



***I'm a
Councillor
Get me out of here***

Event Evaluation Report

I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here 2007

Prepared by Gallomanor Communications

Learning from the experiences of the 5th year of the event
Feedback from Councillors, Teachers and Students

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Contents

Overview

Summary of findings

Key lessons for councils

Key changes for next year

Questions asked

Case Studies

Cherwell

Craigavon

Oldham

Feedback

Young people

Councillors

Teachers

Council Officers

Overview

I'm a Councillor, Get me out of Here! is an online event to get young people engaged with local democracy.

Councils sign up to the event and put forward five or so councillors to compete to be 'Youth Champion' for that area. Those five councillors put up a manifesto on the 'I'm a Councillor' website, and, for two weeks, young people in their area ask them questions, chat to them online, and vote for the councillor they want to be 'Youth Champion'. In the second week a councillor is evicted each day, until the last councillor is declared the winner.

- **Young People** - get engaged with local democracy
- **Councillors** - find out about how young people feel, their concerns and enthusiasms
- **Teachers** - get a ready-made, memorable way to teach citizenship, where the work is all done for them

It's important that the engagement is a two-way process. Young people and councillors both learn from the event. And young people benefit from the experience of actually having a voice and being listened to.

"The youngsters now know that they have a voice and are beginning to know how to use it - BUT More importantly I have started listening in a different way, rather than assuming I knew what they needed."

Cllr Dave Harris, Colchester

What exactly does it consist of?

The website

- Manifestos
- Q & A section
- Live online chat page
- Library (further info on local government topics)
- Quizzes
- TeacherZone (chat booking, teaching materials)

Support materials

- Teacher notes, lesson plans, information sheets, etc
- Councillor briefing notes
- Marketing materials to help councils recruit schools
- Post-event evaluation report

I'm a Councillor is part of Local Democracy Week and is endorsed by the LGA.

The event in 2006

This was the 5th successful year for I'm a Councillor. Since 2002 over 15,000 young people have talked to hundreds of councillors and it gets busier each year. This year we had slightly fewer councils participate than last, but still had 11% more students participating and 43% more questions asked than ever before. Altogether 32 councils took part, across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Stats

	2007	2006
Participating councils	32	33
Participating councillors	173	185
Participating students	4,958	4,447
Questions asked	6,689	4,686
Total log ins	10,350	8,285

Participating councils 2007

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Cambridge City Council
Canterbury City Council
Cherwell District Council*
City & County of Swansea
Colchester Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Craigavon Borough Council*
Cumbria County Council
Dumfries And Galloway Council
Guildford Borough Council
Hertfordshire County Council

Mansfield District Council
Middlesbrough Council
London Borough of Waltham Forest
Mole Valley District Council
Newry and Mourne District Council
North East Derbyshire District Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council*
Oxford City Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Scarborough Borough Council
Shropshire County Council
Teesdale District Council
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Waverley Borough Council
Wigan Council

**Subject of case studies, see page 13*

Summary of findings

Key lessons from this year for councils

- Participation grows in second year
- Contact teachers early and in person

Key changes for IAC next year

- Smoother technical performance
- Develop feedback loop to young people further
- Develop International section further

Young people's feedback

- Young people really enjoyed feeling included
- Young people valued authenticity from councillors
- Young people said they wanted **more** contact with councillors

50% went on the site in their own time

"MSN should be compulsory for all councillors!"

Councillor feedback

- Councillors got a different perspective
- Councillors saw the importance of youth engagement
- Councillors learnt more about young people
- It was fun!

91% enjoyed the event

86% thought IAC was good or very good for understanding the issues of ordinary young people

"Young people take more note of what is going on around them that they are given credit for."

Teacher's feedback

- IAC helps to bring citizenship to life
- IAC involves students who would not normally be interested

100% want to take part again next year

"An excellent way of delivering political literacy aspects of citizenship."

Council staff feedback

- Promotes engagement between councillors and young people
- Start earlier recruiting schools and be persistent

89% felt the event had improved the council's relationship with schools

"Gets councillors and officers thinking about how to engage with young people."

Key lessons for councils

Experience really counts

Returning councils tend to be much busier. For example, last year we had **5 councils** who registered 200 students or more. This year **13 councils** registered 200 students or more, nearly all of them returning councils. Officers tell us that they find it much easier to get buy-in from schools and councillors once people have seen what it can do and much easier to organise the event once they know what to expect. And teachers repeatedly tell us how, having used it once, they are very keen to involve more students – often a whole year group – next time.

Contact teachers early and in person

And also get a named contact. “Letters to schools go straight in the bin, if they don’t have a name on.” We were told this over and over again by teachers. And most council officers told us how hard it had been initially to get hold of the right person and get buy-in. But many also told us what great contacts they had made with teachers who really get into the event. Be persistent, and also, try to get someone who already has relevant contacts to help. Councils have had great success by involving the area Citizenship co-ordinator, or a colleague from Education.

Be proactive about organising school visits

These are usually a great success, young people, councillors and teachers all really get a lot out of them. However, often councillors don’t realise they can offer, and teachers don’t realise they can ask. They frequently end up being arranged on an ad hoc basis by enthusiastic young people talking to councillors in live chat. More can be made of these visits if they are planned in advance, and of course, it’s easier then to fit them into councillors’ diaries.

It’s worth making it clear to schools that they can request them, far in advance. Or even suggest times to them. One low stress/high impact idea is to arrange for councillors to do school assemblies. They can give a five/ten minute talk on their work and the event and explain that they want to hear from young people. This doesn’t take up much of the councillor’s time, but reaches a lot of young people.

