



# Innovation in Democracy Programme FAQs

## 1. What is the Innovation in Democracy Programme?

The Innovation in Democracy Programme (IiDP) was announced as part of the UK Government's Civil Society Strategy in summer 2018. It aims to “pilot participatory democracy approaches, whereby people are empowered to deliberate and participate in the decisions that affect their communities.”

The programme will support “local authorities to trial face-to-face deliberation complemented by online civic tech tools to increase broad engagement and transparency.” It was jointly commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). An open call was held for local authorities to express interest in joining the programme and three were selected to take part.

The Innovation in Democracy Programme is supported by a team from Involve, The Democratic Society, mySociety and The RSA. They will work with the selected local areas to deliver the deliberative processes and maximise the impact of the project.

## 2. Who is part of the Innovation in Democracy Programme?

Three areas were selected to take part in the programme. Each received £60,000 of funding and a support package to carry out a deliberative democratic process, called the IiDP Area Democracy Forums. These areas were Greater Cambridge, Dudley, and Test Valley.

The Greater Cambridge Partnership have chosen the topic of traffic and congestion in Cambridge city centre.

Dudley Borough Council have chosen the topic of the future of town centres.

Test Valley Borough Council have also chosen the topic of the future of town centres, which may be combined with discussions about waste management and recycling in the area.

### 3. What are area democracy forums?

The liDP area democracy forums are a way of involving a representative group of the public in informed deliberation on an issue to determine what should be done. They are like criminal juries, but for public policy decisions.

Members of the public are brought together to discuss an issue, and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. Members are selected at random, but chosen to be broadly representative of the local community. They learn in depth about an issue, hearing from expert witnesses and people with experience of the issue. Together, they then deliberate and reach a collective decision on what they think should be done.

This type of process is one example of a deliberative mini-public. Other examples include citizens' juries, citizens' assemblies, consensus conferences and deliberative polls. They all share the features outlined above, but vary in numbers of participants and how they reach decisions.

### 4. How do area democracy forums work?

The liDP area democracy forums have a number of steps:

1. Decision-makers identify an issue to put to the mini-public. They agree a remit and set the question to be addressed;
2. Residents are recruited through a "civic lottery". People are randomly selected to be invited to take part. From those who agree, a group is selected that matches the demographics of the wider community;
3. The group of participants hears from experts, interest groups and people with lived experience of the issue;
4. Neutral facilitators support the group to deliberate on what they've heard, considering the different evidence, arguments and options;
5. The group agrees a collective recommendation (or set of recommendations) that it puts to decision-makers.

### 5. Why hold an area democracy forum?

There are a number of benefits to holding an area democracy forum, particularly to address complex and challenging issues:

- Members of the public are given a greater say over a decision that affects them and their community;

- Decision-makers receive valuable insights about how members of the public would make the difficult trade-offs and decisions they face, helping them to make effective and legitimate decisions;
- Decisions made as a result are likely to be more trusted, legitimate and sustainable, because they are reached in a transparent way and supported by a diverse group of residents;
- People who take part in forums are likely to report improved levels of political trust and a lasting drive to take part in other parts of civic life.

## 6. How are participants selected?

Participants (usually between 30 and 60) are selected through a “civic lottery”. This ensures that every adult in the area has an equal chance of receiving the invitation to participate and that the membership of the citizens’ assembly will be a microcosm of the local community.

1. A few thousand invitations are posted to households in the area, randomly selected from the postcode database.
2. Invitees are asked to register their interest to participate and will give basic information about themselves.
3. From those who register, a sample is randomly-selected which resembles the local population in miniature (e.g. by age, area, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic group).

Participants are paid an honorarium for taking part to encourage and enable participation by a diverse range of people.

## 7. How are they made accessible to everyone?

Deliberative processes tend to run at weekends, so they are more accessible to people who work.

The costs of members attending are covered in full, including travel, accommodation (where necessary) and meals. In addition, members are given a small monetary gift to encourage and support their participation. This recognises the time that they give up to take part and ensures that a diverse range of participants (e.g. including those on low-incomes, unemployed, with caring responsibilities, etc.) can participate.

All accessibility requirements of members are taken into account. This includes, where needed, providing materials in Braille or large print and sign language interpretation. The costs of carers, respite care and child care are also covered where needed.

