment, which will inform broader findings and conclusions later in the report.

6.27 There is no doubt that the ability to exercise **reactive influence**, in order to get a specific problem or issue addressed, is hugely important to people. There was a widespread perception among discussion group participants that influence on a day-to-day level consisted mainly in *'influencing people to do their jobs correctly and getting them to do what they are supposed to do'* (Pioneer) and that the public consequently viewed their relationship with local institutions as being somewhat adversarial:

- *'You've got to push them. I can't change things. Councillors and MPs are there to do things'* (Settler)
- *'You've got to get involved to make these f****rs do what you want. And if you're not involved you can just sit there all day and wait for someone to collect your rubbish'* (Settler)
- *'I've never met such a bunch of gormless stupid staff in my life'* (Settler)
- *'I just get cross every time I call the local council'* (Settler)
- *'You just want an answer of some description rather than being ignored!'* (Prospector)

6.28 This was strongly linked to the idea of **poor customer service** and of the desire to go 'to the top' for service and answers:

- *'I want to talk to the colonel in chief and all I get to talk to is a bunch of chickens'* (Pioneer)
- *'There's no point in trying to influence one single person in any organisation because you're never going to get to the top boy, so you've got to take it to the top'* (Settler)
- *'The big problem is getting hold of someone in authority, you always get someone small on the phone, it's impossible to get someone with any responsibility.'* (Settler)
- *'I still don't know what the chain of command is, this doesn't give me any clear sense of what I should do to complain in the future'* (Settler)
- *'Trying to get through to the council is difficult. They don't take criticism – they can't be wrong. You then get passed around different people.'* (Pioneer)

6.29 Settler participants were the most outspoken on this, but the feelings cut across Values Modes segments. Many participants spoke of trying to resolve the lack of action and outcomes by adopting more aggressive tactics:

- *'If something is really dramatically wrong you go there and make their lives miserable and they have to do something'* (Settler)
- *'Find out whom you should annoy, then do some "gentle persuasion", shall we say'* (Pioneer)
- *'The main problem with the local concil is the customer care is very poor. I'm very polite and they are very sullen and disinterested and when I've been aggressive I get the response I want'* (Settler)

6.30 Views received about **representative democracy** were, in the main, similarly negative and for similar reasons. A main feature of the views expressed was the concept of **trust**. Trust

in MPs and councillors was absent or fragile among most of the discussion groups convened, across boroughs and Values Modes segments:

- *'I've lived here for 2 years and they are mostly a bunch of self-serving t**ts as far as I can see. I'm shocked by the conduct of elected officials. Not to say that everyone is like that, but from reading the papers...'* (Pioneer)
- *'It's a cliché, but MPs have their agendas. As for councillors, I don't even know who they are or how they get into office. Do they change when the government change?'* (Settler)
- *'MPs are as useful as a pork chop in a synagogue'* (Pioneer)
- *'You only see them when there's an election'* (Settler)
- *'They need to be watched, generally they are OK but they need to be watched'* (Pioneer)
- *'I don't have any contacts. Do you mean contacts who can do special favours for special people?'* (Settler)
- *'We had a public meeting with councillors. We all stood up and told them to sod off and told them what we want. They couldn't push us around. After that they took us seriously and made us an offer'* (Prospector)
- *'People can say they're listening but they don't really - you'll never hear from them again. The MP should have said she'd try her best, but not made promises on issues'* (Pioneer)
- *'I've noticed politicians threaten something worse so that when something does happen it's not as bad.'* (Settler)
- *'The local MP talks against the 3rd runway [at Heathrow] and then votes for it'* (Pioneer)
- *'Because they're all expenses and that, it reared its ugly head last night, it was on Dispatches – feathering their nests looking for jobs later on for 3 or 4 thousand pounds. It's a national thing but it reflects on the council as well'* (Prospector)

6.31 Where participants indicated that they would trust MPs and councillors to get things done, the reasons for this were palpably negative:

- *'I have to trust them because they make the rules'* (Settler)
- *'Yeah, I trust them – if they're doing something dishonest then they will be exposed in the end'* (Pioneer)
- *'I've got no great trust in councils and MPs but doing work alone is like banging your head against a brick wall'* (Pioneer)

6.32 The question concerning trust was the most noticeably media-influenced, with a pre-existing default position of distrust for elected officials based on recent national politics, and a language of personal animus but no great feeling of having been personally injured by the expenses and other scandals. Personal experiences to the contrary were heard by participants with an open mind.

6.33 The extent to which participants distinguished between councillors and officers varied markedly between groups, with Prospectors and Pioneers more likely but by no means certain to make the distinction:

- *The clout of an MP or councillor gets things done – I didn't get any help with social services until my MP got involved' (Pioneer)*

6.34 However, in the main the comments received, whether they refer to officers, councillors, or organisations, show a remarkable degree of consistency that suggests that one or a handful of experiences of interaction influences the views expressed about all such interactions and agents. Without a doubt, these experiences have a significant impact upon how an individual perceives their ability to influence.

6.35 In a few cases, participants have sought to address the issues by getting involved in **grassroots activity**, though they may not always consider this as 'having an influence' as it is done as a matter of course:

- *'I got involved because the park was going downhill, drinking and drug use. Children on the swing smashing bottles, dog mess. We felt that it was our park and we wanted to take it back. We formed the group and went from there.'* (Prospector)

6.36 There was a general agreement that acting **collectively**, for instance through community groups, was likely to be more influential than individuals acting alone, though there were a few dissenters to this.

The more people you get involved in these things the more chance you have getting things done. I sat in this room, the four of us, and we discussed what to do. The next meeting we had more people. It was like there was a light and you could see the similar purpose. They basically proved that if you can do it, you can do it' (Prospector)

6.37 Some participants were or had been members of various groups that had tried to exert influence, and thought that the presence of a named body with a number of people behind it had been helpful, but this did not translate to advocating, forming or joining groups per se as a method of influencing.

6.38 Responses were coloured significantly by personal experience and someone in most groups brought up the fact that the best way to attempt to exert influence depends on the issue at hand – whether it is private or public, how many people it affects, etc.

6.39 In some cases, participants noted that feeling unsafe inhibits them from acting alone:

- *'The litter is a problem. I used to do things and deep down inside it bothers me that I don't. It's different today with knives.'* (Prospector)

6.40 Such feelings of **powerlessness**, and that the authorities were unconcerned or unable to act, were consistently associated with anti-social behaviour – a major topic of discussion across boroughs and values modes segments:

- *'There's boys in gangs hanging around smoking weed' (Settler)*

- *Teenagers of 15, 16, 17 living in a flat with their kid – they have to be housed, social housing, no problem – but live properly, don't live like an animal: have people round all night, smoke cannabis – you name it, they do it all' (Pioneer)*
- *There's a lot of drugs use in tall buildings. I don't know how to complain. Other people don't seem to care. There's enforcement officers that go around in groups but they're not interested.' (Prospector)*
- *We had a big problem, every time a retail outlet closed down they opened a pub. It was awful really. It's got good transport and is a trendy area. People from further west want to go to a "little West End". Long-term residents have to pick up the bill, broken bottles and deal with anti-social behaviour' (Prospector).*
- *I've complained about my upstairs neighbours, but nothing has been done – I feel like I have no influence. There's no wardens around' (Settler)*
- *Antisocial behaviour is affecting me as a person, an individual as well as others living in the block and if we don't speak up we just suffer – we've got to do something. I've never done anything like this before – there must be some avenues how this can be stopped because how can people live like this?' (Pioneer)*

6.41 In some cases, participants recognised that these problems could be solved:

- *I live upstairs and people drink and smoke outside, it is disgusting to me. What I started doing is getting my son to come down some days and sit outside near the door. They obey me' (Settler)*

6.42 In contrast to the Prospector who helped form a group to improve his local park, this Settler participant dealt with the problem on an individual basis by displaying force – potentially a fragile solution, and from the point of view of local agencies, also a missed opportunity to build social capital and improve that individual's perceptions of influence.