Get to know the event yourself

Make sure you understand what’s involved, how things work and all the things the site can do. We are ALWAYS happy to answer questions, explain things, give examples or demonstrate the event. IAC can be one of those things which seems really obvious when you’ve seen it in action, but can be difficult to explain. You’ll find it easier to organise, to convince others to take part and to answer questions once you’ve got your head round it.



Get manifestos up early

It can be very difficult, with holidays, etc, but it makes a big difference to teachers if councillor pages and manifestos are up as soon as they can be (from mid-September). They then have time to introduce the event and councillors and do some background work with students, before the event starts. Young people can ask more in-depth questions and get more out of it. Many schools will only have citizenship lessons once a fortnight.

Key changes for next year

Technical Issues

The biggest obstacle to the smooth running of the event this year was the unexpected problem that many councillors experienced with caching problems whilst running Internet Explorer. This problem did not affect students. Councillors were being presented with an earlier locally stored version of their editing page due to Internet Explorer not requesting a fresh page as instructed by the server.

We solved this problem within a day of becoming aware that the problem was widespread and not due to, as we originally thought, network caches on council proxy servers.

The solution we have used will prevent this problem recurring, however, it has highlighted to us the need to devote more resources to testing and we shall do this.

Feedback loop and outcomes

This year's following up of outcomes and addition of a 'feedback loop' (telling young people what has happened as a result of the event) have worked very well. We plan to repeat this exercise this year. And add contacting the councillors after three months, as well as six, to find out how things are going. We will also (as we did this year) take the opportunity to pass on to council officers and councillors what we find out across the board, enabling all councils who've taken part to learn from each other's experiences.

See "Further outcomes and the full feedback loop" section for more info.

Changes to TeacherZone

Last year in our evaluation report we set ourselves the task of improving our communication with teachers. This included improving the TeacherZone, among other things. We added more information, teaching resources and a discussion board, for teachers to contact us, and to swap tips and info. We are glad to see that more than twice as many teachers filled in our feedback survey this year, and activity levels are much higher, so it appears our improved communication is working.

However parts of the TeacherZone could have been more used, e.g. the chat booking facility. And some teachers experienced initial problems accessing the TeacherZone. Our developers are now investigating ways to add further functionality to the TeacherZone, and we are working to make it easier and clearer to use. These improvements will, we hope, add considerable value for teachers and youth workers. They will, of course, be fully tested before we implement them.

International Section

This year, for the first time we featured an 'International' section as part of the event. Young people had the opportunity to learn first hand about life in other countries, how young people are treated and how they are included in local democracy. The five countries were:-

Burma
Jordan
Nepal
Sweden
USA

We were very pleased to have such an interesting range of countries and situations represented and this section was a success, with the international representatives and young people enjoying and learning from it. However, this was a pilot year for us, so we hadn't publicized or emphasized the new section to the hilt. Now that we have seen it in action and have a clearer idea of the issues, we will certainly 'sell' it more to teachers and make a bigger deal of this section.

Questions asked

An analysis of questions asked by young people in the event this year

As usual, there was a huge range of questions asked, from the serious and thoughtful to the chatty and humorous. A very common theme across most areas was there being nothing to do, and a feeling that young people get treated as trouble-makers, just for being young.

We discuss the type of questions asked, with examples, in a category by category analysis below.

Category	Total	Rural	Urban	Metro	Unitary	District	County
About you and being a councillor	22%	19%	28%	29%	23%	18%	24%
Crime and Anti-social behaviour	12%	12%	11%	12%	11%	13%	8%
Education	11%	11%	12%	12%	11%	10%	14%
Transport and the Environment	14%	14%	13%	12%	13%	13%	20%
Youth Issues	11%	12%	10%	11%	11%	13%	9%
General	13%	14%	12%	10%	14%	16%	9%
Local Facilities	17%	18%	15%	15%	18%	17%	16%

About you and being a councillor

This category includes a range of questions, both about councillors personally, and about the experience of being a councillor. Popular 'about you' questions were, 'Are you married?', 'What party do you support?', 'How much do you want to win?', 'Why should we vote for you?' There were also lots of different and imaginative questions about what sort of person the councillors are, 'What is your favourite book?', 'Who are your top three heroes and why', 'What one thing would you change about our community?'. These questions show young people really getting to know their councillors and seeing them as real, accessible people.

'About being a councillor' questions were also broad-ranging 'Why did you want to become a councillor?', 'How do you become a councillor?', 'What's it like being a

councillor?', 'Do you think you are good at being a councillor?'. And also probed difficult issues, 'Do you think there are too many old councillors?', 'Why aren't there more female councillors?', The overwhelming sense one gets when reading these questions is that young people were enjoying the opportunity, and also making the most of it.

Crime and Anti-social behaviour

There were a lot of questions here about tackling vandalism and youth crime. This sometimes surprises people, but remember that young people are the main victims of youth crime and violence, and their facilities are the ones most often affected by vandalism. There tended to be more questions about crime in urban areas and fewest in the Counties, this may be an artifact though – the counties involved a lot of primary schools, so it may simply be that younger students haven't started being concerned about crime yet.

There were also questions about policing, many young people feel victimised for being young – they feel they get stereotyped as troublemakers, moved on simply for wearing hoods or hanging about with their friends. Depending on the focus of the question, these would sometimes go into youth issues instead.

Education

Questions on testing in education, getting too much homework, bullying, school resources, school hours, tuition fees and many specific questions on local education issues (like new school sites, schools merging, etc). Also, young people take the opportunity to plaintively question the whole process ("Why is there school?" "Why must we learn algebra? What kind of job uses algebra?").

Young people obviously know a lot about school and have strong feelings about what they like and don't like about it. They often ask detailed and informed questions in this category. This helps them to feel they have a voice, in this significant area of their lives. And once they have started asking questions, they carry on doing it in other categories too.

