

decision making and community participation

Hertfordshire continues to engage with residents regarding active decision making and participation

Following the General Election in May 2010, and the change of Government, this area of work has had, and continues to experience, considerable change. The Coalition Government is moving towards a more local approach to politics and encouraging neighbourhoods and local communities to get involved with key decision areas, such as housing and planning.

Electoral Turnout (average % turnout for the General Election in Hertfordshire 2010)

Indicator DM1 – Electoral Turnout Hertfordshire MPs and Electoral Turnout 2010 General Election		
Local Authority	Turnout	Change
Broxbourne	64.00%	+4.7
Charles Walker - Conservative		
Hemel Hempstead	68.00%	+3.7
Mike Penning - Conservative		
Hertford and Stortford	70.60%	+4.1
Mark Prisk - Conservative		
Hertsmere	64.70%	+1.7
James Clappison - Conservative		
Hertfordshire North East	69.80%	+3.2
Oliver Heald - Conservative		
Hertfordshire South West	72.50%	+3.8
David Gauke - Conservative		
Hitchin and Harpenden	74.10%	+5.4
Peter Lilley - Conservative		
St Albans	75.40%	+6.9
Anne Main - Conservative		
Stevenage	64.80%	+2.1
Stephen McPartland - Conservative		
Watford	68.30%	+3.4
Richard Harrington - Conservative		
Welwyn Hatfield	68.00%	-0.2
Grant Shapps - Conservative		

Source: Herts Direct Website www.hertsdirect.org/comdirectory/comvoll/cenlocgovt/hertsmps/generalelection2010

Except for Welwyn Hatfield all constituencies showed an increase in turnout for the General Election 2010. Only two seats changed hands; both Stevenage and Watford gained Conservative seats.

Dacorum Democracy Week



Local Democracy Day event at Hemel Hempstead Civic Centre

Teenagers and children across Dacorum celebrated this year's Local Democracy Week with a series of events, organised by Dacorum Borough Council. For Local Democracy Day, pupils from local schools took part in a variety of activities including a democracy quiz and a Question Time panel with MPs, borough and parish councillors, and senior managers from the council, held at Hemel Hempstead Civic Centre.

Councillor Andrew Williams, Leader of Dacorum Borough Council, said: "Local Democracy Week is a good way for young people to find out about how local government works," and that "It's also a valuable opportunity for them to tell us what they think about the way things are run, and for us to find out about the issues that really matter to them".

Take Part Hertfordshire

Take Part¹ is a national learning framework that encourages lifelong learning for active citizenship. Take Part Hertfordshire is managed by Hertfordshire County Council in partnership with Hertsmere Borough Council, Community Action Hertsmere, Stevenage Borough Council and Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities. The two year programme, started in 2009, was designed to develop and deliver a range of programmes which would facilitate citizenship learning to help adults gain personal skills, qualities and knowledge to become empowered as members of their communities. Hertfordshire's Take Part programme

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delivers Empowerment Academies in two areas (one geographic, the other demographic focused):

Hertsmere – focusing on the Cowley Hill ward in Borehamwood.

Stevenage - focusing on black and minority ethnic groups in the borough.

The Empowerment Academies aim to:

- highlight the opportunities available to influence decisions
- enable shadowing of front-line service workers to understand how agencies work together and how they must rationalise and prioritise resources
- provide training and capacity building to help access opportunities.



Stevenage 'Take Part' project worker, Anne-Raphelle Durix

Take Part Hertfordshire has worked closely with Parliamentary Outreach to raise awareness of the work, processes and relevance of the institution of Parliament, encouraging greater engagement between the public and the House of Commons and House of Lords. This has included work with groups across the two areas as well as helping arrange visits to Parliament itself. Take Part participants have also enjoyed visits to other civic offices, such as County Hall, where they have been able to learn more about what the county council does and ask questions to Chief Executive Caroline Tapster.

Through the programme participants have enrolled onto a number of courses designed to build confidence, team working skills, presentation and communication skills as well as management skills to just name a few. The programme now looks to take the participants onto their next phase of development by identifying community leaders, who as role models, can continue to encourage involvement in local decision making after the programme comes to an end.



Stevenage 'Take Part' launch, January 2010

Please visit the Hertfordshire Take Part website: www.e-voice.org.uk/takepartherts

Participatory budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. Working with Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council allocated £50,000 to trial PB in Adeyfield². Members of the public were integral to the process from start to finish, culminating in a 'Decision Day' on 13 November with around 200 people voting for projects designed and delivered by local people. A second pilot will take place in Hemel Hempstead town centre in 2011. Elsewhere in the county, Harpenden Town Council used PB for their Voice Your Choice³ project which generated over 120 proposals for projects.

The Localism Bill

The wide-ranging Localism Bill⁴ was introduced to Parliament on 13 December 2010. The Bill aims to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.

The Bill gives residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases. The Bill gives new powers to communities to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and giving voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over their services.

The draft legislation aims to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and in their place provides a requirement for neighbourhood plans, which would be approved if they received 50% of the votes cast in a referendum, and to enable neighbourhood development orders to

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allow communities to approve development without requiring normal planning consent.

The Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are to be abolished, and it is proposed that some of the responsibilities of RDAs will be taken on by new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

The Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will be a business led joint partnership between business leaders, representatives from higher and further education, the voluntary and community sector and local government. The LEP builds upon the strong economic links that already exist within the county.

The Hertfordshire LEP proposal was one of 24 to be approved from a total of 61 in October 2010. Feedback from the Government commended the clarity of vision and ambition for Hertfordshire's economy, and the strong platform of partnership support in place to take this forward.

Hertfordshire's LEP held a stakeholder consultation meeting in December 2010.

At this first gathering there was agreement that the executive governance of the LEP will be a small, focused and business-led board and this would be the best way of developing overall priorities and acting as advocates for the county's economy. An interim board will be established in January 2011, and this will be followed by a full board in the spring of the same year.

It is proposed that the Management Board will be supported by a series of Programme Boards to develop and monitor key elements of the overall strategy, the following areas have been identified:

- Enterprise and Innovation
- Skills and Employment
- Strategic Infrastructure
- Investment and Advocacy.

Hertfordshire Forward Conference

In November 2010, Hertfordshire Forward held their annual conference, which focused on Stronger Communities: Hertfordshire's Big Society.

Building a Big Society in Hertfordshire will include encouraging self-reliance, community responsibility and growing the value of independence.

Speakers gave their thoughts on how to build stronger communities in the context of small state / Big Society at a time when public finances face tough challenges.

Speakers included: Francis Davis, Fellow of the Young Foundation and Government advisor on Big Society; Robert Gordon, Chairman of Herts Forward and leader of Hertfordshire County Council; Ben Kernighan from National Council for Voluntary Service; and Nick Johnson from Institute for Community Cohesion. The conference covered community engagement and 'Hertfordshire Local', the role of the voluntary sector and volunteering, and community relations, and offered an opportunity to showcase existing good practice in the county.

For further information please see:

www.hertslink.org/hertfordshireforward



Delegates at the Hertfordshire Forward Conference 2010

¹Take Part Hertfordshire forms part of the Take Part Pathfinder programme which is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and managed by the Community Development Foundation. Take Part Hertfordshire is in the second phase of national Pathfinders (2009/11).

²For more information on the Adeyfield event see: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/adeyfield-action-201cyou-choose201d-hemel-hempstead

³For more information on Voice Your Choice see: www.harpenden.gov.uk/Contents/Text/Index.asp?SiteId=796&SiteExtra=16752795&TopNavId=780&NavSideId=12700

⁴For more information on the Localism Bill 2010 see: www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/localismbill