6.43 In other cases, participants felt that the problem at hand was too large and requires **long-term solutions outside the scope of individuals**, or indeed any one agency:

- *You've got to nip it in the bud when people are 7 or 8 – I see the cycle of kids my age on the estate growing up and having their own kids' (Pioneer)*
- *We don't actually know how long it's going to take. When I go to Germany how clean it is, and I get on the bus here and a water bottle rolls around and nobody picks it up. I have to pick it up. Like the Michael Jackson song, we have to do our bit for other people to do it. It's not about the countries, it's about the education. It starts in the schools.' (Prospector)*

6.44 This emphasis on education and sharing knowledge was also the basis of several more positive examples of **individuals having an influence on individuals, rather than institutions**:

- *When my children were in junior school I got talking to the mothers, SATS were coming up and you have to do well – everyone's comparing, how's your child doing, arrangements for*

tutoring and all this. Some parents I was able to help with details of tutors and some encouragement. Parents have to encourage their children, encouraging people and getting things done, it's about personal influence' (Pioneer)

- 'I work to try to keep young people out of drugs. I didn't have any funding but started up this program working with the local church. At first when I saw young people on drugs it was a mark of a bad place to live and they were a potential problem. But I explored it further and now I help those I can to get off of drugs' (Settler)
- 'I go into schools and talk to Year 9s about teen pregnancy as I'm a teenage parent myself. I feel I've made a difference when a girl comes in who wants a baby and then thinks differently at the end of the course' (Pioneer)

6.45 Such examples were certainly a cause for hope and raise the possibility that local institutions should make a point of highlighting the influence that such individuals have in the local area, which they may not always recognize themselves:

- 'I volunteer for the local parks – is that influence? It's just helping – there's a lot of work to do' (Pioneer)

6.46 Both one to one influence and antisocial behaviour were emotive issues for participants and were sharply contrasted with, and largely unlinked to, the ideas of customer service and accountability that had characterized earlier discussions about reactive and proactive influence.

6.47 From comments made at the discussion groups, the expectations of the majority of participants were rational and broadly realistic. Some of the most interesting discussions centred on whether or not outcomes need to be precisely those desired in order for a person to feel that they have had an influence – whether participants felt that **being obeyed** was necessary or prioritized **being heard**. Most groups agreed, to varying extents and after some debate, that being heard was something that they valued in itself:

- 'The council can't do everything, but at least you know they're listening to you. Sometimes what you might want isn't what others want' (Prospector)
- 'Not everyone can have everything they want – so long as you put your view forward, people listen and explain why something can't happen or can happen – that's good' (Prospector)
- 'You have your opinion as to what you want but perhaps it's not the right opinion – you could be arguing for something that isn't right but if you've had the debate and been listened to...' (Pioneer)
- 'Policy should be developed holistically, not because Joe-mug has his face in the newspaper saying "this isn't good enough"' (Pioneer)
- 'Councils are genuinely making an effort – there's a gym, a swimming pool; people just sit at home watching TV – there's 100% doom and bitching...' (Pioneer)
- 'Before, it used to be the community, very strong. They knew each other, they grew up together, but now there is a lot of people from different cultures, and the council is faced

with a variety of situations and they cannot respond. So sometimes you feel they cannot respond to you. But they have to make laws that suit the minority and not the majority because of the different cultures.' (Settler)

- *'I feel I've had a chance even if it doesn't pan out my way' (Pioneer)*

6.48 However, the value placed on being heard and the recognition of competing priorities did not countermand the **emphasis placed on action** by almost all participants. When asked how they knew that they had been listened to, the almost unanimous answer was *'because something's happened'* or *'because something's changed'*.

Factors affecting perceptions of influence

Being informed about opportunities for involvement

6.49 When asking people about opportunities to influence, it was clear that many people, particularly Settlers and Prospectors, did not have a clear knowledge about the mechanisms available to them:

- *'I was approached to come here tonight, but I don't see nothing in the local paper that says there's a discussion on this and come and voice your opinions' (Prospector)*
- *'you don't know what action's been taken, it's a tough one – you don't know how policy's being formed' (Settler)*
- *'It's not obvious who the council is and how to contact them, or get to do something like sit on a board' (Prospector)*
- *'I still don't know what the chain of command is, this doesn't give me any clear sense of what I should do to complain in the future' (Settler)*
- *'It's lack of information, you have to go and find it out yourself, you always have to research your entitlements' (Settler)*

6.50 There was a distinct frustration from some participants relating to Council communications, which undermines attempts by authorities to engage or inform people through the written word, regardless of the structures created. We have touched on the impact of trust above, but there is a clear issue relating to the volume of communication and its relevance:

- *'How many rainforests does the council waste with all the letters and crap they sent out? I just want them to do things' (Pioneer)*
- *'It's suddenly increased and it's such a waste of paper' (Settler)*
- *'Sometimes if they did put a bit of "this is what we have a problem with and we need your help to deal with it", it might be better. (Prospector)*

6.51 Over the past few years there has been a focus on the possibilities of the **internet** and social networking for communication, the dissemination of information and increasingly as a platform for the direct exertion of influence. Though a majority of participants, particularly

Prospectors and Pioneers, had access to and used the internet, they did not readily associate it with influencing local decision-making. Shopping, email, research and networking applications were more likely to be discussed, with surveys referred to usually national and often commercial:

- *'I'm a YouGov panel member, so I now feel counted in some way in national statistics, but surveys in general I don't know – stuff is decided already, they'll still do what they want' (Pioneer)*
- *I filled out an online M&S survey because it popped up but if not I wouldn't seek them out (Pioneer)*
- *'If it's short and quick I will do it' (Prospector)*
- *'I would sign a petition. In fact I've just done one about slow broadband' (Prospector)*

6.52 A few discussion participants had joined Facebook campaigns but treated this as no different from other possible campaigning tactics. Individual participants cited particular concerns with the use of the internet:

- *'Websites are hard to navigate – you get lost in it – and sometimes you try to go to the Council website and it comes up not available' (Prospector)*
- *'I tried to check for a school for my daughter but it wasn't opening the pages – I tried to check what time the schools open, even. They don't have nothing' (Prospector)*
- *'I've only done online shopping once – they want so much information and I don't know who can access it. I'm suspicious now since I got my card cloned from an ATM, I prefer cash to plastic' (Pioneer)*
- *'A lot of parents don't know how to put firewalls up and kids say they're doing homework and they're not' (Prospector)*

6.53 Overall, the internet did not make a big impression on groups as a topic for discussion. However, discussions did corroborate the imbalance between different values segments in terms of communications methods. Settlers are, statistically, more likely to be older and less likely to own a computer than people in the other two Values segments. From our experience, discussion on online communications has sometimes met with an almost venomous response from Settler groups, who have sometimes seen the use of online content and engagement (particularly when cited as an answer to a request for information that they have made of the Council) as a sign that 'people like us' are being excluded, even if they themselves have access to the internet.

- *'If you haven't got a computer you're buggered' (Settler)*

A potent example of the internet as a signal of exclusion arose in a previous Settler group on sense of place and community cohesion. An animated discussion on the lack of gritting and consequent lack of waste collection displayed participants' feelings that the locality in question was being overlooked. The biggest explosion of fury, however, came in response to one man's statement, delivered standing and in a raised voice: *'and I phoned them up and do you know what they told me? They told me to look on the website!'* It was clear that this mismatch between the communication preferences of those delivering and receiving services had compounded the feelings of unfairness that were already present.

Experiences of involvement

6.54 At each discussion group participants were asked whether they had taken part in consultation events, meetings or other formal mechanisms to discuss particular issues with authorities. Almost universally the answer was 'no'. Interestingly, in response to other questions, many of the same participants brought up stories and anecdotes which did in fact relate to their experience with engagement mechanisms.

6.55 This suggests not only a **public unawareness of opportunities to influence**, but also a deeper issue around **perceptions of the role of service providers**.

6.56 A key issue was around **perceptions of response**. Almost all the personal experiences related, and the frustrations expressed, concerned a lack of action or a slow reaction from institutions (with many examples given in terms of time periods of 3 or 6 months or more for a problem to be acknowledged or resolved). The majority of anecdotes concerned housing and related issues:

- *'There was no outcome' (Settler)*
- *'I had a problem with intrusive neighbours, the Council took 6 months to react' (Settler)*
- *'I have had some response. Two years ago I reported this house that was obviously not being lived in, there was brambles growing and one was going through the letterbox. I spoke to the housing manager and he sent me a letter in response, but nothing was done for 2 years' (Settler)*
- *'I have problem with my neighbour. He take what he want from garden, he put rubbish in my garden. I told police and they do nothing. It makes me feel unhappy' (Prospector)*
- *'I've had a bad experience with the council – my partner was racially assaulted by a neighbour and yet the neighbour is still living next door, still has dangerous dogs milling about and still owes money for compensation. There's been no enforcement and it's been over 5 years now' (Pioneer)*
- *'My baby had a health problem and was coughing because of the damp in my flat. I called the Environmental Health department for a month – it always went to answer phone. I finally spoke to a guy who came and looked round 3 weeks later and I've not heard anything since. It's happened again since' (Prospector)*
- *'I don't like councillors – you have to make an appointment, it's on their time, not your time' (Prospector)*

6.57 These frustrations were linked into the motives and outcomes that participants across boroughs and values modes segments associated with Council activities:

- *'The Council are like janitors – they just keep things ticking over' (Pioneer)*
- *'They think it's a job for life: as long as I have some fancy report at the end of the year then I'm doing my job. It's a load of bollocks' (Settler)*
- *'It's like the failing schools and hospitals. As long as they tick the boxes they think they're doing their jobs' (Settler)*
- *'It's easy to make judgements, but I think the fat cats are sitting on their salary and wanting a quiet life' (Prospector)*
- *'I always feel a survey's just part of a quota of information they have to compile; various sections of middle-management – self-perpetuating and possibly useless shite' (Pioneer)*
- *'We don't have any more influence past the "we've given our viewpoint" – I can't tell whether it's been listened to or whether you're just going to send it down to some bloke ... who doesn't really care about it' (Pioneer)*

6.58 At a time when local authorities are making a transition to an enabling role within local strategic partnerships and the wider empowerment agenda, there is a clear divergence of views between authorities and the public in terms of the motives, activities and outcomes associated with authorities.