Transport and the Environment

This category saw a lot of questions on green issues, particularly recycling and global warming, which young people feel strongly about. However, the most common topic was lack of transport in rural areas. Being geographically isolated, unable to drive and dependent on public transport and lifts causes many problems for young people in rural areas. This category was less popular in urban areas, which demonstrates the difference between the experiences of young people living in different areas.

Youth Issues

This category included questions on bullying, stereotyping of young people, drinking, voting and driving ages. This year there were, in particular, many questions on the recent increase in the age for buying cigarettes. There were also many questions about teenage pregnancies, teen alcohol and drug abuse, vandalism and young people as victims of crime.

Stereotyping was still a very popular topic, for example, "I feel that young people are always getting bad press, apparantly we are all violent yobs however this is only a minority. What do you think should be done to change people's opinions on young people and to award youths for good behaviour or achievements?" Young people often feel that they are unfairly all 'tarred with the same brush'.

General

A very wide range of topics was covered here, showing young people engaged with the wider world, as well as their local area. For example, "What do you think of George.W.Bush and do you think America are a good Ally for the UK", "Would you like to see a general election being held this year?", "What help and support are the council giving to the Eastern Europeans who have decided to move here. Especially the children and young people?"

There were many questions about Iraq, national politics, global warming, poverty and its effects on health and social exclusion, gay rights, animal rights, unemployment, homelessness, religion and ethnicity, and many other issues. Young people have as wide a range of beliefs and interests as adults and many of them are thoughtful and well-informed.

Local Facilities

This is a perennially popular topic with young people, and this year was no exception. They feel there is little for them to do, that youth facilities are bottom of the list, are often vandalised by a minority (disadvantaging the well-behaved majority) and are expensive and difficult to get to. Many drew a link between a lack of facilities and young people getting into trouble because they are bored.

"Could there not be a modern hangout at the weekend with disco's and games rooms and chilling out places made in the local community for teenagers? I think this would prevent underage drinking taking drugs and getting into trouble."

Many were quite informed about what was going on in their area, and what they thought of it. "I live in Shaw were there is very little for young people to do. Why is ASDA allowed to build a store when we already have a Tesco, Aldi and Iceland? Why not get someone to build a bowling alley or cinema?"

And many were prepared to be pro-active about improving facilities in the area, they just wanted some help from councilors. "Is there any agencies i could write too, to get more things for our royrton youth centre"

Case Studies

These three, very different councils, all did well this year. We've talked to the officers running the event, to find out about how they did it and what they did right.

Cherwell were taking place for the first time, but still managed to be one of the busiest councils in the country.

Oldham took part last year, but weren't that busy. This year they put what they learnt last year into practice and made a great success of it.

Craigavon put in a lot of work, to be one of our busiest councils last year. Because of that, without much extra work from council staff, schools carried on the baton and they were even busier this year than last.

Cherwell District Council

District Council, SW England, popn 137,400, mixed urban and rural, Conservative controlled council.

	Cherwell	UK Average	Ranking (out of 31)
Registered users	308	165.3	2
Votes cast	237	118.0	3
Questions asked	373	223.0	6
Votes per user	0.77	0.7	11
Questions per user	1.21	1.3	16
Log ins per user	1.64	2.0	22
Live chat, lines by students	1597	1679.4	12
Live chat, lines by cllrs	56	263.1	14

Winner: Cllr Surinder Dhesi



1st year taking part

Lead officer: Jon Wild, Young Person's Recreation Development Officer

"We really needed something like your package to get into schools. Flyers or leaflets just wouldn't have worked."

Key points

- Enthusiasm from Councillors
- Making a connection with the right teacher
- Important to keep it going throughout the year.

How it went

Cherwell had a great year, with the second highest number of registered users and third highest number of votes cast in the whole of the UK. Not bad for a district council taking part for the first time!

What did they do?

Unusually, **it was a councillor who got Cherwell involved in the event.** Young People's Champion Cllr Dan Sames had heard about I'm a Councillor and thought it sounded like a great project, so he talked to Youth Services about taking part. Young Person's Recreation Development Officer, Jon Wild was made the officer in charge, and Dan also put in a lot of work, championing the project at council and going in to schools to give presentations.

Jon put a lot of effort into recruiting schools, talking to teachers and going into schools to give presentations and ask questions. **"Finding the right person to speak to was the hard bit, but now we've got all their names for next year!"** The lesson plans and information sheets helped sell it to teachers, and also showing them the website, **"It was really simple to use".**

Banbury School, in particular, really ran with the event. They registered 279 students, which is a new I'm a Councillor record for one school! They had just become a specialist Humanities College and saw IAC as a great way to connect with the wider community and make the school more 'outward-facing'. Having seen the buzz the event created at Banbury **"other schools are now queuing up to take part next year"**.

He also tried to make it easy for councillors to take part. He sat them down and took them through how the website works, even putting up their manifestos for them if they wanted. He did ask councillors to go into school assemblies, if they could, and just give a quick five minute talk on the event and how the councillors wanted to hear from young people. This was great as it was high impact, but low hassle for councillors. Councillors enjoyed the event. **"They are now really keen to do more fun stuff with schools"**.

On the last day of the event Jon organised a trip to Westminster, with six students from each school in the district. This made more of an event of it and created links with and between schools. **"It was really exciting getting texts from the office about the voting!"** Now the event is over, they will feed what young people said into consultation. **"This event has got everyone talking about young people's issues."**

"It'll be much easier next year, now I've seen it in action and can explain it better."

