

# decision making and community participation

## Hertfordshire joins forces to implement the government's community initiatives

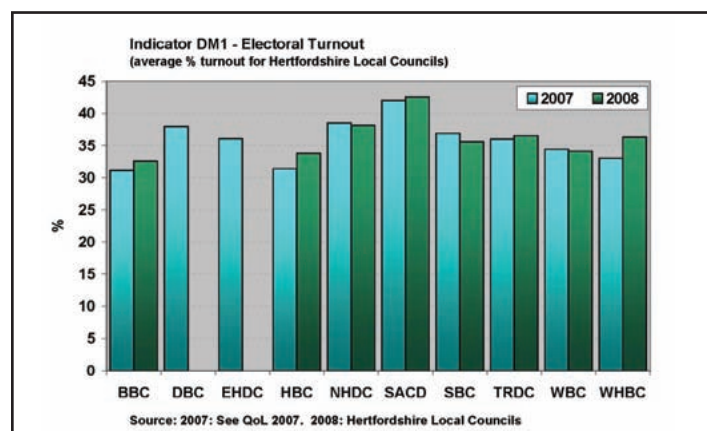
In 2008 there was a marginal improvement in Hertfordshire's electoral turnout, however, it is well-known that this kind of community participation is often poorly supported and that there are a number of other ways it can be represented. With a White Paper, a new range of indicators and survey, the government clarified how civic renewal could improve public service design and delivery.

### Indicator DM1 - Electoral Turnout (average % turnout for Hertfordshire Local Councils)<sup>1</sup>

The county's local elections were held between May 2007 and May 2008. Turnout ranged between 32.6% and 42.51%, a slight improvement on 2007.

Indicator DM1 - Electoral Turnout (average % turnout for Hertfordshire Local Councils)		
Local Authority	2007	2008
Broxbourne	31.12%	32.60%
Dacorum	37.95%	No election
East Hertfordshire	36.10%	No election
Hertsmere	31.38%	33.76%
North Hertfordshire	38.48%	38.10%
St Albans	41.99%	42.51%
Stevenage	36.90%	35.61%
Three Rivers	36.03%	36.53%
Watford	34.40%	34.10%
Welwyn Hatfield	33.03%	36.32%

Source: 2007: See QoL 2007. 2008: Hertfordshire Local Councils



## Communities in control: real people, real power

Launched in 2008, the UK government's White Paper "Communities in control: real people, real power"<sup>2</sup> is concerned with democracy and how those practices and ideals can be applied to a complex, modern society. Key themes are:

- Power, influence and control
- Who has power
- On whose behalf is it exercised
- How is it held to account and
- How it can be diffused throughout our communities.

Supporting these themes, Hertfordshire County Council took the unprecedented step in 2008 of inviting local charities to comment on the spending priorities of the county's primary care trusts. The county's Local Strategic Partnership, Hertfordshire Forward, also drew up Local Area Agreements (LAA's) with central government to promote, encourage and enhance opportunities to empower local communities. Three out of the possible eight performance indicators for measuring decision making and community participation were chosen as LAA's for Hertfordshire until 2011:

- NI 1 Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
- NI 4 Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
- NI 7 Environment for a thriving third sector<sup>3</sup>

Read more on Hertfordshire's Local Area Agreement 2008-2011 [www.hertslink.org/hertfordshireforward](http://www.hertslink.org/hertfordshireforward)

Although there is a clear desire from the government to increase community engagement, the extent to which people want this is far less clear cut. The evidence suggests a range of interests, with only a very small minority of people who actually want to be actively involved. A larger minority of people have no interest at all and most people seem to be indifferent. It does appear that there is a significant proportion who want more of a say. This needs to be provided through a variety of ways, rather than just through traditional governance mechanisms, like public meetings and resident boards which are less successful at encouraging people to come forward.

## National Indicators<sup>4</sup>

198 new national indicators replaced a range of performance indicators in 2008. The following may apply to decision making and community participation:

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National indicators that may apply to community participation	
No.	Description of New National Indicator
NI3	Civic participation in the local area
NI2	Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood (community)
NI4	Percentage of people who feel that they can influence decision in their locality
NI5	Overall general satisfaction with local area
NI6	Participation in regular volunteering
NI7	Environment for a thriving sector
NI24	Satisfaction with the way police and local council dealt with anti-social behaviour
NI27	Understanding of local concerns about anti social behaviour and crime by the local council and police

**Source: National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions<sup>2</sup>**

## Local Democracy Week

Local Democracy Week is a national annual campaign devised by the Local Government Association to persuade young people to participate in the future of their community from an early age. Together with councils and other groups, it encourages them to work together to create positive changes within a young person's community. Providing a range of tools via its website on leadership, ideas and examples of good practice, it also encourages the setting aside of stereotypes and prejudices. Aiming to connect young people with local politics and politicians, the 2008 Local Democracy Week ran from 13th to 19th October. Events were held across the county and throughout Britain. See [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk) for campaign ideas.



