Renewing democratic engagement: Exploratory research

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Renewing democratic engagement: Exploratory research

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Available at: https://gov.wales/renewing-democratic-engagement-exploratory-research

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym/Key word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household Enquiry Form</td>
<td>A form sent to every household in Great Britain to check whether voter registration records are correct. It is organised locally, usually by local councils. Some councils may send an email if they have a resident's address and then, if the resident does not respond by a certain date, will follow it up by posting a form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Senedd</td>
<td>The name is used to refer to the main public building of the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff Bay. From 6 May 2020, the National Assembly for Wales will be renamed Senedd Cymru (in Welsh) and Welsh Parliament (in English). The institution represents the interests of Wales and its people; makes laws for Wales; agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic grouping / SEG</td>
<td>A social classification system used in market research and other sectors. The classification assigns every household to a grade (A, B, C1, C2, D, E), usually based upon the occupation and employment status of the Chief Income Earner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **Research background, aims and objectives**

**Research background**

1.1 In July 2018, the then First Minister announced the Welsh Government’s legislative programme for the next 12 months\(^1\). It included provisions for extending the voting franchise for local government elections to 16 and 17 year olds and foreign citizens legally resident in Wales\(^2\). This legislative proposal coincides with plans to extend the voting franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in elections for the National Assembly for Wales\(^3\).

1.2 The extension of the franchise to include all those aged 16 on polling day in National Assembly elections and Welsh local government elections would be the first changes to the age of voters in Wales since 1970, when 18 year olds were able to vote for the first time.

1.3 The position of the Welsh Government is that the existing rights of EU citizens living in Wales to vote in local council elections would continue following the UK withdrawing from the European Union. Currently, citizens of non-EU countries living in Wales do not have the right to vote with the exception of citizens from Commonwealth countries.

1.4 The Welsh Government is therefore considering extending the voting franchise for local elections to citizens of all countries living in Wales lawfully. By the time this report is published, the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill will have become an Act, with Royal Assent scheduled for 15 January 2020. This will mean the franchise will be changed for the 2021 Senedd elections.

1.5 In addition to engaging with the proposed newly enfranchised groups, the Welsh Government is interested in how to engage with groups of voters who are already enfranchised but less likely to be registered to vote and/or less likely to vote in local elections. In 2019, the Welsh Government published the report ‘Democratic renewal: evidence synthesis to support local government electoral reform’ (Hunt and Nickson, 2019)\(^4\). This review appraised existing evidence on civic, democratic

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and voter engagement, and relevant research regarding extending the voting franchise to 16-17 year olds and foreign nationals.

1.6 Building on this, the Welsh Government commissioned Beaufort Research to carry out exploratory research with proposed newly enfranchised groups of voters and those who are already entitled to vote but are politically disengaged. This primary research builds on insights from the research to inform strategies for engaging with these groups about their democratic rights and to promote voter participation and engagement. The findings will also be used to inform the tone, content and channels of communications and engagement with any newly enfranchised groups of voters and those who tend to be politically disengaged to inform them of their rights and promote voter participation.

Aims and objectives

1.7 The overall aim of the research was to understand how best to engage with newly enfranchised groups of voters in devolved elections in Wales; and those who are already entitled to vote but are politically disengaged, to inform these groups of their rights and promote democratic participation and engagement. To fulfil this aim, the research was carried out with:

- 14-17 year olds, disengaged adults and foreign nationals;
- Stakeholders who work with a range of groups of interest.

1.8 The main objectives of the research with the sample of the Welsh general population were to:

- Explore attitudes towards voting in elections;
- Explore current knowledge and understanding of politics in Wales and how represented people feel;
- Collect views and experiences of wider civic engagement;
- Identify suitable / effective methods of communication and engagement with different groups of voters.

1.9 The research questions investigated under each objective are given below:

Voting in elections

- Being given the opportunity to vote in Welsh elections (proposed newly enfranchised groups);
• Likelihood of participating in Welsh elections, and identifying the key motivations for, and barriers to, doing so;

• What has been the influence of family and friends on participating in Welsh elections;

• The process of registering as a voter and current methods of casting a vote (e.g. polling station / proxy vote / postal vote);

_Wider civic engagement_

• The degree to which participants feel they are able to engage in political debates affecting their local area and Wales more widely;

• The importance of community engagement (e.g. volunteering) and other forms of political engagement (e.g. petitioning, marches, social media campaigns) and how this compares with voting in elections;

_Knowledge, understanding and representation_

• Knowledge and understanding of local government (including community councils) and how this compares with their understanding of decision making at Wales / UK levels of government;

• The link between voting in local elections and decision making that affects local matters;

• The degree to which they feel their views are represented by local government candidates;

• Knowledge about what services councils are responsible for providing;