Jon would like to work with a slightly bigger team next year, to bring in other departments in the council. And to get more schools involved, which he thinks will be easy, with such positive word-of-mouth from Banbury, and with the contacts he's made.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Unitary Authority, NW England (Greater Manchester), popn 219,600, urban, Labour-controlled council

		UK Average	Ranking (out of 31)
Registered users	304	165.3	3
Votes cast	184	118.0	8
Questions asked	648	223.0	2
Votes per user	0.61	0.7	19
Questions per user	2.13	1.3	3
Log ins per user	2.89	2.0	3
Live chat, lines by students	4455	1679.4	3
Live chat, lines by cllrs	467	263.1	6

2nd year taking part (1st year very quiet)

Lead officer: Jodie Barber, Senior Youth Work Manager For Empowerment and Participation

"One of the best youth work sessions I've ever had"

Key points

- Be really persistent with schools
- Show teachers the materials and how much work is done for them
- Strong support from Head of Youth Service.

Winner: Cllr Bernard Judge



How it went

Oldham first took part in 2006, and had quite low participation (64 registered users), although the Youth Council took part, who are very engaged, and asked hundreds of questions. This year our team were really impressed by the way Oldham quintupled participation, but still had high activity per user (e.g. number of questions asked per user). They had the third highest number of students, log ins and questions per user, and lines of chat by students, in the whole of the UK.

What did they do?

Jodie Barber, Senior Youth Work Manager said that the big difference was that she had experience of doing it now, **"I could really explain to people how great it is and give them examples"**. She echoed other's comments that teachers are difficult to get hold of and it makes an enormous difference to have the right named contact. **"You just have to be really persistent with schools. I'm probably the most hated woman in Oldham, by school receptionists!"**

Fortunately the council were committed to making a success of the event, and Jodie's **Head of Service lent her weight to Jodie's work on the project**. She came along to an area Headteachers' meeting to help Jodie sell the project to schools. Here they got Heads to tell them the right teacher to speak to (usually the Citizenship Co-ordinator) and also to buy-in to the event. This meant that once Jodie had spoken to teachers, there was no delay while they sought permission from Heads. They weren't afraid to **use the stick as well as the carrot** - the Head of Service also made it clear to youth workers that they were expected to take part and if they didn't, would have to explain why.

Jodie told us that once they'd agreed to use the event, they really loved it. Teachers thought the lesson plans and information sheets were brilliant and covered loads of the curriculum. Youth workers found it a great way to engage young people, from the politicized to the disaffected. There was one worker at a youth club in a very difficult area, who was reluctant to take part, saying they didn't have the IT facilities. Jodie persuaded him to try it anyway, just on one PC, He called the next day to say, **"last night was one of the best youth work sessions I've ever had!"**

Jodie says the best thing about the event is that the questions show young people know about their local area, and also have a conscience and think about the world.

Craigavon Borough Council

District council, Central NI, popn 80,000, mostly urban, Unionist-majority council

	Craigavon	UK Average	Ranking (out of 31)
Registered users	229	165.3	9
Votes cast	210	118.0	6
Questions asked	672	223.0	1
Votes per user	0.92	0.7	5
Questions per user	2.93	1.3	1
Log ins per user	3.61	2.0	1
Live chat, lines by students	6436	1679.4	1
Live chat, lines by cllrs	1023	263.1	2

2nd year taking part

Lead officer: Pauline Nixon-Black, Public Relations Officer

"We've created a monster really"

Key points

- Demand from schools
- Very committed councillors
- You need to really familiarize yourself with the event to sell it.

Winner: Cllr David Jones



How it went

Craigavon were one of our busiest councils in 2006, and this year they did it again. They were top in the country for number of questions asked and log ins per user. Craigavon's young people definitely had a lot to say, not satisfied with breaking all records for question asking, they also wrote the most in live chats.

What did they do?

Pauline Nixon-Black, Public Relations Officer at Craigavon Borough Council is very clear on what was behind their repeat success this year, **"We've created a monster really, there's such a demand from schools.** They love it because it really works for kids who wouldn't say boo to a goose in class. But it means there's a lot of work for councillors." Taken up with the opening of their new Civic Centre this year, Pauline did far less work on IAC than she did last year, but schools were still clamouring to be involved, having got so much out of it last year.

Craigavon had more questions last year (402) than any other council in IAC, ever. This year they had 67% more questions than last year – hard work for the councillors who had to answer them! **"You have to sell it to councillors, skeletons and all.** I tell them that it will be a lot of work for them, but that it's crucial to engage young people in the political process." Pauline also thinks it's **key to really familiarise yourself with the event.** "You have to understand how it works, because teachers and councillors will ask lots of questions. You need to know the answers to convince them to do it."

Craigavon also have very committed councillors who went the extra mile for young people, and lead to really positive interactions. Another, perhaps unexpected reason councillors enjoy it is the immediacy and informality of live chat, and the opportunity to speak to each other and work together. **"It really breaks down barriers between parties."**

Feedback and research

This section contains:-

Results from the post-event feedback survey of

- Young People
- Councillors
- Teachers and Youth Workers
(+Conclusions from in-depth interviews with 14 teachers)
- Council Officers

Further outcomes and the full feedback loop:-

- Outcomes from councillors
- Outcomes from young people
- Results of 2007 pre-registration survey from young people

Young people

Based on 154 completed surveys (58 completed paper surveys, 96 completed the same survey online). The survey contained 20 questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions.

50% of students went on the site in their own time, having been introduced to it at school.

90% said they liked the format of the project

Young people relished the opportunity to have their say, and get taken seriously by councillors.

"It was an enjoyable experience and i felt like people were actually listening to my ideas for once."

"I always thought that you only listened to adults, so at least I, (a teenager who cares about matters) Can speak up. So I guess I should say thanks"

They learnt a lot about their council and what councillors do.

"talking to the councillors helped me understand what they do for us and why."

