

SUMMER E-PANEL SURVEY

319 e-panellists from across Kirklees took part in an online survey about local democracy, to inform the work of the Kirklees Democracy Commission. The survey ran throughout August 2016.

How should we do democracy here in Kirklees?

Elections

Have you voted in a **local election** in the last 3 years? (Please don't count the recent EU referendum).

307 (96%)	Yes
11 (3%)	No - I chose not to
1 (0%)	No - I wasn't eligible to vote

Do you think you should be able to vote electronically (on your smartphone, tablet, laptop etc)?

159 (50%)	Yes
90 (28%)	No
69 (22%)	Unsure

It would save money for us to elect Kirklees councillors only once every four years, but this would mean you would get to exercise your right to vote less often. How would you feel about this?

71 (22%)	It sounds like a great idea in principle	} 61% in favour of 4 year voting
125 (39%)	Sounds okay but I would need to know more	
49 (15%)	It sounds like it would be a bad idea to me	} 38% against changing
73 (23%)	I would be totally against changing to four yearly elections	

Making decisions

Thinking about how you feel about how Kirklees Council makes decisions now, please choose where you fit on the scale:

1 - I have no idea how decisions are made	2	3	4	5 - I fully understand the council's decision-making process
49 (16%)	61 (19%)	88 (28%)	78 (25%)	40 (13%)

1 - I'm completely uninterested in how decisions are made	2	3	4	5 - I'm extremely interested in how decisions are made
2 (1%)	11 (4%)	51 (16%)	130 (42%)	119 (38%)

1 - Councillors make decisions in secret in closed rooms	2	3	4	5 - Councillors make open decisions in public
40 (13%)	69 (22%)	110 (35%)	70 (22%)	24 (8%)

1 - No one can be involved unless councillors want them to be	2	3	4	5 - Anyone can get involved if they choose
38 (12%)	68 (22%)	107 (34%)	64 (20%)	39 (12%)
1 - I've never influenced a council decision	2	3	4	5 - I think I've influenced a council decision in the past
111 (35%)	62 (20%)	75 (24%)	34 (11%)	32 (10%)

Although our panellists are generally more politically engaged group than the average resident (with the first question demonstrating that 96% of respondents have voted locally in the past three years), this set of statements shows that there are very mixed perceptions on how decisions are made, and limited understanding of the process. A third believe they have never influenced a council decision, despite the majority saying they are interested in how decisions are made.

Do you think the voting age for local elections should be lowered to 16, to encourage more young people to participate in local politics?

161 (51%)	No
104 (33%)	Yes
53 (17%)	Unsure

Should councillors have less control and the local community have more?

163 (51%)	Yes
104 (33%)	Unsure
51 (16%)	No

Half of respondents feel the community should have more control over the local area. In a previous panel survey, 61% agreed that councillors should be helping and encouraging local people to solve problems for themselves (i.e. working with them, rather than working for them).

Councillors

78% of panel respondents told us that 'it's important to have a range of different ways of interacting with local councillors - online being just one of them.'

With this in mind, please pick up to three options you feel you would be most likely to make use of:

209 (67%)	Regular surgeries
183 (58%)	Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc)
139 (44%)	Ad-hoc councillor drop-in sessions
105 (34%)	Councillor visits to schools (thinking about your family / young people you know)
71 (23%)	Webchat, Skype etc
45 (14%)	Something else:

49 responses received - mainly referring to email and telephone. There was also mention of potential to use forums or online forms on Kirklees.gov.uk, street surgeries, councillors approaching residents via existing groups, meetings and workplaces, doorstep contact, WhatsApp, and attendance at schools and colleges.

Considering this is an online survey made up of people that are happy to engage online, it's surprising how many respondents chose regular surgeries and drop in sessions as one of their top three options.

84% of you told us that when you're dealing with a councillor, 'political party doesn't matter all that much to me, it's more important that they are working for the good of the area'.

Have you had any good or bad experiences of local councillors, of your own or that you've heard you're your friends or family? Please tell us a little about what happened:

176 responses were received to this question. There is clearly a strength of feeling about interactions with local councillors, and the comments received cover a broad range of interactions from a quick email to many years of ongoing relationships.

Many residents have high expectations that their local councillors will be there for them, promptly, and make time to listen and work with them – alongside some understanding of busy workloads and commitments. Perceived bad experiences take time to be forgotten and once trust is lost, it is difficult to rebuild. Many positive comments were made showing there are areas of goodwill, understanding and joint working.

We know being a councillor isn't for everyone.. but what one thing might get you more interested in getting more involved with the work of councillors and the decisions they make? Please be honest!

210 responses received. Many respondents indicated they would need more time or fewer responsibilities to be more involved, while some clearly felt jaded about local democracy, and that little can be changed. There was call for more honesty, clearer communication, and for councillors to be visible all year round not just at election time.

Some felt that they would be more likely to get involved if there was opportunity for short term projects, on topics of interest to them, that they could fit around other commitments. Some felt that party politics hinder decision making, fairness and working for the good of the community, and this is offputting to their further involvement.