_Engagement and communications_

• How would it be best to engage and communicate with younger voters who are in school and those who have left school about their right to vote, to encourage and enable them to vote and participate in democracy more widely, and to provide information on government and candidates;

• How would it be best to engage and communicate with citizens from other countries about their right to vote, to encourage and enable them to vote and participate in democracy more widely, and to provide information on government and candidates.
1.10 The main objectives of the research with stakeholders explored:

- What work they already do to promote citizenship and civic engagement among those they work with;

- What methods, in their experience, are the most successful in engaging the groups they work with.
2. Methodology

A qualitative approach

2.1 Given the nature of the objectives, the research used a qualitative approach which consisted of a mix of focus groups, mini-focus groups (smaller focus groups e.g. four or five participants), face-to-face and in-depth phone interviews. The benefits to this project of a qualitative method were:

- The ability to explore the diversity around the topics of interest in more depth than would be possible via a quantitative approach;
- The ability to reach groups of interest who would otherwise be difficult to include using a quantitative method;
- The opportunity to explore with participants their suggestions for engagement and communications.

2.2 The potential drawback of this qualitative approach was the limited ability to draw decisive inferences from the feedback obtained that can be applied to a population, as the sample would not, by design, be representative. However, qualitative investigation is intended to provide in-depth understanding which was required for exploring the research objectives. Its strengths lie in the ability to identify themes across diverse groups and indicate the prevalence of certain issues.

2.3 Where lists of points made by participants are provided in the report, they are organised in alphabetical order unless otherwise stated, indicating that the points were not dominant themes. Bold text is used in the report to identify themes and change of topic.

2.4 Anonymous verbatim comments made by participants are included in the report. These comments should not be interpreted as defining the views of all. Instead they give insight into individual views on the points identified. Comments are provided bilingually where the conversations were conducted in Welsh. Each comment has an attribution which indicates the participant’s characteristics. Where more than one individual is contributing to a comment they are marked as ‘F’ for female and ‘M’ for male.
Research sample

2.5 The sample, summarised in the diagram below, spanned four broad groups of participants: young people aged 14-17 (8 focus groups); disengaged adults aged 18+ (8 groups); foreign nationals (28 participants); and stakeholders (12 participants). Five focus groups were convened in Welsh. In total, 148 people took part in the research between late July and early November 2019 in Aberystwyth, Ammanford, Caernarfon, Cardiff, Newtown, Swansea, Torfaen, Welshpool and Wrexham. Further detail on the sample is provided in annex 1.

Figure 2.1: Sample summary

Recruiting participants

2.6 Before recruitment started, Beaufort agreed a participant recruitment questionnaire with the Welsh Government. Using the questionnaire, the regionally based recruiters found participants by knocking on doors, stopping people in the street and through networks. Beaufort recruited some young people not in education and foreign national participants by liaising with organisations working with these groups. Stakeholders were recruited from a longlist provided by the Welsh...
Government based on a stakeholder scoping exercise. They included organisations which support:

- Young people and children (including not in education, employment or training, from minority ethnic backgrounds, rurally based, and in care)
- People with a disability and protected characteristics;
- Economically inactive adults;
- Gypsies and Travellers;
- Migrant communities.

2.7 Each member of the public who participated was given a financial incentive for taking part to contribute towards any costs and as a thank-you for their time.

2.8 The recruitment process was expected to be quite challenging for some participant groups. In particular, reaching 16-17 year olds not in education proved difficult: finding those who were not in some kind of training or education and also encouraging them to take part. In addition, we were asking adults to take part in research on a topic with which they were disengaged. A further challenge was reassuring some non-EU and non-Commonwealth individuals that the research was bona fide and not linked to their status in the UK. Despite steps taken to reassure potential participants (including a financial incentive) and making the sessions attractive, it still proved difficult and labour intensive to achieve the final sample. Working with organisations (e.g. a community group, support organisation or charity) proved helpful in recruiting some of these participants. This experience has implications for the challenges ahead in renewing democratic engagement with disengaged people.

**The discussions and analysis**

2.9 Beaufort drafted a topic guide to use in the discussions which was revised based on feedback from the Welsh Government. The guide was adapted slightly for different groups. The first day of fieldwork was used as a pilot to check that the topic guide worked. No significant changes were made.

2.10 The discussions began with a brief question asking participants how likely they would be to vote in a Wales election if eligible. They then moved onto the topic of wider civic engagement: what are the positive and not so positive aspects of where
participants lived. This section also explored participants’ views on raising an issue or getting involved in their local community.

2.11 The discussions then explored participants’ knowledge and understanding of local councils, the Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales. It also touched on how represented they felt by their local councillors.

2.12 The third part of the discussion covered views on voting in elections and motivations and barriers to vote, with a focus on Council and National Assembly elections.

2.13 In the last section, participants were asked for any suggestions for how to engage and communicate with them on voting and wider civic engagement. Finally, they were asked again about their likelihood of voting in elections in Wales, if eligible.