When asked what activity they learnt most from on the project, the most frequent answer was live chat

"The chat, being able to ask the councillors questions and respond in real time. MSN should be compulsory for all councillors!"

Followed by Q & A

"Reading all the posts, I just didn't like ASBOs so I HAD to see what people thought and I thought Councillor Johnathon Wilson was THE best!"

Other answers were varied and difficult to classify, but often mentioned:-

Councillor visits to schools

"The talk when the councilors came to my school. i had a great time asking questions. Mark should have won."

General points about getting to interact with councillors

"It was great to get involved with our Councillors, as even though were on the Youth Council we hardly get chance to because they don't have the time to get involved."

"I learnt to ask why and for better things where I live"

And specific topics on the site and supporting teaching materials, like recycling and social housing.

Councillors who want to know how to do well in the event will be interested in **why young people vote the way they do**. When asked what influenced the choice of councillor to vote for, **authenticity** was highly valued.

"Most genuine and answered the question asked without avoiding the hard parts."

"The answers they gave, the honesty and promises they could keep."

"The one that was the least patronising"

"The councillor who didn't try to act young to get across to us. Councillors who tried to act my age made me feel uncomfortable and it felt fake, therefore making me to believe that their responses were fake."

As was commitment.

"The amount of times Davy Jones went on the Chat to speak to us was good and the amount of questions he answered!"

And, naturally, agreeing with what the councillor said or proposed.

"Their manifesto which highlighted their main aims. Also, through their answers to others' questions, I could tell which candidate I identified with most."

"what they were doing for young people and their views on leisure facilities."

"he said he would build a skate park"

When asked **how the project could be improved**, gratifyingly, many said that it couldn't be. The most common answers, however, were about wanting more of it.

"if the cllrs had more time in the chatrooms. i only ever spoke to two."

"The project doesn't need much improvements but they could have had a longer one and more people to vote for!"

"Enable a councillor to visit every school if possible."

Councillor visits to schools were often mentioned very positively by young people (and by councillors). It's great to extend the event in this way and carry on the contact which IAC begins.

Councillors

Based on 69 surveys (out of 173 councillors, in total, competing in the event, = 40% sample) all completed online. The survey contained 24 questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions.

- **89% thought that IAC was very or quite good for meeting lots of students**, making it the best of a range of youth engagement methods.
- **86% thought that IAC was very or quite good for understanding the issues of ordinary young people**, the next highest rated method (councillor visits to schools) scored 74%.

Councillors found that youth engagement can be fun!

"The most enjoyable event I have taken part in this year."

- **91% enjoyed taking part in the event**

What was it good for?

Councillors felt the event gave them a genuine connection with young people:-

"Its raw - got the impression that those taking part were not being coached/led in the phrases used."

"immediate contact with a big cross section of young people"

Interestingly, councillors overwhelmingly rated the Q+A section as the most enjoyable part of the site (73%), and best for communicating with students (83%), and mentioned this section most frequently when asked, "What did you like best about the event?"

The following quote seems to sum up the view of many councillors:-

"The questions- whilst chat was fun I think the questions section had the most useful output."

This is particularly interesting, because teachers and students were far more likely to rate the live chat section as the best/most fun part of the site. Perhaps the councillors were thinking in terms of information exchange (Q+A does allow councillors to research an answer and give more information), while the teachers and young people were thinking in terms of the emotional immediacy and connection generated in live chat.

A Different Perspective

"I chatted with pupils outside my ward and got a different perspective on the Borough"

Councillors often found the event made them think differently, most often (unsurprisingly) about young people:-

"[I learnt] young people aren't just vandals"

"Young people take more note of what is going on around them that they are given credit for."

"That the concerns of young people are very similar to everyone else's, but they don't know how to raise their concerns."

These two points – that young people are more interested, knowledgeable and thoughtful than adults sometimes expect, and that the way they differ from adults is knowing less about how they can get their voices heard, arise again and again in the councillor feedback. The same points were made last year, and are made by council officers, youth workers and teachers. This is why it's so valuable for councillors to get involved in youth engagement:-

"Councillors need to keep the lines of communication open with young people, especially when making decisions which effect their lives."

And it's important to be reminded that councillors and young people aren't really that different:-

"[I learnt] Our students are enthusiastic and smart. Oh and that things are not so different from my youth!"

Changes?

Asked how the event could be improved, and for any further comments, councillors most frequently mentioned wanting more schools to get involved. (Although people should be careful what they wish for, Craigavon councillors spent 1-2 hours a night or more answering their questions, while most councillors spent less than 1 hour!)

Many also mentioned technical issues, which are addressed in the 'Key Changes for Next Year' section.

Teachers and Youth Workers

Based on 16 surveys (out of 72 we invited to respond by email, =22% response rate.) all completed online. The survey contained 27 questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions.

The event

"I was delighted to find out how much our pupils actually cared about our borough"

This quote was typical of many, who found pupils were more positive and informed than they had assumed. Others felt the event made a big difference to the young people they worked with.

"[The most important outcome was] pupils feeling that someone was actually listening to them."

The response from young people was overwhelmingly positive.

"Our students are already looking forward to next year!"

And they felt that it was a great way of covering the curriculum.

"An excellent way of delivering political literacy aspects of citizenship."

100% of teachers said **Yes, they would participate again next year**, given the chance. Several mentioned that, having seen how it works, they would be keen to involve the whole year group next time. Schools who do this find it does create a real 'buzz' around the event.

- 81% said it involved students **who wouldn't normally be interested in politics**

Usage

37% of teachers took one class online, 25% took two classes, 19% took more.

50% had spent 1-2 hours preparing the class for going on the site before the event.

31% took young people onto the site for 30mins-1hr, 25% for 30mins or fewer. 37% took young people onto the site on two occasions, 25% only once, the remainder (38%) took their classes on more than twice.