6.59 Personal experience of local authorities and organisations as impeding, rather than facilitating, action, or of being seen as making excuses for inaction, was particularly problematic:

- *'Last summer we were playing cricket and there was no one taking care of the grass. I went with a group of people and cut it myself. One day the council people stopped us and asked if we had permission. We are the local people, we are paying tax and we know how to do it properly' (Settler)*
- *'I live in a council house, the back wall's crumbling. They came 6 months ago to look at the wall, then nothing happens. So what happens when my grandson comes and plays in the garden and the wall falls on him? The Council wasn't sure if the wall belonged to the Local Authority or to the shop behind – but I'm not interested, I just want the wall fixed' (Prospector)*
- *'I want to get the benefit of what I am paying for' (Settler)*
- *'The police are threatening to evict my girlfriend because she rings them quite often, her ex is threatening her and she doesn't feel safe, so it's made things worse' (Settler)*

6.60 A particularly striking feature of the discussion groups was the **power of anecdotes** – in expressing and reinforcing negative perceptions, but less often also positive ones:

- *'My mum contacted the MP a few years ago because she needed a letter, not sure what it was for but she managed to talk to... him or her, I don't know, and get it sorted and they helped. I don't really trust them but my mum had an OK experience' (Prospector)*
- *'One of my councillors ... always sends emails and responses, often walks around the neighbourhoods, she is available 24/7, but there are other councillors...'* (Settler)
- *'I was living above a pub where they played music every Saturday and Sunday. I didn't like it so I wanted to move out. It took a long time to move out. I was really helped by the One Stop Shop where they have several services under one roof. It gave me more confidence to know that there were small things that I could do to try and find somewhere better to live.'* (Pioneer)

6.61 Such positive personal experiences were never associated by the teller with engagement mechanisms, but rather related to particular people or, in the case of the One Stop Shop, mechanisms that were not identified by either the customer or the service provider as an engagement or influencing opportunity. The importance of personal experience in building trust and confidence was a common theme:

- *'Rather than spending money on consultations and surveys they should go out and meet the public more than before every election. Go down the street and knock on the doors'* (Prospector)

6.62 A preference emerged for the more **discursive, anecdotal style of the discussion groups** themselves as compared to other methods of consultation. There was a general consensus that the groups themselves were a good thing and were filling a niche that participants saw as being insufficiently filled. There was a consensus among participants that they were taking part not for the voucher incentives, but to enter into an interesting discussion, meet new people, or get their voices heard:

- *'Things like this help because they get different people from the community together and we can share experiences and common ground.'* (Pioneer)
- *'It's about interactions, being dealt with directly rather than ticking boxes'* (Settler)
- *'I was brought up in the village and there was the parish hall and if there was anything that was going to impact the village everyone could go have a chat. Now, you go through all this routine and nothing happens.'* (Settler)
- *'There's no forum for discussion.'* (Prospector)
- *'If you do a survey on paper, it's not the same because you're not getting any feedback as you do it'* (Pioneer)
- *'If there was one of these twice a week, I'd come'* (Pioneer)

6.63 Although, as with any form of engagement, action and feedback remains paramount:

- *'Today has been a good experience, but I'd like to see the results'* (Prospector)

6.64 This was a theme that cut across several of the questions asked during the discussion groups and chimed with stakeholder concerns that certain types of event intended wholly or partly to engage residents, such as ward panels, might be 'stage-managed', play the role of 'ratifying' rather than deciding, or irritate residents by too narrowly defining the scope of what they can talk about. Discussion group participants avowedly enjoyed the opportunity to speak their opinion freely, despite the different constraints that the group format introduced. In the majority of discussion groups, there was a healthy debate on the merits of being listened to in itself, with the consensus generally emerging that discussion was a good thing and was necessary (though by no means sufficient) to lead to improvements in one's local area. There was a wide and variously expressed feeling across boroughs and segments of a **duty to contribute views**:

- *'Everyone's got an influence. And if everyone did speak up...'* (Settler)
- *'You can always write to the council. We voice our concerns here but how many of us will follow it through?'* (Settler)
- *'It's my social responsibility'* (Prospector)
- *'If I don't give my opinion, I can't complain about what happens. It's the same as an election – if I don't vote, I can't spend 5 years complaining about it'* (Pioneer)
- *'It's our job to hold them to account and get the best out of the council'* (Settler)
- *'I'm a great believer that the local community gets to a large extent what it deserves'* (Pioneer)

6.65 This finding is a cause for optimism, but the general tenor of the discussion groups made it clear that these positive feelings of responsibility were largely untapped by local institutions.

Worldview

6.66 There was no explanation of Values Modes to group participants. However, there were clear observations across the discussion groups about how each of the segmented groups responded to the issues raised. Though there were differences from person to person, as the segmentation processes being used were broad, there were strong commonalities within values modes segments, and the following summarises some of the common themes, backed by wider research into the different groups:

Settlers

6.67 This group particularly felt they **lacked knowledge of how to influence**. There is an attitudinal tendency among Settlers, as discovered through the work conducted over several years by Cultural Dynamics on the British Values Survey, to be self-reliant and trust in known quantities such as oneself, one's friends and one's family. Both in these groups and cohesion-related groups run recently, it has been noted that some Settlers have actually engaged and involved themselves in a broad range of community activity, but that this does not usually translate into feeling that they have an importance or influence locally.

6.68 Cultural Dynamics' work suggests that Settlers are more **predisposed to pessimism** than others. Optimism and pessimism are major factors in determining perceptions of influence.

An optimistic or pessimistic worldview is to an extent a filter through which events, news stories, personal experiences and the experiences of others will be viewed. A key example of this dynamic in relation to influence, observed with Settler groups on many occasions, is the pessimistic perception that *'people in authority do not listen to me'*; in this frame of mind, people may paradoxically view any consultation as further evidence of this, rather than a rebuttal of it, on the grounds that the consultation will be 'rigged' in advance or simply ignored.

6.69 Though this cut across groups, Settlers were particularly strong in feeling that **surveys are generally a waste of time and money**, particularly where no feedback was given. Even with individuals who had been involved in various ways, the language used was the most 'us and them' in tone of any values segment.

6.70 Settlers consistently viewed seeing one's own desired outcomes achieved as a far greater indicator of influence than simply being listened to. Possibly in consequence, Settlers may be more likely to feel powerless. The contrast was illustrated particularly well with regards to a supermarket planning controversy: whilst the Prospector group discussed the same issue in terms of the pros and cons of the proposed development, the Settler group were strongly in agreement with one participant who said *'I don't think I could change that because they're so powerful, they've hired ex-MPs so they can get into planning departments'* (Settler).

6.71 Settlers were less likely to use the internet for as wide a range of purposes as were participants from the other two segments – as explored above, there is also an issue around the negative message of exclusion conveyed by too great a reliance on the internet, to which this group is particularly attuned.

6.72 Around half the Settlers recruited initially responded 'definitely agree' or 'tend to agree' when asked during the recruitment process if they could influence decisions in their local area (NI4) and a significant proportion tended to or definitely disagreed – similar proportions to the Pioneers.