Barclay School pupils vote during Local Democracy Week 2008

## Stevenage pupils make decisions about how to deal with litter during Local Democracy Week

During a programme of events during Local Democracy Week teenagers from Barclay School in Stevenage were given an insight into its council's waste management. Twenty-three of its pupils, aged 14 to 16, attended a Community Conference for Young People in the Council Chamber on 14 October 2008. The pupils learnt how the local council aimed to keep the town's streets clean and rubbish free. After completing an exercise to decide how to allocate the litter collection budget, Barclay Schoolteacher Jan Pugh, said: "The Conference was a huge success. Instead of just talking about democracy the students got to see where it really happens."

## Welwyn Hatfield Youth Council

In 2008 Welwyn Hatfield Youth Council focused their Local Democracy Week activities on a Question Time event. Held later than the national equivalent, a lively debate took place on 3 December about the current issues affecting young people in the district. Posters and a press release were sent out the previous month to encourage sixth formers from schools in the Welwyn Hatfield Consortium to attend or send in questions on topics they felt were important. Key community figures in the panel taking questions at the event, hosted by Monks' Lane School in Welwyn Garden City, included; Terry Mitchinson, Editor of Welwyn Hatfield Times newspaper, Conservative MP Grant Shapps and Labour Parliamentary candidate Mike Hobday. Topics ranged from providing sex and drug education for young people, the availability of affordable transport and leisure facilities and youth community voluntary work.



A panel takes questions from Welwyn Hatfield Consortium pupils

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## Community Strategies and Plans

Community strategies are overarching documents that sit at the apex of all local authority strategic and service plans. They promote a long term vision for improving sustainability, i.e. the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area. There is a statutory requirement for their creation and 11 Community Plans and Strategies exist in the county which are supported by a variety of partners and key stakeholders.

This year Dacorum updated their strategy to take them up to 2021, as did North Herts and Welwyn Hatfield. In October, Hertfordshire Forward<sup>6</sup> held their annual conference in Hatfield. The range of presentations given showed how community strategies and partnership working would improve health and wellbeing which was the theme for the event. Given that the Home Office Citizenship Survey has suggested that sport and exercise is the single greatest contributor to social participation, it was therefore fitting one of the presentations included an introduction to Hertfordshire's Olympic involvement and its Ready for Winners partnership.

Hertfordshire Community Plans and Strategies
Broxbourne Community Plan 2007-9
Towards 2021 - The Dacorum Sustainable Community Strategy
East Herts Together - Community Strategy 2003
Hertsmere Together Community Strategy 2006-2020
North Hertfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy
St Albans and District Community Strategy: Shaping Our District Together for 2020
Stevenage 2021: Our Town - Our Future
Three Rivers Community Strategy 2006-12
Watford's Community Plan 2006-2026
Welwyn Hatfield 2021 - The Borough's Corporate & Community Plan
Hertfordshire 2021: A Brighter Future
<b>Source: Strategic Partnerships Unit, Hertfordshire County Council</b>

Read how Hertfordshire is improving community participation with leisure

See page 35

## Place Survey

As part of a national survey designed by central government to capture local people's views of the area they live in, around 40,000 questionnaires were sent to Hertfordshire residents at the end of September 2008. The questionnaire was created to capture information on a range of issues, concerns and services including:

1. **Your local area:** what is important in making somewhere a good place to live; what most needs improving locally; overall satisfaction.
2. **Your local public services:** local public service performance; police, GPs, hospitals and councils.
3. **Information:** how well-informed people feel, how to get involved in local decision-making and what to do in event of a large-scale emergency.
4. **Local decision-making:** whether people feel they can influence decisions affecting the local area.
5. **Helping out:** how often people give help voluntarily.
6. **Getting involved:** whether people are involved with local decision-making bodies.
7. **Respect and consideration:** questions about respect and social cohesion.
8. **Community safety:** do people feel safe during the day and night, the extent of problems around vandalism, drugs and drunkenness. How well local services tackle anti-social behaviour and crime.

### Notes about the Place Survey:

- In Hertfordshire the survey was conducted jointly between county and district councils, the police, health services and local agencies, as part of Hertfordshire Forward, the Local Strategic Partnership.
- To provide a reliable sample at least 1100 responses are needed from local people in each district.
- Data is submitted to central government at the end of January 2009.
- The full questionnaire and guidance for the survey provided by CLG and the Audit Commission is online at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/placesurveymanual0809](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/placesurveymanual0809)

- 1 *Local Elections Handbook 2007 (Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher) 2007 and Local Elections in Britain: A Statistical digest: edited by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher. 2003 2nd edition*
- 2 See [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)
- 3 *Third sector - Organisations in this sector share common characteristics: non-governmental, value-driven, principally reinvest any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. The term encompasses voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals both large and small*
- 4 See the report introduction for explanations about the new indicators
- 5 *Searching for the Impact of empowerment (2008) Bobby Duffy, Jessica Vince and Leon Page. Ipsos MORI*
- 6 See our link to Hertfordshire Forward's work via the report website