There is a real benefit, where timetables make it possible, of bringing young people onto the site twice or more. For a start, if young people spend that time submitting questions, they would need to visit at least once more to see the answers! Of course,

teachers are free to use the site as it fits in with their plans, and fortunately 50% of young people visit the site at home, in their own time. But as there are so many parts to the site (manifestos, Q+A, live chat, quizzes, library and links to further info, etc), teachers can get many lessons out of it, enter into the 'event' side of it more (e.g. following the evictions and results), and get more in-depth, extended interactions with the councillors going.

Groups who do visit more frequently really get to know the councillors - young people in Oldham sometimes popped into the chat room to say, 'Is Bernie there?', looking for former Mayor, Cllr Bernard Judge. This was a positive attitude to local politics, by anyone's standards. And when young people visit repeatedly, debates progress further and become more in-depth. In Colchester, one councillor's manifesto offered new shops in the town, like Primark, this led to many questions on the subject, and then deeper discussions in live chats about whether this is something a councillor could deliver on, and the ethics of cut price clothing (sweat shops, etc).

Teachers most frequent comments when asked 'what would you do differently next time' were 'bring more classes online' and 'do more preparation'.

Teaching materials

Out of the teaching materials provided, the local government information quiz was the most popular (used by 87% of teachers), along with the accompanying information sheet (used by 81%). Least popular were Social Housing and Leisure Services information sheets, both used by 63% of teachers. All the information sheets and lesson plans were used by the majority of teachers, except for the Balloon Debate exercise, which was only used by 47% of teachers. The most common reason given for not using materials was lack of time.

Live chats

When asked what they liked best about the event, live chats were mentioned by teachers and youth workers more frequently than anything else. However, several also mentioned these as a problem. If no councillors were present, students sometimes used the chat room unproductively. We, of course, are moderating chat rooms all the time and moderators will maintain order through interacting with the young people and in extreme cases banning disruptive users, or closing the chat room if necessary.

Our policy otherwise is to keep chat rooms open all the time (i.e. not just when chats are booked), because so many chats happen without teachers having used the booking facility. We will usually text councillors if young people turn up unexpectedly and if councillors can make it, these spontaneous chats are often fun and productive. Even if councillors can't make it, they are an opportunity for moderators to discuss the event with students, answer questions and sort out any issues. However, given the feedback of teachers on this issue this year, we have decided, for next year, operate a tougher policy of closing unproductive chats.

Conclusions from in-depth interviews with 14 teachers

We only had 7 responses from teachers to our 2006 post-event survey, so supplemented this with interviews with 14 teachers and youth workers. The interviews were finished after last year's evaluation report was published, so we are including them here for completeness. *(We are pleased to note that, following greater efforts to open channels of communication with teachers, this year we had 16 teachers complete the feedback survey, out of 72 we invited by email, so 22% of those eligible.)*

Benefits of the event

"When you get an event like this, it makes being a Citizenship teacher really worthwhile."

Teachers told us that young people responded very well to the event, and particularly the chance to have their say and feel involved in the local area.

"When they realised they could talk about the things they knew about, they got really into it."

They were impressed that it involved 'doing' democracy, rather than just talking about it.

"There's masses of Citizenship materials out there now. Yours wasn't the whizziest, but it stood out because it was so real."

Youth clubs also felt that the event dovetailed perfectly with their mission.

"As soon as we heard about it we thought it sounded brilliant, exactly what we are about."

The kind of changes it created were:-

A greater interest in current affairs or politics

"A couple of the kids have joined the youth forum – one would have run a mile from something like that before."

An understanding of the problems of local government.

"It brought home to them that being a councillor is not an easy job"

A feeling that they are listened to and can get their voices heard

"You can see that some of them, their confidence has gone up, it makes a difference that someone actually listened to them."

And breaking down barriers between the young people and the councillors.

"The two groups (councillors and young people) knew nothing about each other, but were amazed to realise they weren't that far apart really."

Practicalities

Timing: Most wanted to find out about the event in second half of the Summer term (June/July), as this was when they planned for next year. Exams mean this is the time of year when teachers have a bit of breathing space.

IT suites: It can be difficult to book an IT suite at short notice, so good to have plenty of notice. One teacher made a very practical suggestions - next time they would book at least one PC for lunch-hour, each day of the second week, so that pupils had a way of checking the results and casting their votes in each round.

Obstacles: In many schools (because it doesn't feature in league tables) Citizenship is sidelined – supposed to be covered in registration class, or 'shoved in anywhere'. This can mean there isn't much time. It's handy that, once they have their access code cards, young people can go on the site in their own time.

Contacting teachers: Teachers really appreciated meeting/speaking to council officer who could answer their questions, where this is possible. If you are sending something to a school, you need to have a named person on it, or it will go straight in the bin. They also don't have access to email, usually, during the day, so when they do log on have hundreds and don't read most.

Council Officers

Based on 19 surveys (out of 31 councils, in total, taking part in the event, =61% sample) all completed online. The survey contained 30 questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions.

This information may be particularly useful to council officers wanting to run the event next year.

The event itself

"It was a fun and a unique way to get young people involved in local democracy"

89% Thought "IAC is a great way to help young people understand what their council and councillors do"

But engagement is a two-way process.

84% Thought "IAC really helped councillors understand the issues faced by young people today"

Young people surprised officers and challenged councillors.

"The responses from the children and the awkward questions that councillors were given were very interesting!"

And the event encourages further engagement with young people

"It helps to build direct links between the Council, councillors and young people. It also gets councillors and officers thinking about how to engage with young people."