Prospectors

6.73 People within this group are the most likely to **perceive themselves as time poor**, with many citing a lack of time and being too busy as a reason for not having been involved in local mechanisms. There is generally more awareness of wider political issues than with Settlers, but still little knowledge of the mechanisms available and how to get involved. There was some antipathy to consultations and Prospectors were likely (though this feeling cut across groups) to feel that *'Sometimes it's a case of too much talking and not enough done'* (Prospector)

6.74 Prospectors were predisposed to seeing one's own desired outcomes as a measure of influence, but were generally more willing than Settlers to compromise after debate.

6.75 Prospectors were more likely than other groups to talk about commercial drivers, such as the availability of shops, the need for economic regeneration and corporate online surveys.

6.76 However, though we would stress that the small sample size makes this only indicative, over four fifths of Prospectors recruited definitely agree or tend to agree that they can influence. This was a huge proportion compared to the other two groups and we reflect on some of the possible reasons for this disparity below.

Pioneers

6.77 More so than the other groups, Pioneers tended to give the impression that they knew how to influence if they wished to and were more likely to raise a poor experience rather than a lack of information as a reason for not getting involved. Whether and how they chose to do so was a matter of whether they were interested in the issues and the tactics they chose to adopt.

6.78 Strikingly, Pioneers' generally greater awareness of routes to influence was not matched by a greater perception of influence: Pioneers were even less likely to regard themselves as influential than were Settlers, with fewer than half the Pioneers recruited responding 'definitely agree' or 'tend to agree' when asked if they could influence.

6.79 This group was more likely to report having joined formal structures or filled in official surveys, but were no more enamoured with them than other groups, articulating doubts about the destination and use of the data and often expressing a suspicion of statistics.

6.80 However, Pioneers were as likely as others to bring up the idea of influencing others in the community as opposed to local institutions, and as likely to express feelings of powerlessness in the face of anti-social behavior, a feeling which cut across groups.

7 Key findings

7.1 As noted above, the majority of those seeking to influence local institutions are interested in **reactive** influence, solving particular problems, and many have not been satisfied with their experiences in this regard. Most of the anecdotes and examples captured, where frustration is greatest, relate to issues addressed through front line services.

7.2 Yet the majority of mechanisms identified by authorities were by their very nature **proactive** and trying to address wider issues. Those who do seek proactive influence, meanwhile, are often attempting to address issues which are outside the scope of local institutions – because of ineffective partnership working, lack of resources or simply not having a remit in a particular area. Very few of the points made by discussion group participants focused on engagement mechanisms, reflecting not only feelings of not being sufficiently informed, but also the feeling that some engagement mechanisms lack relevance for many people.

7.3 The resulting ‘influence gap’, which neither frontline service provision nor engagement mechanisms are necessarily addressing, has a clear bearing on the relatively low proportion of Place Survey participants who definitely agree or tend to agree that they can have an influence on issues that affect them in their local area.

7.4 A high proportion of members of the public do, however, recognise the importance of getting involved, and cite a lack of information and not having been approached to take part as two major factors that would make them more likely to follow this up. Residents clearly expressed a desire to be personally asked to get involved and contribute their views, and this offers a basis for local institutions to build on reactive transactions to create proactive influencing opportunities. A major conclusion of this study is the need to consider a closer alignment between the service delivery and engagement arms of local institutions in order to make this happen.

An example from a borough in which TCC has worked underlines the potential power of simply asking people to get involved in particular ways. A borough had experienced a murder in a notoriously dangerous area of town and the Council was besieged by allegations of an inadequate police response, possibly with racial motivations, against a background of accusations that the locality in question had been neglected. A special meeting of the community safety partnership was called and advertised to residents as a chance to ask questions and discuss the issue with a panel of key local stakeholders. This meeting was particularly difficult, pervaded by residents' feelings of anger and confusion, and often involved the panel shouting to be heard.

The Council and police knew that continued meetings would make no difference at this stage. Instead, officers located the people who had been particularly concerned or vocal in the meeting, spoke to them separately and invited them to work with the Council and Police. The first stage was to play this group the incident tapes from the night in question, building trust and demonstrating transparency. The partners continued to work with the members of the public until another reassurance meeting was held three months later. This time, when people in the audience became angry, the people who had been working with the council in advance were able to calm the meeting and explain to the residents what they thought was going on. Having had a chance to have their say, they were far happier to work with rather than against the council. This defused the tension, but in the long term also made it possible for the council to hold conversations with local residents about wards with sensitive problems, rather than being stopped at the first hurdle by a lack of trust.

7.5 The frustrations expressed extend to **representative democracy** and its ability to influence on people's behalf. Some participants were able to distinguish between organisations, officers and elected representatives, and some have positive experiences of approaching councillors and MPs. The majority, however, have negative experiences and perceptions and so view councillors and MPs as part of the problem.

7.6 Settlers and Pioneers in particular are sceptical about the ability of **individuals** to influence and so where appropriate will try to attract or join others with like minds. This approach can see these individuals bypassing formal structures in order to take more **collective or institutional** action in order to influence change. Such **grassroots action** can manifest itself in many ways, including joining or creating community groups, campaigning and lobbying. Technology is making the latter options easier, but local institutions should be wary of treating online engagement in particular as fully representative of a community. A further option available to the most wealthy is the choice to opt out of public services.

7.7 Prospectors are more likely to feel that they can influence as individuals, that they understand how things work and can get to the people who make decisions, despite expressing a lack of awareness of engagement mechanisms. They may be more likely to respond to opportunities to speak with key people when the opportunity presents itself.

7.8 On the whole, citizens understand the limitations of authorities and their expectations are broadly rational and realistic. Most do not expect to be unconditionally **obeyed** (although some do), but nearly all do expect to be **heard**. Their experience, however, is that they are not and that there is no response to their concerns (see below).

7.9 A key problem is that residents do not feel **informed about the opportunities to influence**. This is somewhat surprising because authorities are devising ever more opportunities for citizens to have a say in decisions affecting their locality, and in recent years have actively sought to improve access to information. The Duty to Promote Democracy mooted in the Government's 2008 White Paper, *Communities in Control*, has the potential to go some way towards addressing these issues depending on if and how it is implemented.

7.10 The majority of issues where influence is sought are reactive and require a service response. Here, perceptions of influence are intrinsically linked to feelings of customer service and satisfaction. It is clear however that **authorities do not see these transactions as opportunities to extend influence, or to improve perceptions of influence**. The engagement mechanisms available are often not appropriate for resolving the problems or issues at hand.

7.11 The stakeholder interviews and our related experience indicate that boroughs have often focused work and defined success factors around the concepts of engagement, involvement and, increasingly, empowerment, which can result in a different focus and different outcomes from those that members of the public speak about in discussions. This can be viewed as a mismatch between those designing and implementing engagement mechanisms (who are often Pioneers) and the broader spectrum of values found in the community.

7.12 The mismatch may be compounded by the establishment of the community engagement function as a separate entity within some institutions, increasing the likelihood that the publicity and format of engagement opportunities may not be congruent with public concerns and priorities.

7.13 Communication is another hugely important factor. Even where a problem or issue needs an active response, and there is a mechanism available to address it, the majority of members of the public are unaware of the opportunities to do so – sometimes, significantly, even when they have taken part in such an opportunity themselves. Better communication – and often communication segmented for different audiences – is vital.

7.14 Public discussion groups revealed a wealth of activity taking place that did not always match up with the themes discussed in stakeholder interviews, and importantly was not always acknowledged by participants as being related to 'engagement' or 'influence' Someone who brings flowers to an old people's home each day is just as much a part, if not more so, of the 'engagement' fabric as somebody who has filled in a survey or attended a meeting. Though it must be recognised that democratic engagement and volunteering can stem from very different motives, more recognition, thanks and informal support from boroughs to

individuals and groups who may not necessarily have much contact with local authorities, but are civically active in some way in the borough, may help to open lines of communication and boost perceptions of influence.

7.15 The discussion groups powerfully suggested that many individuals felt a lack of awareness and / or a lack of confidence, not just in opportunities to engage, but in the wider purpose and context of those opportunities and their outcomes in terms of action and service delivery. Even where citizens did report choosing to engage in proactive statutory engagement mechanisms, it was often with a feeling of not knowing what, if anything, would come of it. If sustained, such a lack of clarity would make repeat engagement less likely.

7.16 Where authorities do publicise the expected or realised outcomes of engagement opportunities, these messages may be lost in the wider maelstrom of communications, much of which is discarded or dismissed out of hand if it contradicts the worldview and values of the individual or if it assumes a trust in local institutions which is often fragile or absent. Though a majority of the concerns and issues raised by discussion group participants were shared across values modes segments, the differences that did emerge underlined the importance of segmentation in messaging.