The proceedings are carefully designed to enable the full participation of all members. Small group work ensures that all participants are able to contribute and have time to reflect and

develop their own opinions, particularly those less confident in public speaking. The exercises and techniques that are used are specifically designed to support members to engage with complex information and feel able to put their opinion forward, with no prior knowledge needed.

## 8. What happens during the process?

Members will be taken through a process of learning, deliberation and decision making. The process is designed to provide participants with the evidence they require to make informed decisions. The process usually lasts four days or more and goes through three key stages:

- **A learning stage**, where participants hear from expert contributors who reflect the range of views on the given subject. Members will hear presentations from the contributors and spend time questioning them.
- **A deliberation stage**, where participants consider what they have learnt, individually and in conversation with their fellow participants.
- **The decision-making stage**, where participants reach a collective decision or set of recommendations. This can be done through individual voting and/or a consensus building process.

Members spend most of their time in discussions in small, facilitated groups. These groups will be changed throughout the process to ensure that participants have the opportunity to engage with most of the other members over the course of the process.

The discussions are supported by trained neutral facilitators. It's their role to make sure everyone can be heard and feels comfortable, as well as to explain each of the exercises. Each session is organised to give sufficient time and space to enable participants to gain new information and to discuss in depth the implications of what they have heard. This includes the opportunity to engage with a range of people and information sources – including expert presenters and the views and perspectives of their fellow members.

## 9. How will decisions be made?

Emphasis is given to ensuring that participants make trade-offs and arrive at workable conclusions and recommendations.

It is important that the process does not force the group into a false consensus; thus, alongside negotiated positions, individual voting should be used to collect the views of all participants. This ensures that minority voices are heard as well as the majority.

## 10. What role will decision makers play in this process?

The final reports from the liDP area democracy forums will be presented to local decision makers, who will then decide whether to follow the forum's advice.

There is also the option for decision makers to play a more active role in the design of the process. They can help to draft the question put to the forum or suggest expert speakers to present. These processes are supposed to provide decision makers with the confidence and legitimacy to effectively take difficult decisions and their involvement throughout is crucial for achieving this.

## 11. How will the recommendations be taken on board?

All three local areas have agreed at very least to publicly respond to each recommendation made by their citizens, with a presumption in favour of implementing what comes out of the process and a clear explanation why not if a recommendation is not to be implemented.

## 12. Is it possible to observe the process?

Yes. While observers can't take part in the decision making process, they can watch the evidence giving and discussions. In fact, it's a key part of the process that others are able to watch and understand how recommendations are arrived at. While numbers of observers will be limited, the liDP programme will be supporting the local authorities in providing a digital platform to support the transparency of the forum by explaining the process to the wider public, and sharing the evidence that is presented to the forum and the recommendations that come out of it, along with their subsequent implementation. Digital tools may also be used to gather expert and lived experience evidence from the wider public in order to inform the forum's deliberations.

## 13. How will you ensure that the information Forum members receive is balanced and accurate?

The speakers that present to the assembly and the learning materials provided to members are selected by an impartial advisory group, which vets the accuracy of the information and ensures that all perspectives on an issue are equally represented.

The advisory group will be made up of experts on the chosen topic, including academics and those working in the field. There is the option of including local stakeholders in the advisory group, in which case representatives of the different positions will be given an equal say.

## 14. Are these processes new?

The liDP area democracy forums are like deliberative mini publics which are a method of 'deliberative democracy', where citizens consider evidence and deliberate together to come to collective decisions. Mini-publics have been used in many different countries to arrive at decisions on contentious, difficult or complex issues, including:

- Abortion (in the 2016 citizens' assembly in Ireland)
- Voting systems (in the 2004 citizens' assembly in British Columbia and the 2006 citizens' assembly in Ontario)
- Social care (in the 2017 citizens' assembly in the UK which was co-commissioned by the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee).

Generally, decisions made in this way are thought to be more representative and more considered, because the group represents a whole population, hears from a wide range of evidence and works together to consider a collective position. Evidence suggests that more diverse groups are better at solving problems than less diverse groups, even when each group member knows less about the topic. The method of selection for mini-publics ensures high levels of diversity in terms of how members view and interpret the world.