- **89%** Thought there had been an improvement in the council's relationship with schools and youth centres

56% got coverage on local radio

83% got coverage for the event in local newspapers

Organising the event

Timings

Most popular times to:-

Receive an information pack	Jan/Feb
Sign up to event	Mar/Apr

Recruit schools	May/Jun
Receive Teacher packs	May/Jun
Recruit Councillors	May/Jun
Brief Press	Sept/Oct
Start event	Sept/Oct

This is a crucial point for councils thinking about running the event. We have had councils sign up late and have a successful event, for example Hertfordshire signed up on 11th Sept 2007, and still had a successful event, with 200 registered users. And we had other councils who signed up late, had a relatively quiet event, but saw it as a pilot, which is perfectly valid, and we're sure they've laid the groundwork for a successful event next year (for example, see Oldham case study), BUT, for councils who can sign up earlier, contacting schools early, and recruiting councillors early will pay dividends.

"Many schools seem to have similar events on the curriculum around May time. However, I think the event sits great in LDW and schools said that they could change the curriculum timetable as long as they knew early enough." (my italics)

"Schools need to be contacted as soon as possible!"

How to contact teachers?

Most people (83%) wrote letters to schools, and called them (72%). Only 33% went to visit schools, but these tended to be the councils where there had been most activity from schools. Some of our busiest councils also, first, gave a presentation to an area headteachers' meeting, or area Citizenship co-ordinators meetings. The one or two officers who reported not using the marketing materials Gallomanor supplied (particularly the leaflet for teachers) were from councils with very low levels of activity.

Getting support within the council

The marketing leaflets Gallomanor supplied were all found to be extremely or quite useful at gaining support from within the council. Most popular was the 'Information for Councillors' leaflet, at 94%. Least popular was the 2006 evaluation report at 79% (a little disappointingly, to this humble writer). However, the short 'I'm a Councillor' briefing paper got the highest 'extremely useful' rating at 53%.

Support from Gallomanor

Gallomanor have now run this event for 5 years, dealing with dozens of councils and council officers. We are happy to pass on what we've learnt about what makes a successful event, so everyone can learn from previous experiences. It's in our interests for each event to be as successful as possible.

"Excellent service and quick responses, staff were always helpful and explained what I needed to do in a way in which I could understand - thanks!"

Further outcomes and the full feedback loop

Outcomes

It's one thing to ask people just after the event what they thought of it, quite another to show that there have been real, long term changes in anything. This year, for the first time, we surveyed councillors and young people six months after the 2006 event, to discover what had actually changed because of IAC. The changes we'd be hoping for in young people are attitudinal (e.g. feeling more positive about local government), which it's difficult to test for without data from before they took part in the event. We therefore asked them matched statements about local and national politicians, to examine if there were any differences between their attitudes to groups they had and hadn't interacted with.

This year we introduced a short pre-survey, which students filled in when registering for the event. This gives us baseline data which we'll be able to use next year to compare next year's follow-up survey to.

The full feedback loop

When people take part in a consultation, it's useful to inform them of what happens because of it. Otherwise people don't feel that there's been any point in their contribution. IAC can be regarded as a consultation exercise with young people (on behalf of local authorities), and so this year we decided to follow best practice and keep our young people informed. So six months after the event we emailed all the young people to tell them about the outcomes the councillors had told us about, as well as the feedback results from last year and what we were doing in response to their comments.

For 2007 we will email councillors after three months, and again after six, informing them of our findings so far, and passing on what we find out to young people.

In this section

- Summary of councillors' outcomes from 2006 event
- Summary of results of six-month follow-up survey with young people who took part in 2006 event

Summary of councillors' outcomes from 2006 event

We asked all the councillors, six months after IAC 2006, what the outcomes had been. Most councillors wrote back to us and talked about how they now listen more to young people, have a better idea of what young people want, and give a higher priority to youth issues.

These effects are exactly the kind of change IAC is supposed to bring about, but they are a bit intangible. What more specific outcomes could councillors point to? Below are the main examples.

Blaenau Gwent, Wales

2 new multi-use games areas and 2 derelict houses being turned into a fitness centre.

Bristol, SW England

Young people complained that trees in the park had been knocked down by storms and not replaced. Cllr Ron Stone successfully lobbied for an increase of £50,000 to the parks budget, to replace the lost trees.

Caerphilly, Wales

New Skate Park, plans for a possible multi-use games area.

Colchester, SE England

Cllr Lesley Scott-Boutell tried to get the council to have a Young Mayor, although she didn't win the final vote. She has helped young people in her ward set up a youth council and raised money and got training for a other young people in her area to do a mural in a local underpass. Cllr Dave Harris says he now listens a lot more to young people, instead of assuming he knows what they want. He's doing things like fighting to get the council to put in a goal on a local playing field (yes, just one goal, there's one there already – but it took the young people to point out to the council that that's not much use for playing...)

Coleraine, Northern Ireland

Some of the councillors became very enthusiastic about engaging young people and listening to them and have started pushing for things a lot more. They've now got a borough-wide youth council which will be involved in consultation and meet with decision-makers. Also, Cllr Billy Leonard, the IAC winner 2006, brought a motion to council, making the council agree to take the issues raised by young people in IAC into account in all future development projects. Young people from a school who took part came to watch the meeting. Lots of the things agreed – like building more facilities – take a long time, so it's still a work in progress, but youth issues are now taken much more seriously, and thought about.

Congleton, NW England

Youth issues have also really moved up the agenda, the councillors involved have made more effort since to meet and consult with young people. Young people in one school wanted a youth club in the town and now the Town Council is finding funding for it. The young people's champion councillor now has an official position on council.

Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland

Councillors have increased their understanding of young people and have raised young people's issues with other councillors. They found poor transport was the biggest concern raised so they are now planning a special event looking at young people and transport in the area.