7.17 Additionally, the availability of information alone may not be enough. A key reason that participants gave for not having engaged in consultation or similar activities was that they had not been approached, or did not feel that they had been approached. Ipsos MORI's analysis of the Citizen Survey corroborates this, with the second most cited point that would make it easier to have an influence, cited by 46% of respondents, being 'If the council asked me'. This reflects the need for a shift in perspective, or even power balance, as compared to a more traditional, 'build it and they will come' view of service provision that casts engagement professionals as being there to provide opportunities for local people to influence.

7.18 Once an individual has decided to get involved, their **experience** of engagement in the majority of cases is negative. It is clear that people emerge from contact with engagement mechanisms not feeling heard. Though this raises the questions of whether engagement opportunities are in a format that people respond to and whether the mechanisms chosen are appropriate, it is most of all derived from the perception that nothing happens as a result, or that if it does, it takes too long.

7.19 Despite the wider direction of travel of authorities towards extending and building on opportunities to influence, there is clear recognition within authorities around areas for improvement. There are cultural issues to be overcome around engagement and its purpose. There is evidence of consultation by default, and residents often perceive such efforts as merely tick-box exercises driven by internal priorities and processes rather than by the need to further their desired outcomes, with a detrimental effect on trust.

7.20 Authorities also need to recognize not only that different mechanisms are appropriate for different people, but that different people will interpret the same experience in different ways.

Settlers and Pioneers were far less likely than Prospectors to agree that they could have an influence over local decisions. Given that groups drawn from each values segment did not noticeably differ in the proportion of participants who had got involved, there is a powerful suggestion that different values help shape different interpretations of experiences. Whilst Settlers were more vehement than Prospectors in their frustrations at the lack of action arising from their engagement with local institutions, Pioneers were more likely than Prospectors to express subtler doubts about the engagement process and how, and whether, data and views would and should be taken into account by decision-makers. Understanding such differences and taking a **segmented** communications approach which works with, rather than against, an individual's own worldview will be crucial in improving perceptions of influence.

7.21 There are competing pressures within authorities around the decisions that are made. The majority of residents understand that there are limits and boundaries to the influence that they can have in a particular transaction with other agents and agencies, but are usually unclear as to what these limits are and why they arise. The problem can be compounded by the indirect nature of many opportunities to influence, particularly within more advanced local strategic partnership structures. The more direct a transaction, the more likely it is people will be aware of its results. The more levels, barriers and layers between an individual and a decision, the less likely it is that people will attribute an action taken to their attempts to highlight and influence an issue. There needs to be greater clarity about the remit, extent and process of any opportunity to influence.

7.22 Most of all, residents need to understand what happens as a result of such opportunities. This again places an emphasis on the appropriate communication of decisions that have been made and the reasons why they were taken. The premium placed on visible action – on individual matters of service delivery or larger aspects of desired change – is difficult to overstate as the key to building trust, and front line staff are crucial in this.

7.23 Discussion group participants were impatient with being given procedural reasons why certain things could not be achieved, but were very accepting of these when compared to the common alternative of inaction and a lack of acknowledgement. Low expectations of Council and Job Centre staff in particular were self-perpetuating, with a need to go further to reach and communicate with pessimistic customers.

7.24 Both stakeholder interviews and public discussion groups revealed the scope to link engagement and customer service far more explicitly by asking customers to get involved in engagement structures. This can help engender a positive response to what might otherwise be an unresolved issue of dissatisfaction. As Demos conclude in *State of Trust*, local institutions 'need to use the personal interactions between their staff and the public to build ongoing, two-way relationships with the people they serve based on honesty and reciprocity' (p12) – perhaps involving offering them training and support in communicating effectively and empathetically with customers.

A Pioneer participant described how he was asked when leaving a clinic one day if he would be willing to sit on its committee, observing how, having had an experience that did not match his expectations, he agreed to join the committee and noting that had he had a better experience, he might not have been interested.

7.25 A **prompt response** to requests and **prompt feedback** on actions taken are therefore paramount. If this feedback is seen as bland, impersonal or evasive, however, or if it is given in a form that does not suit the recipients, it can do more harm than good: the example above of the Settler group responding with venom to the mention of the internet is an extreme, but accurate reflection of how inappropriate communications methods can compound a problem. A willingness to **emphasise outcomes rather than particular mechanisms** and to engage people on their own terms, if necessary in an ad-hoc or informal way, is part of changing the perception that individuals have no opportunity to influence and that service is ineffective and impersonal.

7.26 This is particularly true (and corroborated by Values Modes research described in section 4 above) where residents, particularly Settlers, do not feel connected to their local community in a way that would allow them to feel comfortable in many formal engagement settings. In contrast, for example, seeing a councillor walking down their street might provide an opportunity to engage on their own terms. The willingness to engage in creative but authentic ways is also particularly important where individuals (particularly Prospectors) perceive themselves as lacking the time to get involved.

7.27 Personal experience was the only thing that emerged as being able to bolster or renew trust. Finding ways of harnessing – and creating – positive personal experiences without being inauthentic, demonstrating to people that they, or people that they identify with, have experienced promises being kept and a level of courtesy and effectiveness, is central to building trust and boosting feelings of influence. For instance, the propensity to want to speak to someone ‘in authority’ that emerged clearly from the discussion groups may be a symptom of a lack of belief in local institutions, and so can be indirectly addressed through other improvements. However, meeting this need is also a sign of respect on a one-to-one level from the institution to the individual. With executive pay high on the agenda and almost certain to remain so in the current economic climate, ensuring that senior officers and councillors are more visible to the public on a day-to-day basis is vital.

7.28 In *State of Trust*, Demos note that ‘Word of mouth is the second most influential factor [in perceptions], with all participants knowing someone who had experienced bad service. Many council staff felt that the media had a particularly negative impact on trust, but our research suggests that it is in fact only the third most influential factor’ (p36). Bolstering trust and perceptions of influence through anecdotal and word of mouth experiences will require a continuation of the move away from top-down, centralised communications and towards **peer to peer networks**.

7.29 Perceptions, positive as well as negative, are most often expressed through anecdotes. These anecdotes can be first-hand, second-hand or merely stories at large in the community, but they are powerful methods of communication. The importance of personal experience, anecdote and storytelling is one of the key learning points that this project has most clearly reinforced.

7.30 In contrast to experiences with unsegmented groups, participants in a particular discussion group tended to get on well together and communicate effectively when discussing and reaching consensus on the various issues at hand. This amplified the primacy of anecdote as a mode of expression, with even relatively recalcitrant groups starting to pick up and refer back to each others' anecdotal examples to back up their assertions, within a few minutes of having met each other.

7.31 This demonstrated the importance of segmentation not only in devising messages, but also in deciding who is best to carry those messages. If an individual hears a message, whether in an anecdote or otherwise, from someone whose prevailing worldview feels too far away from their own, they may well choose to ignore it. This is reinforced by the British Values Survey research referenced in Section 4 above.

7.32 Taking in not just opinions but also emotions, a more anecdotal approach aligns itself with the reasons why people might seek to exert influence in the first place – *'very emotive – from the heart, not the head'* (*Pioneer*). The positive response from the vast majority of participants suggests that this is an approach which should be incorporated into boroughs' engagement offerings.

'It's about interactions, being dealt with directly rather than ticking boxes' (Settler)

8 Next steps to consider

In setting out these next steps, we would stress the limited timescale, geographical scope and sample sizes which characterised the insight work. Many of the recommendations serve to indicate further work which we feel would serve the interests of boroughs looking to improve their interventions in this area. A fuller evaluation of the processes and approaches used is given in Appendix D below.

Our objective in this section is to set out some ways in which boroughs can use the findings above to help tailor their communications and engagement work.

Segmented messaging is at the heart of our approach in order to bridge some of the gaps in perception between local institutions and the public, ensuring that all segments in the population hear what institutions are saying without dismissing it out of hand.

Understanding motivations and expectations

- Local authorities need to be clear what different people's motivations are for engagement in different circumstances.
- If a person's motivation is to exercise reactive influence – i.e. someone has a problem that they want to sort out – high standards of service are paramount.
- Motivations for engaging vary according to values. Differences in practice are often subtle but need to be understood in order to ensure engagement with the whole community.
- To give a broad brush example, a Prospector is more likely to be motivated by improving the status of the area, whereas a Settler is more likely to be motivated by a desire to protect the area from unwanted changes. Pioneers are more likely to be motivated by big picture arguments about changing society.
- Values will also have an impact on different residents' expectations of influence. Authorities should be clear and realistic with residents about the extent of influence that they can expect from a particular encounter, and the ways in which the gathering of views relates to outcomes.
- Authorities need to connect a clear understanding of differing motivations to their approaches to communication and the channels they use for engagement.
- Expectations about different residents' knowledge of the engagement process and the opportunities to engage need to be realistic, and participants in formal mechanisms recognised as belonging largely to a self-selecting group.

