

decision making and community participation

The current political environment endorses initiatives of increased corporate citizenship and social responsibility. Local authorities are presented with the challenge to develop strategies that will increase community participation in local decision making and hence create an environment in which community becomes the focal point in decision making.

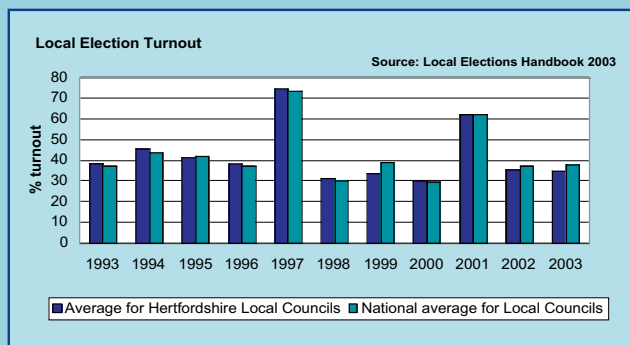
Participation in local elections is a good indicator of community involvement and citizenship as many policies that affect the communities we live in are influenced through voting. Voting empowers the public to influence issues involving energy use, transport, building development and council spending as well as to take ownership over decisions that affect the public's quality of life.

Hertfordshire County and Districts strongly believe that 'voting is about making a contribution to the community'. This year Hertfordshire celebrated Local Democracy Week (LDW) (18th-24th October), an event organised by the Local Government Association, through numerous activities involving school visits and competitions.

Stevenage's theme for LDW was Making your Mark. Throughout the week the Mayor gave talks about local democracy at several secondary schools in town. The Council also organised a competition encouraging young people to think about ways to make Stevenage a better place to live.

Students of the 7th Grade of St Joan of Arc Secondary School attended presentations on local democracy and citizenship on a two-day visit to Three Rivers House in Rickmansworth. Three

Indicator DM1 – Electoral turnout (average % turnout over ten year period for Hertfordshire local councils and national average for local councils)



Rivers District Council organised the competition What will your life be like in ten years time? for children 18 years old and under. Young people were encouraged to take an interest in their community by expressing their views on what they thought the District would look like in 2015.

At the St' Albans School for girls, councillors and young people came together to discuss a wide range of issues ranging from the new cinema to planning agreements with developers. The young people came up with their own suggestions for improving life in St Albans including a smoking ban in pubs to protect the health of young people, more youth oriented programming for theatres etc.

The activities however that Hertfordshire County and Districts have undertaken to increase youth participation in decision-making extend well beyond the LDW events.

The Hertfordshire Youth Forum with representatives from clubs and schools took place in a Big Brother style room in November 2004. During the meeting representatives featured workshops on bullying, drugs, health and street crime and raised other issues of concern that were communicated by members of Hertfordshire Youth Parliament to the County's decision makers.

During October 2004 North Hertfordshire District Council held a series of Open Youth Forums with the aim to increase communities' participation on youth issues. Residents were offered the opportunity to discuss requests to set up youth clubs in villages and any other issues affecting young people in their community.

Similarly, in November 2004 Welwyn Hatfield Council hosted a day event on community safety with representatives from the Council, public organisations and senior police officer. Residents were invited to ask any questions concerned their safety and express their opinions on issues affecting safety in the District.

In conclusion, Hertfordshire's District and Borough Councils have been eagerly working with the public during last year to increase public participation in local decision making process in response to the national government's reform strategy for streamlining delivery of local services to communities.