Kettering, Central England

Youth issues now taken more seriously, planning more after-school clubs and activities, places for young people to meet and better transport for them.

London Borough of Lambeth

It's really made Cllr Pete Robbins understand the importance of engaging with young people. He's started a regular rota of visiting all the local youth groups every two months or so to talk to them directly.

Middlesbrough, NE England

Used I'm a Councillor to kick off a whole programme of youth engagement events, including fun and education events, as well as including young people in decision-making. The council have put together a 20 page report with all the issues raised by young people and what the council has done about them. Young people often told the council that they were frustrated by raising issues and then never hearing any more about it. So, for next year's Local Democracy Week, the council will publicise this report to schools and young people and tell them all about what's happened.

Tunbridge Wells, SE England

The young people complained that the council didn't take the Youth Forum seriously enough because they didn't send a representative to the meetings. In response the Borough Council have now put a councillor on the Youth Forum, to be the contact for the council.

West Sussex, SE England

Helped to get cheaper bus fares for young people in the county.

Young people six-month follow-up survey 2006

We sent out a follow-up survey to all the young people we had email addresses for, six months after IAC 2006 (in April 2007). 96 young people completed the online survey. It had 15 questions, mainly set response checkboxes, but with two open response textboxes.

We were trying to find out a bit about how young people view politics and youth engagement. And also looking for any effect of taking part in IAC on young people's attitudes to politics.

Only 5% thought politicians did enough to listen to the views of young people.

80% thought the councillors in IAC had listened to their views, 20% were more cynical.

"Done it for the sake of trying to get young people on there side."

Asked how politicians should listen to young people's views, **80% wanted to meet them in person, 61% recommended online chats and 46% recommended using social networking sites** like MySpace and Bebo.

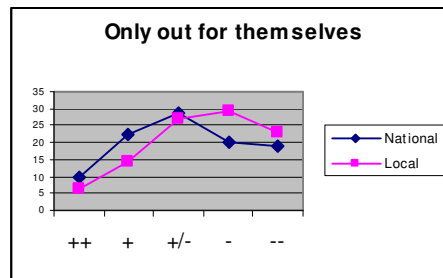
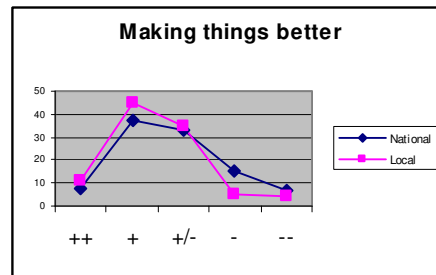
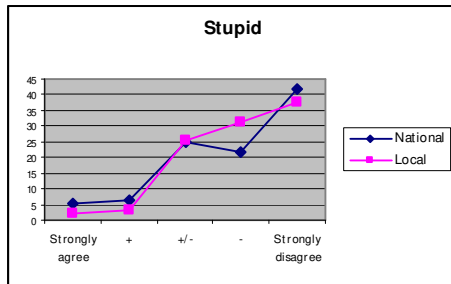
We then asked young people whether they agreed (5 point scale) with a series of statements, about national politicians and then about local politicians. These were a mixture of positive and negative statements, to counter agreement/disagreement bias.

The statements were:-

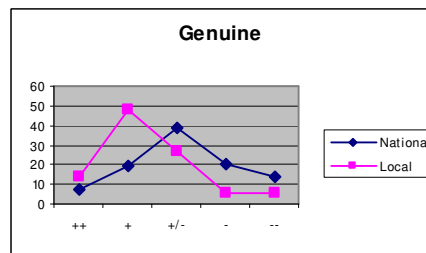
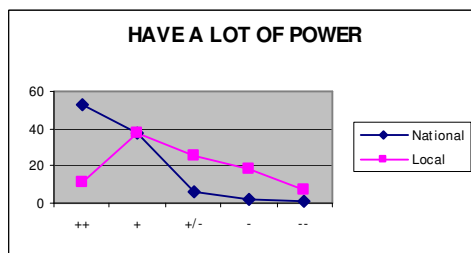
They are trustworthy
They are all about spin
They are genuine
They don't care about young people
They have people's best interests at heart
They are clever
They don't care about ordinary people
They are interesting
They have a lot of power
They would be fun to spend time with
They are making things better
They are boring
They are important
They are stupid
They are funny

They are only out for themselves
They don't do enough about the environment

Interestingly, out of all these qualities, the things they viewed local and national politicians most **similarly** on was whether they were **stupid**, whether they are **making things better** and whether they were **only out for themselves**.

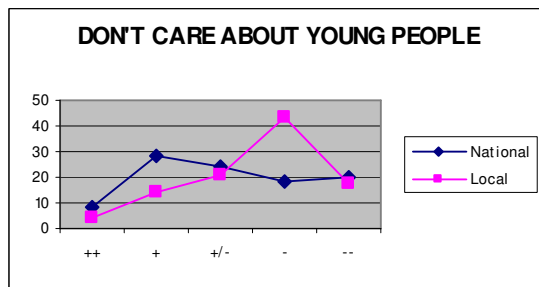


Interestingly, out of all these qualities, the things they viewed local and national politicians most **differently** on was whether they were **genuine**, whether they are **had a lot of power** and whether they **had people's best interests at heart**.



Young people seemed to have a more positive view of local politicians than national ones.

Another particularly interesting statement was 'don't care about young people'



We saw another big difference between young people's views on local and national politicians, with far more young people disagreeing with the statement.

We can't be sure of any causal connection between taking part in I'm a Councillor and these more positive views of local politicians. You could argue, for example, that many people are more cynical about national politician's motives than local ones.

But in *every other category* the young people give more positive ratings to the local politicians – including agreeing that they are funny, interesting and fun to spend time with.