Breaking down cultural barriers

- Many authorities appear to be focused on the mechanisms labelled as 'engagement' and may undervalue the importance of customer experience from an engagement perspective.
- Residents feel disempowered and negative when they cannot access someone who is responsible for making a decision, or when feedback about a decision is lacking. Part of this is about information provision but much of it is cultural.
- The culture of many public service organisations needs to become more customer oriented, with clarity about responsibility and personal ownership of residents' problems and queries.
- Senior figures within authorities need to become more visible.
- For many residents the demarcation between different service providers, and elected and non-elected figures, is unclear. Often, in reality, a problem is not owned by one department or service provider. The more approaches and insights are co-ordinated and, where appropriate, integrated, the better.

Enhancing front line engagement

- Many authorities now collate information on customer complaints and feed this upstream, but few appear to connect this to their engagement approaches.
- Authorities should make better use of the ability of front line staff to promote and provide proactive engagement opportunities as part of their daily interaction with residents.
- In this context, authorities should give consideration to how they train their front line staff for this vital role.

Integrating communication

- Communications and engagement should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Authorities should think more in terms of an ongoing conversation with their community, in contrast to viewing communicating with residents as a task separate from the processes for obtaining views and feedback from residents.
- Appropriate and targeted feedback on decisions made or actions taken, and on the impact of residents' involvement on those decisions or actions, is essential to build trust and improve perceptions of influence.

- Pooling insight and co-ordinating communication and engagement across service providers is also important.
- Communication needs to be focused on what motivates residents to get involved, for example real people's stories, rather than on the need for the authority to engage.

Choosing the right channels

- The channel – e.g. the internet – that is appropriate for one group in society is not necessarily appropriate for another. Even if people with different values use a particular form of media, how they use it and what they use for are different.
- One underutilised channel is word of mouth. For Settlers in particular, this has the power to engage in a way that formal consultations and the internet do not. For some local authorities, word of mouth networks are an important part of the approach to engagement.

People and outcomes first, mechanisms afterwards

- Many authorities automatically reach for more formal consultation mechanisms, often at considerable cost, where there may be better alternatives. Often the informal approach is the one that should be adopted.
- Residents expressed to us their desire to discuss rather than tick boxes, though most recognised that this depended on the nature of the issue being consulted on.
- Low trust in authority, particularly among Settlers, increases the importance of using local influencers or interlocutors to help engage people.

Taking influence beyond the town hall

- More open and discursive engagement approaches are important to allow people to voice some of their deepest concerns. These are often not around public services but rather anti-social behaviour, social norms and the need for education.
- Elected and non-elected figures within authorities need to see their remit as including the building of social capital through personal contact with and lending personal support to informal community initiatives, as well as formal ones: acknowledging the influence that such initiatives and contributions have on decision-making, helping to define shared challenges and helping communities find ways to tackle them.

a. TCC experience and ethos

We are nationally recognised as leaders in the field of community cohesion in particular, having worked with a wide range of local authorities and local strategic partnerships across the country. Initially piloted and developed through a longstanding relationship with Barking and Dagenham Council and contracts with Thurrock Council and Boston Borough Council, our approach has since spread and our work been widely recognised through our involvement in the Capital Ambition project sponsored by the Government Office for London. More recently, TCC has been a key delivery partner for the Civic Leadership strand of the Connecting Communities programme, run by the Department of Communities and Local Government, through which we have worked with over 30 local authorities nationwide.

Through this work, we have pioneered and developed a range of methodologies and techniques for identifying and tackling disaffection, low trust and the feeling among communities that their values are not those of the people making decisions. We understand that the narratives and experiences that prevail within communities are vital to comprehending their underlying values, attitudes and needs, and that a credible, congruent response to these narratives is at the heart of good communication. We have a strong track record of using this insight to enable organisations to develop appropriate – and appropriately targeted – services and interventions to maximise return on investment. Particular challenges to which we have been involved in finding solutions include the need for significant change to the unsegmented "air war" communications approach that has been traditional in the public sector, and the need to train and support front-line staff in empathising with the challenges that their customers may face.

Another key area of work is designing and implementing effective community engagement initiatives. An example is Imagine Croydon, a radical consultation for Croydon's Local Strategic Partnership to engage thousands of people in sharing their ideas for a 30 year vision for the future of the borough, using video interviews, online engagement, do-it-yourself 'toolkits' of activities, a strategy game for school pupils and colourful quick response 'postcards', in addition to more conventional methods, to ensure a reach beyond the 'usual suspects'. More recently we have helped Northamptonshire County Council to engage as many residents as possible in setting out their priorities for service transformation. We have particular expertise with groups often considered 'seldom heard from', particularly young people.

This background stands us in good stead for primary and secondary research work, of which we have considerable experience in a variety of contexts from research on the needs of older people for the Croydon Strategic Partnership to a project on the rise of the Far Right. The depth and breadth of our practical work in the communities sector also means that we are continually returning to the issue of influence – what it is, who has it and how it can be exercised. We were delighted to have the opportunity to ask for and listen to people's experiences and views on the subject in the course of this project.

b. Selecting the test boroughs

From the first phase research, we were able to group the boroughs according to a number of relevant factors, shown in the table below. A key consideration both in determining the focus of the insight work and in selecting the test boroughs was the applicability of insight to all London boroughs. This influenced the groupings into which interested boroughs were placed prior to selection. The test boroughs contrast significantly with each other in terms of the trends and lines of enquiry identified in the previous and following sections of this document, and also cover a wide range of NI4 scores.

Eligibility and interest

Out of the thirty-two London boroughs, seventeen (listed below) were eligible for Targeted Support, of which twelve (in bold) expressed an interest in participating in TCC's research:

Borough	NI4 score (%)
Barking & Dagenham	37.0
Barnet	37.3
Bexley	26.4
Bromley	26.8
Camden	36.1
Croydon	33.8
Enfield	31.6
Greenwich	33.4
Havering	24.8
Hillingdon	34.5
Hounslow	33.6
Kensington & Chelsea	37.0
Redbridge	32.1
Richmond	31.1
Sutton	30.5
Tower Hamlets	35.7
Wandsworth	37.9

Ethnicity and migration

In line with the findings from the first phase, we were keen to include at least one borough with a clear majority of white British residents, as well as one with a significantly ethnically mixed population. A further distinction was between ethnic minority populations that were largely of a particular nationality or group of nationalities, and populations that were genuinely 'diverse' in terms of ethnic fractionalisation, measured by MORI using the Herfindahl index and meaning, in simple terms, the likelihood, expressed as a percentage, that two randomly selected individuals from a particular locality will be of the same ethnicity. Two

boroughs both termed 'diverse' in general discourse might score very differently on this criterion.

Geographic factors

The London boroughs eligible for Targeted Support were largely located in outer London, but we were anxious to include an inner London borough as a comparator, noting the marked attitudinal and political differences between inner and outer London. Some differentiation in the location of test boroughs within London was also desirable in order to ensure that the findings were as useful as possible to all London boroughs.

Boroughs chosen

Barking and Dagenham is an outer London borough with a white British population comprising over 71% of the total population. It has a dominant Labour administration which has held ongoing control throughout the borough's history as a unitary authority. The British National Party has experienced notable success here, forming the opposition prior to the 2010 local elections. There is a strong and growing programme of cohesion and engagement interventions which several other London boroughs are observing with interest.

Barnet is a large outer London borough with a Conservative administration and a notable commitment to innovation in public service delivery. It is ethnically diverse with an unusually high amount of ethnic mixing in residential areas across the borough. Much of the borough is characterised by a well-educated, commuter population, likely to have different conceptions of identity and influence from the deprived urban localities and the traditional village communities also to be found in Barnet.

Hounslow is an outer London borough with a settled ethnically diverse population. Fairly typically of outer London boroughs, there is a socioeconomic divide visible across the geography of the borough, with a particularly consistent and pronounced east-west gradient. Settled Asian communities in Hounslow offer an interesting opportunity to explore perceptions. Prior to the 2010 local elections, the Council was run by a coalition with heavy independent involvement, giving a potential point of comparison for exploring perceptions of influence in relation to trust.