2.14 The group discussions and interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ permission. Transcripts were produced as the basis for the analysis. An inductive approach to the analysis was used whereby the researchers, through descriptive analysis, categorised the data to develop themes that emerged from the content of the focus groups and interviews. The categories and themes were broadly framed within the key research objectives.
3. Knowledge, understanding and representation

3.1 This chapter explores participants’ awareness of and familiarity with their local council, the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales:

- Participants knew something of their local council but little about the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales;
- Their local council was more visible to them through services and interactions;
- The Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales were generally considered to be one and the same thing, where participants were aware of the names;
- Politics in Wales was thought to have a low profile. Participants were relatively more familiar with UK politics and political figures as they were more visible in the media.

Knowledge and understanding of the local council

3.2 Overall, participants did not think that they were very familiar with what their local council does. However, they tended to be aware that certain services were the council’s responsibility. Waste services, libraries, parks and leisure centres, housing and planning were regularly picked out when participants were presented with a list of possible council services. Some participants admitted that they were assuming the council provided these services rather than knowing for certain.

*F: You don’t really hear much about it. F: Unless they’re getting the bins or something, that’s it. (16-17, not in education, Swansea)*

*When I registered with the library, I think I went through the council website but nothing else [is known] apart from that. (Female, EU foreign national, Wrexham)*

*All I know is that you have to pay your poll tax and they send a gentle reminder if you don’t. (Female, 45+, DE, Torfaen)*

3.3 Of the possible services in the list shown to participants that were not the responsibility of the local council, ‘health services (e.g. GPs, hospitals etc.)’ was most likely to be chosen, especially among young people (aged 14-17). Young people were also more likely to think that social care was not the council’s responsibility. Those still in education (aged 16-17) were more informed than those who were not.
Further areas of uncertainty reflect services where participants were less likely to have had any interaction with the council: highways / transport and agriculture. The diagram below highlights the services and areas participants thought or assumed were the council’s responsibility. The orange crosses indicate that some participants chose incorrectly. The larger crosses indicate the majority chose that option. Foreign nationals were asked about a shorter list and generally picked out waste services, schools, libraries, parks and leisure and housing. They were sometimes uncertain about health services and social care. Some foreign nationals believed that the local council was also responsible for policing and community safety.

**Figure 3.1: List of services and perceived local council responsibility by age and socio-economic grouping where appropriate (young people and disengaged adults)**

Despite being aware or correctly assuming which services a local council provided, it emerged that participants were not very aware of how a local council functions and the role of councillors. There were also cases where participants were unaware that they could vote for councillors to represent them. In addition, they were mainly unaware of who their local councillors were and which parties they represented.
I don’t think politics is to do with the council, it’s something to do with the government. (Male, 16-17, not in education, Cardiff)

3.6 There were exceptions where a councillor had personally been involved in something affecting a participant (e.g. housing for one older participant and helping to develop a local park which a young person used).

3.7 Where participants were more certain about the services provided by the local council, the knowledge had been gained predominantly in three ways: learning over time through interactions with the council (e.g. with housing, having a social worker, waste collection queries); word of mouth; and seeing the local council logo in situ or seeing staff carrying out environmental work like grass cutting. There were also occasional references to finding out about the council via regional and local news, Facebook, a council app to report issues and via the council tax bill.

It’s not too clear [what the council does]. I guess I get a pamphlet every year with my council tax telling me where my money’s going: to the police and to here and there and that. . . . No, I don’t [read it] because I just think nothing’s ever really going to change. (Female, Commonwealth foreign national, Welshpool)

3.8 Foreign nationals added to these sources of information and referred to online searches, visiting council offices with a query, receiving communication from their child’s school, receiving information from the university they attended and via charities (e.g. drop-in centres).

3.9 Participants were largely unaware of community or town councils. In isolated cases among participants aged 45 or older, there was some awareness in Newtown and Torfaen. They were thought to deal with things like flower beds, hanging baskets and helping to keep the town looking tidy. A couple of participants were aware of the building in which the community or town council operated but had no idea what went on inside.
Feeling represented

3.10 Overall, participants either did not feel represented by their local councillors or did not feel able to answer this question. It was not something that they had considered. A number of factors combined to leave some participants believing that local councillors did not represent them: the limited awareness and understanding of their local council; a low awareness of councillors; rarely or never seeing a councillor; and never having been asked for their views.

F: Probably not [feel represented] because I don’t even know who my local councillor is. F: No, I don’t know who it is or what they do so I don’t really know how well they do it. (18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)

3.11 Those who felt unable to say whether or not they felt represented stated that they did not know enough about the local council and councillors to form an opinion.

3.12 A further group of participants concluded that they were probably represented because local services and facilities functioned adequately and they did not have any pressing issues. Foreign nationals were more likely to feel this way, especially if they had not been in the country for very long and came from a country with less developed local services.

