

To whom it may concern,

I am fully behind the overarching plan's priorities of Participation in Democracy, Public Participation to develop policy and services and Transparency and accountability.

As someone who has worked in this area within the UK as well as in New Zealand, I thought some of my experience might help provide some insights into what has worked well and what might enhance the current proposal.

I was a part of the Local eDemocracy National Project, a programme of work that was intended to drive participation in local elections by supporting and encouraging participation in local democracy in between elections.

I was responsible for leading two aspects of that programme: e-petitions and e-panels and was a member of the team who carried out the overall programme evaluation.

I was also involved in European Parliament funded programmes of e-participation which considered how to engage the community into European led legislative programmes of work.

Since then, I have worked to implement new approaches to public participation within New Zealand at a local government and district health board. It feels as if many of the issues facing New Zealand now were explored during my time in the UK 10+ years ago. My feedback relates directly to my experience.

Commitments 1 & 2

Parliament TV is a good start but people don't generally just want to watch parliament. They want to watch a particular issue being debated eg climate change. The TV needs to be managed in a way that allows people to navigate right to the issue they wish to see and to be able to dip in and out of the conversation – eg being able to just focus on specific points in the debate or particular speakers. The provider I worked most closely with in the UK that allowed this to happen at a local government level was <https://www.public-i.tv/>. In addition, my experience of partnering with the media allowed greater dissemination and visibility of those key issues – allowing them access right to the point in the agenda they were reporting on was essential.

The evaluation from the Local eDemocracy National Project identified that children and young people enjoy participating but this needs to form part of the school curriculum and to be embedded into school programmes of work rather than being an add on. [Democracy games](#) were a good way of helping to make it fun and engaging for young people. [Local Democracy Week](#) was a nationally facilitated programme of work which helped to support and encourage councils to participate. As part of this, I facilitated an activity called [I'm a councillor, get me out of here](#) which brought together 5-6 councillors with school children and involved online dialogue, live chat and was followed by evictions. Hansard Society developed a democracy cookbook which was full of good ideas of activities for children to participate in and I used these as a way of warming up the children before I'm a councillor started. The results from the dialogue were used to inform youth services and activities and the winning councillor was named youth champion to help ensure the feedback was progressed through council.

Children and young people also may like the opportunity to participate virtually in parliament – having a Q&A session through live TV so that they are able to engage with members of parliament without having

to travel would open up Parliament much more than three events per year and a virtual tour. Any face to face events should include support for schools from less privileged areas to participate.

I facilitated participation in a select committee process that allowed us to be able to ask questions from the community at key points in the committee deliberations and then invite them to watch or attend the committee meetings to see the issues being discussed – perhaps this model could be used within the youth parliament select committee process.

Developing guidance about the petitions process is useful and there is a lot of material available from the UK and overseas that would be of relevance. However, a process at a governance level that would support this would also be of benefit. The Scottish Parliament's set up was a good example – a public petitions committee used to receive petitions, evaluate solutions and monitor their process until conclusion. A publicly accessible e-petitions site that registers all petitions received, encourages and supports people who wish to champion change and tracks where they are in the process would provide transparency and help to educate.

Commitment 5

While improving the toolbox is important and it's great that you are keen to use the IAP2 framework, democracy and public participation need careful communication so that the right questions are asked and so that the issue is framed well.

Communication is often done in a way that is either too formal and stuffy, they are too light in terms of detail or they try to sway people in a particular direction. This is incredibly difficult to get right and needs the right expertise and to allow people to participate at a level that suits their circumstance.

Essential to this is the commitment to provide feedback throughout the process so that people know how their views have been reflected on during the decision making or implementation process. Even when decisions take some time (years), it is important to ensure that people are kept informed and educated about the process.

It is disappointing to see that public participation is at the end of the current policy method toolbox guide – efforts to include more co-design and start with engagement at the start of the process and not just at the end would be particularly beneficial. A way of incorporating citizen led approaches too would be beneficial – potentially linking in with the petitions process and helping to show that the community can make a difference and deliver change.

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