Tower Hamlets is a highly socioeconomically diverse Inner London borough, with a Bangladeshi population forming nearly a third of the total population. Innovative engagement mechanisms include their successful implementation of the Young Mayor scheme and an upcoming, high-profile consultative budgeting process. The scoping interview revealed huge enthusiasm for the project, particularly for a more objective assessment of engagement attitudes and mechanisms in light of the borough's ethnic makeup and the statistical links between this and NI4.

There was strong interest among several of the other boroughs eligible to participate. The key reason that most were not chosen is to ensure adequate contrast between the boroughs selected, and thus to ensure the best learning for London as a whole. The first group in

particular presented considerable difficulty in selection; however, the scope and budget of the research makes it impractical to expand into a greater number of boroughs without diluting the findings. In some cases where we have prior knowledge and experience, this is also a factor, as this experience can be brought to the wider study whilst project resources are concentrated in other areas.

We are very grateful to all interested boroughs for expressing their interest and in many cases taking the time to meet with us, and where we have been unable to select boroughs, we will do all that we can to help them maintain their interest in shaping the emerging 'toolkit' by putting forward their thoughts during the drafting phase.

Interested boroughs grouped as discussed above, set out with other data of interest

	Borough	Political makeup	Population density	NI4	Actual involvement	Want to be more involved	Well informed of involvement opportunities?	Voter turnout 2006	% White Brit 2006	% White Brit 2001	% Economically Inactive	% Age: 0 - 15	% Age: 16 - 29	% Age: 30 - 44	% Age: 45 - 64	% Age: 65+
Outer London, ethnically diverse	Barnet	Con 37, Lab 20, LD 6	Moderately low	37.3	16.3	30.6	30.1	38.3	57.3	59.7	24.7	20.5	18.5	24.3	20.3	16.5
	Croydon	Con 42, Lab 25, Ind Con 1, Ind 1, Ungrouped 1	Moderately low	33.8	15.5	28.00	27.8	~40	59.0	63.4	21.0	20.7	18.7	23.8	21.5	15.3
	Enfield	Con 34, Lab 27, Ind 2	Moderately low	31.6	15.5	30.0	30.0	36.85	56.9	60.9	25.9	21.4	18.9	23.5	20.6	15.6
	Hounslow	Con-Ind Coalition Con 24, Lab 23, Ind 6, LD 3, Other Ind 4	Moderately low	33.6	15.8	33.5	26.5	37.8	53.0	55.6	23.5	19.7	21.9	26.2	19.2	13.0
	Redbridge	NOC Con 31, Lab 14, LD 13, Others 5	Moderately low	32.1	15.6	32.9	32.2	38.4	52.0	57.2	27.0	21.7	19.8	23.2	20.3	15.0
Inner London, ethnically diverse	Kensington and Chelsea	Con 45, Lab 9	Very high	37	22.4	33.6	33.1	28.72	50.1	50.3	27.1	15.4	21.1	28.3	19.5	15.7
	Tower Hamlets	Lab 33, Con 8, Respect 6, LD 4	Very high	35.7	23.7	35.4	30.3	?	44.4	43.1	29.9	20.1	27.9	30.2	13.1	8.7
	Greenwich	Lab 36, Con 13, LD 2	Moderately low	33.4	15.1	33.4	25.3	35.81	66.0	70.3	27.9	21.1	20.9	25.5	18.8	13.7
Outer London, ethnically less diverse	Barking & Dagenham	Lab 35, BNP 12, Con 2, Ind 1	Moderately low	37	13.4	31.2	34.9	38.3	71.2	80.4	29.7	24.6	20.2	22.9	18.2	14.0
	Bromley	Con 47, LD 7, Lab 3, Ind 2	Very low	26.8	16.2	31.9	21.7	42	82.4	86.3	19.9	19.7	15.7	23.0	21.9	19.6
	Havering	Con 33, Residents' Group 13, Ind 2, Rainham and Wennington Ind 2, Lab 2, BNP 1, LD 1	Very low	24.8	11.3	31.1	23.8	?	87.3	91.7	16.5	19.0	17.4	19.9	23.0	20.8
	Richmond	LD 35, Con 18, Ind Con 1	Moderately low	31.1	17.7	31.6	28.9	51.13*	75.1	78.5	20.5	19.8	15.2	27.2	22.1	15.6

* highest in country

c. Agreed variations from original proposal

The work has been undertaken largely (to date) in line with the final proposal agreed. There have been minor variations in the time spent, which are highlighted here for future reference:

- More time has been spent on desk-based research than had initially been envisaged. This reflects the emerging work around NI4 taking place at the national level and our determination to ensure that this piece of work builds on any relevant findings.
- There was less time required around quantitative analysis than had been anticipated, because there are limited datasets available to analyse.
- The report reflects this, and there is a correspondingly greater (although not exclusive) weight placed on the quantitative analysis emerging through the national work of Ipsos MORI and others. This also reflects that the larger datasets with which they are working will be more robust than findings derived from smaller datasets.
- The undertaking of stakeholder interviews also required more time than anticipated, as the seniority of interviewees made it impractical to arrange the interviews concurrently within the project timeframes.
- Finally, it was agreed that recruiting nine Values Modes discussion groups as previously agreed would leave just three discussion groups based on demographic or other factors, which would have added little value to the data. Consequently, all focus groups were recruited for based on Values Modes.

d. Noted limitations in the approach

It is essential to be frank about the limitations in the agreed scope of the project, and the limitations of the approaches used, in order to allow boroughs to contextualize the resulting insight and assess where the case for a particular approach needs to be strengthened.

Political context

The general election of May 2010, on the horizon as the research was conducted, has given rise to uncertainties and preoccupations for local institutions that may not have existed at other times. Though this does not appear to have had a major distorting effect, it may well have meant that information gathered on future engagement projects and mechanisms was not as full as it might have been at another time in the political cycle.

Discussion group recruitment

Groups were recruited using a specially modified form of the standard Values Modes questionnaire, developed by Cultural Dynamics. Having previously experimented with a range of questionnaires, it was found that retaining potential participants' interest was difficult if too many questions were used, limiting the exercise to only the most interested people and defeating the objective of achieving a broad sample of participants. As such, a shorter questionnaire was developed in consultation with Cultural Dynamics that provides a speedy recruitment process together with a fair degree of accuracy. On the whole this worked well, but the groups should be considered as a reasonable approximation of the Values Modes segmentation, rather than statistically pure. Had time permitted, it would have been instructive to incorporate an opportunity for participants to fill in the standard questionnaire into the discussion group timetable to verify the segmentation process.

Small sample sizes

Overall, 170 members of the public were recruited for the 12 discussion groups, enabling a reasonable amount of data to be collected on the links between values and perceptions of influence, explored in sections 6 and 7 above. However, this level of recruitment was conducted in the knowledge that around half of those recruited would turn up for their allocated groups, even if reminded and incentivized. The resulting discussion groups of between six and twelve people were ideal for establishing the group's mood and probing individuals on their particular opinions, but cannot fairly be used as a basis for any numerical or statistical claims.

Few discussion groups

The scope and timescale of the project necessarily placed a limit on the number of discussion groups that could be conducted. If it had been possible, we would have liked to supplement the values modes groups with demographically and geographically segmented groups to test other hypotheses. (At the request of one council we were able to run a discussion with a group of Hindus, which was an interesting addition.)

e. Summary of previous research – identifying factors possibly related to NI4

Correlations 18 London Boroughs	Citizen Survey				NDC Empowerment Household Survey	People Perceptions & Place Frontiers	Audit of Political Engagement (Not influential)
	2008/9	2007	2005	2003			
Informed about influencing opportunities (0.8)	Ethnicity (White lowest; Black African highest)	Trust in local council	Trust in local council	Age (35-49 highest; 65+ lowest)	Weak relationship between feel of influence & actual involvement	Ethnic fragmentation	Nobody listens
Ethnicity white (-0.76)	Age (generally the older the lower – highest 25-34)	Civic activism in last 12 months	Civic activism, consultation and participation	Ethnicity (white lowest)	Need to maintain role in decision making – not take it away again	Net level of international migration	Decisions made without talking to people
Balance of migration from within UK (-0.75)		Ethnicity (black or asian positive)		Education (higher the level the NI4 score)	Key role of expectations – not just performance	Urbanity (more urban less influence)	System does not allow influence
Age 65+ (-0.73)		Formal volunteering in last 12 months		Routine occupations lower managerial/professional higher	Need for a range of approaches, including less demanding	Informed about influencing opportunities (positive)	Politicians out for themselves

Correlations 18 London Boroughs	Citizen Survey				NDC Empowerment Household Survey	People Perceptions & Place Frontiers	Audit of Political Engagement (Not influential)
	2008/9	2007	2005	2003			
Age 45-64 (-0.70)		Age (65+ negative)		Long term unemployed higher than routine, semi- routine		Public services act on concerns of residents (+ve)	My opinion is not important
Age 16-29 (0.70)		Gender (female positive; male negative)				Council seeks peoples views (+ve)	I'm not given the opportunity to influence
Economic Inactivity (0.68)		Semi routine occupation (negative)				Satisfaction with the way council runs things (+ve)	Politicians don't care about me
Gender (Male 0.65 / Female -0.65)						Ethnicity white (- ve)	Not interested in influencing
Social Grade C1+C2 (-0.62)						Council provides VfM (+ve)	Don't have time to influence
Civic Participation q16 (0.57)							My vote does not matter
Want to be more involved (0.54)							
Occupation Administrative (-0.53)							

f. Stakeholder interview topic guide

Purpose

The primary purpose of the stakeholder interviews is towards the task of understanding the current approach to engagement taken within the three boroughs. This includes the local authority, strategic partnerships, and partners such as the police, voluntary sector and the PCT. We will look to identify the various channels and mechanisms used, the extent and type of influence these provide, and whether these are reactive or proactive in nature.