3.13 In isolated instances, participants did feel represented because a councillor had supported them with an issue or because the council, rather than a councillor, had been responsive to a query or issue.

Expectations of what a local councillor might be like

3.14 Given participants’ low awareness of their councillors and limited familiarity with councils, they often had no opinion or expectations of what a local councillor would be like as a person. Where participants did voice an opinion, it tended to be neutral or less positive. Perceptions were sometimes formed based on opinions of the local

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6 For context on representation, see:
council rather than councillors. There was also an indication that some young people’s less positive perceptions of the council were being shaped by hearing parents and relatives complain about issues like pot holes.

*My nan works for like cooking in schools and she complains about the council to me all the time. I’m not listening though she’s just talking to me, so I don’t know what she says.* (Female, 16-17, not in education, Swansea)

Some younger participants from the 16-24 age group felt that councillors would be older people and probably not very easy to relate to. Some assumed that councillors were unlikely to use social media platforms like Snapchat that young people used. They doubted that councillors cared about or were very interested in representing young people. An example was given of youth clubs reportedly being shut down in one area. Thinking more about the council rather than councillors, some participants aged 16-17 felt the council was at fault for local issues with drug use and homelessness.

*F: And they took away all the youth clubs and youth centres. Everything that people beforehand had got used to, so then there is nothing to do for kids.* . . . *F: They won’t speak to like our age.* . . . *F: They probably don’t care about our opinion, do they?* (16-17, in education, Wrexham)

*Sai’n mynd ar oedran, mor bell a bod nhw’im hefo tuedd tuag at fel ‘o, dyw plant ddim yn gwybod dim’. (I don’t go on their age, as long as they don’t tend to think ‘oh children don’t know anything’.)* (Male, 16-17, in education, Aberystwyth)

On occasion participants surmised that councillors were likely to be from affluent backgrounds and perhaps were more privileged: ‘a bit posher’ as one young participant suggested.

*M: They’re usually a bit more on the elderly side, but not all the time. M: They’re not elderly, elderly. M: They’re sometimes a bit posher than most people, because people who aren’t that posh, don’t really think about politics that much. I don’t know.* (Male, 14-15, Newtown)

*I wouldn’t say very well [represented]. . . . I don’t know. I guess they’re more privileged than the normal people that they’re meant to be looking out for. So, they kind of just don’t get it.* (Female, 18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)
Reflecting an attitude of general cynicism, some older participants and occasionally foreign nationals assumed that councillors were probably paid too much, were driven by self-interest and did not keep their promises. In a Valleys location, for example, a couple of participants knew of a local councillor mainly through hearsay who used to hold regular meetings in the community centre. These had stopped as people no longer attended because of disillusionment over the lack of action.

A final point made by a foreign national was that she was probably 'accepted' by local councillors but that councillors would be more likely to listen to 'British neighbours' than her. Councillors, she felt, might also be prompted to look into her background as well. She recalled contacting the council about a leaking roof, but it was only when the landlord got involved that the council fixed the issue (the flat above her privately rented flat was council owned).

In a similar vein, another foreign national described how she did not feel very safe when out and about in Wrexham because of the drug use she saw. She inferred that councillors or the council therefore were not necessarily representing her as she would wish.

Positive expectations were more likely to be expressed among 14-15 year olds and foreign nationals. There were assumptions that councillors would probably be 'nice', 'normal', from the local area, passionate, approachable and interested in listening to people.

The small number of participants’ experiences with local councillors were mainly positive. They included receiving invaluable support and empathy at difficult times (e.g. when homeless, for a child’s mental health support issues and with accessing childcare). A couple of young people in one group had seen evidence on Facebook of their local councillor working hard on community projects like litter picks. Also, seeing an increased police presence after violent crime in the area was assumed by a foreign national to be a result of the council looking after residents. A councillor who was seen to actively engage with and help local people created a positive impression among participants in one group.

*M: Saying that, there is one good councillor. F: Yeah, that’s who I was on about. . . . She listens. F: She listens to the people, she gets results. M: She’s like a Rottweiler. . . . F: You know she’s listening, she cries with you. (45+, DE)*
Knowledge and understanding of the Welsh Government

3.22 Regarding context, it should be borne in mind that some participants believed Welsh politics had a low profile. They did not encounter it in media coverage or hear about it generally, especially with the political noise surrounding UK politics and Brexit.

But for me, it's not really clear what the Welsh Government is doing. At least from the news that I'm reading, and I'm reading the BBC Wales and the Media Wales. (Female, EU foreign national, Cardiff)

3.23 Overall, participants’ familiarity with and understanding of the Welsh Government was lower than for the local council although awareness of ‘the Welsh Government’ was reasonably widespread.

3.24 Across different types of participant, some acknowledged that they had no idea what the Welsh Government was responsible for. Perceptions of its role and responsibilities, where volunteered, tended to be quite vague. The Welsh Government was responsible, for example, for Wales as a whole in some undefined way; it was a level above local councils and perhaps responsible for all the councils; it had a South Wales focus, according to some in Mid and North Wales; and it was something to do with the Senedd building in Cardiff Bay.

M: Haven’t got a clue. M: The Welsh Government obviously is the larger body, isn’t it, than the local [council] and I suppose that’s where the MPs and all the people further up the chain do whatever they do. (Male, 45+, DE, Torfaen)

Sai'n really clir ar be maen nhw'n neud, ond byddwn i'n meddwl trio jyst gwella Cymru fel gwlad. (I'm not really clear on what they're doing, but I would think they're just trying to improve Wales as a nation.) (Male, 16-17, in education, Aberystwyth)

Be sy'n digwydd yng Nghymru. Pethau mwy kind of top shelf. (What's happening in Wales. More kind of top shelf stuff.) (Male, 18-24, ABC1, Caernarfon)

They do the same thing [as the council] but for people who’d rather speak Welsh. (Male, 16-17, not in education, Cardiff)
This latter point highlights how, in the main, participants assumed that the Welsh Government was the same entity as the National Assembly for Wales (where they had heard of both). Where participants had given it any thought, there was also confusion over how the Welsh Government / National Assembly for Wales related to the UK Government.

Infrequently, participants were relatively more aware of the Welsh Government’s responsibilities and activities, but its name was used interchangeably with the ‘Assembly’ in a few cases. There were occasional references to health, the NHS and free prescriptions and to education as areas of responsibility. Further isolated references were made to:

- Having taxation powers and certain finance control (after a participant’s Senedd tour and via a training course on accounting);
- How the Welsh Government delivered policies and was separate from the National Assembly for Wales (a foreign national participant who was interested in the Welsh Government’s graduate scheme);
- Providing free childcare (25-44 year old);
- Implementing a ‘help to buy’ scheme for housing (25-44 year old);
- Reducing the use of plastic bags (which this participant felt highlighted how the Welsh Government did not have significant power);
- Transport responsibilities.

_Doesn’t it run the NHS in Wales or it has more control over it and the education system because it’s different from England? And the WJEC is Welsh._ (Female, 18-24, ABC1, Torfaen)

_Fatha genna chdi’n cynulliad yng Nghymru, wedyn genna chdi’r llywodraeth yn Llundain. Ond mae Cymru’n siarad fwy am pethau yng Nghymru. Lle mae’r llywodraeth yn Llundain fatha yr UK i gyd. Ond mae Cymru yn siarad am fatha ysgolion, siarad am yr iaiith Gymraeg a pethau fel’nna. (So you have the Assembly in Wales, then you have the government in London. But Wales discuss things happening in Wales. Whereas the government in London is for the whole of the UK. But Wales is talking about schools, talking about the Welsh language and things like that.)_ (Female, 14-15, Caernarfon)
A small number of foreign national participants were generally politically aware and guessed correctly at the Welsh Government’s role in relation to the National Assembly for Wales. They sometimes spoke more positively about politics in Wales than when discussing politics in general, for example Brexit.

I’ve heard anyone can presence (sic) the discussions going on [at the Senedd]. I find that really cool and engaging. (Male, Non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

Knowledge and understanding of the National Assembly for Wales

Participants often felt unable to comment on the National Assembly for Wales either because they had not heard of it or had heard the name but knew little about it.

M: No idea. . . . F: They just focus on Wales. . . . F: Just a collection of people that talk about Wales aren’t they? (18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)

M: No, I didn’t know that. F: I thought it was the same thing. F: National Assembly? . . . F: Which one has that beautiful building in Cardiff? . . . M: But why do we need two different things to run Wales? F: Do they contradict each other? (45+, DE, Newtown)

Sometimes an association was made with the Senedd building in Cardiff Bay. There were cases where participants had visited the Senedd as part of a tour. These tended to be young people who had visited on a school trip. A small number of foreign nationals had visited as well. Their recollections of what they had learned on the tour about the Assembly were not very clear. Examples of these recollections and perceptions included thinking it had been ‘cool’ to see the debating chamber; hearing reference to how it had some devolved and tax raising powers; finding it a little confusing understanding what the Assembly’s role is; and thinking it had not been very engaging, according to one or two young people.

I remember I sat in a chair and we pretended that we were electing for stuff, but that was about it. It bored me. . . . [But] we watched an election as well, we watched a massive meeting, it was cool. (Female, 16-17, not in education, Swansea)

As with the Welsh Government, there was occasionally greater awareness of the Assembly. There were references to how it was like the Houses of Parliament with debates and how it passed law in Wales but that most power still lay with
Westminster. The Assembly also enabled the voice of people in Wales to be heard and it looked after Wales in some way by making decisions on its behalf. What these were, however, was unclear.