The secondary purpose of the stakeholder interviews is (where relevant) to explore whether and how these agencies and partnerships take into account those factors emerging through the desk-based research. This includes:

- How opportunities to influence are communicated to residents
- Whether and how engagement is targeted to take account of demographics including ethnicity and age
- If the mechanisms and channels used differentiate between residents who are new to the borough and those who have been more established
- Impact of political factors on approach engagement

Interviewees

Whilst the exact composition of interviewees will change depending on the structures within each borough, we anticipate that this will include:

- Relevant Head of Service within the Local Authority
- Director/Chair or equivalent of the local CVS
- Most senior officer in Local Strategic Partnership if mechanisms and structures separate from the above
- Relevant Head of Service within the Primary Care Trust
- Senior Police Officer responsible for Safer Neighbourhoods Teams

Structure

1. Introduce project, work to date and purpose of interview
2. Broad, freeform discussion with a view to capturing the following:
 - a. Stakeholder's view of NI4 as a useful measure
 - b. Stakeholders view of what 'influence' is and what questions they might ask in the Place Survey to capture
 - c. Stakeholder's view about how different communities in the borough relate to and define 'influence'
 - d. Stakeholder's view of whether there is demand for influence, and if so some of the key barriers

3. Understand context for engagement, identifying:
 - a. Strategic documentation and strategic objectives
 - b. Relevant aspects of organisational structure
 - i. Where do functions sit
 - ii. Management and performance
 - iii. How does organisation respond and adapt to resident views
 - c. Representative versus participative democracy
4. Identify the top 5 key 'opportunities to influence' channels and mechanisms used by the agency/partnership, including any documentation
5. For each identify:
 - a. Format of channel or mechanism
 - i. Reactive or proactive
 - ii. Open or by invite
 - iii. How event works
 - b. How residents are informed
 - c. Whether there is targeting of certain demographics and how this works
 - i. Age
 - ii. Ethnicity
 - iii. New or existing residents
 - d. Extent and type of influence
 - i. Identify type of change likely
 - ii. Identify likelihood
 - e. What is the political and/or strategic interface if any
 - i. Where do outcomes get reported to
 - f. Agency/partnership view of effectiveness

g. Public discussion group topic guide

Objectives

- better understand the ways in which members of the community understand and perceive the concept of being able to 'influence decisions that affect you in your local area' as expressed in the Place Survey
- better understand why members of the community would or would not be motivated towards exerting such influence, and what this would look like for them
- derive further insight through the use of the Values Modes methodology for segmenting focus groups

Structure and timings

(Signing in and distribution of name badges)

A	Facilitator's introduction	3 mins
B	Group introductions (including ice-breaker)	5 mins
C	Ways of getting involved	10 mins
D	Influence	15 mins
E	Types of influence	25 mins
F	Motivations for influence	10 mins
G	Close and payment of incentives	2 mins

Proposed running time of 1 hour 10 minutes. If the group is larger than expected, then the session will take longer but will not exceed 1 hour 30 minutes.

Facilitator's introduction

- Thanks for coming; introduce self and note-taker
- TCC is an independent research company working on behalf of the London Empowerment Partnership, who want your views on how you feel decisions are made in your local area.
- So that's why you're here. Has anyone been to a discussion group before?
- Painless – no trick questions and can even be fun. Some ground rules though:
- We hope you can be as honest and open as possible and all your views will be treated with confidence. (We're taking notes [and recording] because we have to report back what you're saying but your names won't be added.)
- Respect: Everybody has to respect each others' views even if you don't agree with them. Not looking for consensus – it helps if there are differing views.
- Time: We'll do our best to keep this to an hour but we do want to hear ALL your views. I apologise in advance if I have to pick on some of you to make sure ALL OF YOU have a say, or stop any of you because we have lots of things to cover and I need to make sure we move the discussion on to cover them all.

- Confidentiality: Again, we won't tell anyone the names of who has attended focus groups, we only report back on what has been said. It is important that you feel that you can be completely honest here.
- Is that OK for everyone?

Group introductions

- Name?
- Whereabouts you live in the borough?
- How long you've lived in the borough?
- Favourite thing about your local area?

(Get feedback from everyone and be open to common themes that can influence following questions)

Ways of getting involved

Two fairly quick questions to start with.

- Have you ever taken part in a consultation from the Council or another local body like the Police or the local NHS?
 - What was the consultation about? *Get a few examples – single issue or general?*
 - How did you come to get involved?
 - Why did you get involved?
 - What was the experience like, and what did you think the results were?
 - If you've never participated in a consultation, what would you say was the main reason why?
- Do you use the internet? *Show of hands.* What do you use it for? Do you see it as important in having influence on local decisions?

Influence

- Do you agree that you can influence decisions affecting you in your local area?

The purpose of this is as much to elicit quibbles with the question as anything. If someone quibbles with the question, draw them out – why is it difficult to answer? 'Well, it depends'... what does it depend on?

- Tell me about a time when you felt you had an influence on, or could have had an influence on, a decision in your local area. What was the situation? What happened? How did you feel?

- Alternatively, was there a time when you felt you wanted to have an influence and couldn't? What was the situation? What happened? How did you feel?

'Anecdote circle' style – drawing people out

- What ways can you think of in which you could influence decisions locally? Just call out the first things that occur to you.

Types of influence

This part will be facilitated using mini whiteboards – Weakest Link style!

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about different kinds of influence. Here are some whiteboards and you'll see they have a line marked on with A at one end and B at the other. I'll give you two statements, A and B, and ask you to place your opinion on this line according to what you think.

For example, suppose that statement A was 'I love Jedward' and statement B was 'I hate Jedward'. *Demonstrate on a whiteboard where you would put your mark if you loved Jedward, hated Jedward or were indifferent.* The real questions will be a bit more interesting than that!

I'll ask you to make a cross on your whiteboard without looking at what anyone else is doing, and then hold it up – like in the Weakest Link.

Here are the statements... *(Use flash cards or projected slides)*

A: Mostly, I'd only try to influence organisations like the Council if I had a problem

B: I'm interested in trying to influence local decisions even if I don't have a problem

A: I generally trust people like councillors and MPs to represent me and get things done

B: If you want something done, you're better off doing it yourself or with other interested people

A: I can have more influence by taking part in a consultation or survey

B: I can have more influence by speaking to someone in authority, like a councillor, about an issue

A: I would normally use personal contacts, or do something like writing to the local paper, to have influence

B: I would get involved with organisations or attend formal meetings to have influence

A: I'm most concerned that I get the services I pay for through my taxes, such as healthcare or bin collection

B: I'm most concerned that people get to have a say in what happens in the local area

A: To influence decisions affecting me I would mostly need to focus on what organisations like the Council, Police, schools or voluntary organisations do

B: To influence decisions affecting me I would mostly need to focus on influencing other local people and local groups

A: I'm more likely to take action as part of a community group

B: I'm more likely to try to influence a decision on my own

A: Influence is knowing that the people who make decisions are really listening to me

B: Influence is seeing the changes I want to happen

Motivations for influence

- What would make you want to try to influence decisions affecting you in your local area?
 - Think back to the stories we were telling earlier. (*Remind people if needed*). If you felt you could have an influence – what was it that made you want to have an influence?

NI4

- So, taking into account everything we've talked about, do you agree that you can influence decisions affecting you in your local area?
- Have your views changed from earlier? Why?

Can do this with the whiteboards if desired

Close – thanks and payment of incentives