*Welsh Government are people who will actually take action and do things. And then the Assembly are just the people who talk about it.* (Male, 14-15, Torfaen)

3.31 There was a good deal of confusion over how the Assembly worked and what its relationship was with the UK Government. Some thought that politicians in the Assembly represented Wales in Westminster by attending the House of Commons and reporting back to the Assembly. There was also an assumption that all laws still had to be passed by Westminster. A further perception voiced was that the Assembly was more concerned with South Wales than other parts of the country.

*Mae’r representative yn y Senedd yn mynd i’r House of Commons, wedyn maen nhw’n trafod o’n fan ‘na wedyn dod nôl wedyn, a wedyn sortio’n fa’ma. (Because the representative in the Senedd goes to the House of Commons, then they discuss things there and then they come back and then sort it out here.)* (Male, 18-24, ABC1, Caernarfon)

*I do understand the Scottish Government have their representatives in the Parliament in Westminster, but as far as I know none of the Welsh Assembly Members goes in Parliament.* (Female, Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

**Knowledge and understanding of the UK Government**

3.32 Given its level of media coverage, there was relatively greater awareness of the UK Government and its politicians in contrast to the perceived low profile of Wales politics. Prominent political figures mentioned were Boris Johnson (although not all were aware that he was Prime Minister), Donald Trump and occasionally Theresa May. Even so, participants often had little to say about UK politics. The relationship between the Wales and UK governments was mainly unclear. Some participants acknowledged that it was not something they had ever thought about before.

*Mae be bynnag sy’n cael ei neud yn Llywodraeth Cymru mond yn effeithio Cymru. Ac o be fi’n deall, unrhywbeth drastic iawn yn Llywodraeth Prydain, ti’n gwybod, mae’n effeithio pawb. (Whatever is done in the Welsh Government only affects Wales. And from my understanding, anything very*
Brexit was generally considered to be a dominant political theme and was affecting some participants’ perceptions of politics. Some foreign nationals were anxious about what the future held for them in the UK and a small number reported unpleasant experiences in their community because of their nationality. More broadly, Brexit was a source of confusion and frustration among participants who had grown weary of it. The issue was compounding their disillusionment with politics.

In contrast, some young Welsh speakers in one focus group were aware of their local MP. They thought that the MP was approachable and hard-working and they followed the individual on social media. The combination of the MP’s visibility and age (younger than many MPs, ‘an overall nice guy to speak to’) were helping with this engagement.
4. **Attitudes towards voting**

4.1 This chapter explores levels of motivation to vote in Council and National Assembly elections, barriers to voting, political discussion at home and perceptions of the voting process:

- Younger people and foreign nationals were more likely to show an interest in voting;
- A lack of knowledge, finding politics unappealing and general disillusionment with politicians were prominent barriers to voting;
- The voting process itself did not emerge as key barrier to voting in elections in Wales;
- ‘Politics’ was often interpreted through a lens of negativity which had formed over time for older disengaged participants;
- There was little to suggest that any constructive political discussions took place at home, with the exception among some young people’s families and some foreign nationals.

**Views on lowering the voting age in Wales**

4.2 Fourteen to 17 year olds gave mixed views on whether the voting age for elections in Wales should be lowered to 16 years old. Those in favour argued that:

- Young people’s voices needed to be heard as it was their future that would be affected;
- If an individual feels prepared and mature enough to vote they should be allowed to do so;
- If they could decide to leave school, work full-time and join the army, they should be able to vote in an election;
- A 16 year old’s maturity levels were not that different from an 18 year old’s;
- If politicians were going to lie to people to win an election it did not really make a difference what the voting age was;

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7 For context, see:
- McAllister L (Wales Online columns on democracy and diversity). *Why giving the vote to 16-year-olds can help resuscitate our failing democracy*
4.3 Those who thought 18 years old was an appropriate age to be able to vote believed that:

- At that age they might have a better understanding of politics and be mature enough to take voting seriously which some acknowledged they did not do currently. The remark was made that fellow pupils at school who had been interested in politics had been considered ‘outcasts’;
- It seemed to be the legal age for most things in society;
- Sixteen to seventeen year olds seemed more concerned with popularity and personal image and did not care about political issues. Some thought that even people aged 18 would probably not be interested in political issues;
- They might still be too impressionable and easily influenced to be able to make their own decision on voting. Some participants expected that they would vote for the same party as their parents, for example.

**Likelihood of voting in elections in Wales**

4.4 At the start and end of the discussions with participants, they were asked how likely it was they would vote in a local council election in Wales if they were eligible.

Participants aged 14-17 and foreign nationals were the most likely to say that they would vote (if they could), giving an average of 6 out of 10 or more overall. The score they gave sometimes rose slightly by the end of the discussion. Some explained that the research had given them pause for thought or that they had found out a little more which had piqued their interest. Some had concluded that they had some responsibility to find out more about the subject. As one participant had come to realise, ‘it’s not that I don’t care, it’s that I don’t know enough about it’. Foreign nationals were more likely to stress the importance of voting.

4.5 Not surprisingly, disengaged adults were least likely to show an interest in voting. However, those aged 18-24 (a mix of socio-economic grouping) were slightly more interested in the subject by the end of the discussion. Participants aged 25 or older and from lower socio-economic groupings remained disengaged, giving very low scores at the start and end of the discussions. It should also be remembered that participants aged 14-17 and foreign nationals were from a mix of socio-economic groupings.
Stated barriers to voting in elections

4.6 The barriers to voting described by participants were broadly consistent across participant types, regardless of eligibility, but with varying levels of emphasis. They applied to voting in political elections in general rather than there being specific barriers arising for different kinds of election in the UK (local, Assembly and UK). The diagram below summarises these barriers which also often interlinked.

Figure 4.1: Stated barriers to voting in elections

4.7 Those who were ineligible to vote in elections in Wales were asked to imagine what the barriers would be if they could vote in a Wales election. Foreign nationals also took into account any previous voting behaviours in their country of origin.

4.8 The key barrier across younger people and foreign nationals was a lack of knowledge. Although this was less prominent as a stated barrier among participants aged 45 or older, their limited familiarity with politics and lack of engagement suggested that it was an issue for them as well. Finding politics unappealing, boring and confusing were also common obstacles to voting. Disillusionment – voting making no difference and not trusting politicians – was particularly marked among older participants as a key issue. Feeling disconnected was present as a barrier to voting across all participant types. The diagram overleaf indicates the strength of each barrier by participant type with larger crosses representing larger barriers.
4.9 The barrier of a **lack of basic knowledge** of politics was widespread in the sample and sometimes caused **confusion**. It was difficult for participants to understand how politics worked. They were not very familiar with the different political parties or candidates, what they stood for or how they represented them. It would be hard to know how to decide who to vote for, some anticipated. Some also acknowledged that they found it difficult to understand what politicians were saying on the occasions they heard them in the media. According to some 14-15 year old female participants, the lack of knowledge and confusion felt ‘scary’ in the context of having this responsibility. Not knowing anything about the subject and finding it confusing also prompted apathy and a sense of not feeling qualified to vote.

*Dim yn deall digon i fod yn saff be o’n i’n votio am. A dwi’m isio jyst neud be mae pobl yn deu’tha fi i neud, achos dwi isio gwybod be dwi’n neud. Gwneud penderfyniad fy hun. (I don’t understand enough to be sure what I’m voting for. And I don’t want to just do what people tell me to do, because I want to know what I’m doing. Make my own decision.)* (Female, 14-15, Caernarfon)
F: I didn’t even know Wales had their own politics. M: Yeah, you don’t hear much about it. (25-44, DE, Cardiff)

If I don’t know who they are or if I don’t know what their policy is, or if I don’t know if their policy is good for the foreigners [I wouldn’t vote]. (Female, Non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

4.10 When participants talked about politics being unappealing and boring, it appeared to be present alongside a lack of understanding and confusion. These factors combined to leave some participants feeling disconnected from politics. Some described how it was difficult to relate to the politicians they saw in the media, for example arguing in the House of Commons and behaving in a ‘childish’ manner. Politicians were thought to be all the same which also made it hard to relate to them. The ongoing situation with Brexit added to problem, according to some who were tired of hearing about it. Occasionally, participants admitted that the reason they found politics unappealing and boring was a result of their own laziness.

4.11 Younger participants who felt disconnected from politics did not feel that there was anything they could do as they were not eligible to vote and did not feel anyone was interested in their views. Some foreign nationals did not feel that their opinion was sought or valid and therefore voiced a similar sense of disconnection. These types of barriers also emerge when exploring obstacles to broader civic engagement (see section 6).

Ar y foment, dwi’m yn meddwl llawer. Fel dwi’m yn cymryd cymaint â hynny o ddiddordeb achos ni’m yn gallu effeithio fe rwn, a ni’m wedi gallu effeithio arno fe, so ‘dan ni dim ond yn gallu mynd gyda be sy’n digwydd. (At the moment, I’m not taking much interest because we can’t affect it now, and we haven’t been able to affect it, we just have to go with what’s going on.) (Male, 16-17, in education, Aberystwyth)

I just stay in the background. I feel, well I’m not Welsh or English so does it really matter what my opinion is? (Female, EU foreign national, Welshpool)

4.12 Participants aged 25 or older were more likely than others to state that they were disengaged because voting made no difference. Some did not see any obvious impact on their day to day lives as a result of elections and could not see how their voting would make any difference. However, participants tended not to provide specific examples to support this opinion. Occasionally, participants began to
articulate what lay behind this perception: local councils always seemed short of money regardless of who was in control, the same party seemed to have been in power for a long time and Wales did not appear to be doing particularly well as a nation. Once more, Brexit was given as a further rationale for this barrier in that the UK had still not left the EU. Some foreign nationals’ disillusionment had first arisen in their country of origin (e.g. Italy, Germany and Greece) and they continued to hold this view.

I just think, you know, it’s not so much voting for local or general or you know, however it is. Your vote doesn’t, sort of, get recognised. So the first time I have ever voted in my life was over this Brexit thing. And I voted out and theouters won, didn’t they? And it’s still ongoing now, isn’t it? (Male, 45+, DE, Torfaen)

I’ve heard there is always one government in [council area] and it doesn’t seem to change. . . . with the local councils. And we as neighbours talked about it and it seems like [council area] is always at the backend of funding. (Female, EU foreign national)

Sometimes linking in with apparently seeing nothing change, a lack of trust in politicians was a prominent barrier among participants aged 25 and older. Perceptions of UK politics was adversely affecting perceptions at all levels. Politicians were generally associated with unfilled promises (with Brexit mentioned as an example) and corruption to an extent, with some still recalling the MPs’ expenses scandal some ten years ago. A more recent instance of false expenses claims in Wales was top of mind for a few older participants as well. It emerged among foreign nationals that long-term political corruption in their country origin could leave them with doubts about politicians’ honesty as well.

‘Sna’m point, . . . hanner y pethau maen nhw ‘di gaddo ddim y digwydd. (There’s no point, . . . half the stuff they promised doesn’t happen.) (Female, 25-44, Caernarfon)

Constantly lying. We’ve had this Brexit now for the last four years; they can’t even make a decision on that. […] It’s nonsense, and like […] Iraq; how many Muslims killed? Like, I’m Muslim, so it affects me in that way. (Male, 25-44, DE, Cardiff)
As a Kurd, . . . I have seen so many things recently going on. Then how politicians and politics impact its people in the area, especially in the Middle East. Like recently in Syria, but in other areas as well. And that’s also, somehow, how I lost confidence in politicians and what they say, and that they won’t change actually. (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

Motivations to vote

4.14 Section 6 covers in detail what might motivate disengaged as well as more receptive participants to vote in elections. The disengaged adults were recruited as not having voted in the past and doubting they would vote in the future. On occasion participants aged 18-24 thought that they might be more likely to vote in a UK election because it attracted more media attention and seemed more important. Council and National Assembly elections on the other hand were felt to be quite low profile and therefore less important.

4.15 There was, however, an occasional perception among 16-24 year olds that local elections would probably have more of a direct impact on their lives. The lack of knowledge and interest in voting however, among other barriers, meant they were sometimes still not inclined to vote.

4.16 A small number of participants had voted in the EU referendum because it had felt like such a significant moment. Specific motivations to vote included:

- Family pressure;
- Seeing ‘racist’ posts on Facebook to do with Brexit and deciding to vote for the ‘non-racist’ option;
- ‘The state of the country’, ‘the rich getting richer’, growing poverty, homelessness and more foreign nationals entering the UK;
- To save the UK and NHS money which otherwise would have gone to the EU;
- Wales being better off in the EU with the funding it received.

4.17 Foreign nationals were not recruited as disengaged adults and were more likely to emphasise the importance of voting as a means of making their voice heard. For some, this was still important even if they doubted the integrity of the process in their country of origin. Living in Wales, some who had lived in corrupt regimes felt that the process would be far more trustworthy.
This is the way to make change. For example, you vote for the people that you believe that they can make change or they are close to your thoughts or they perform what you hope or what you are working for. (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

**Awareness and perceptions of the voting process**

4.18 The voting process itself did not emerge as a barrier to voting overall although it was clear that participants were often not very familiar with how the system worked. The more fundamental obstacles described above were the dominant issues. In a few cases, participants who were disillusioned with and apathetic towards politics stated that they would vote if they wanted to and that it would be quite straightforward to do so. Some were also aware that polling stations opened early and closed late which helped with convenience.

*I don’t think it’s the way you vote [that stops us voting]. I mean you could do postal vote, that’s simple enough. You can go round the corner, there’s one round the corner for me. It’s not much of an effort, is it?* (Female, 25-44, DE, Cardiff)

*Dwi’n meddwl mae o’n hawdd, yndi. Ond eto wedyn, ‘sach chdi’im yn gwybod pwy i voteio i, na. (I think it’s easy yeah. But then again, you wouldn’t know who to vote for.)* (Female, 25-44, DE, Caernarfon)

*If I wanted to vote, I’d make an effort and go regardless of circumstances.*

(Female, 45+, DE, Newtown)

4.19 Younger participants tended not to feel very prepared to vote. In addition to the broad lack of knowledge described above (also a reason for not feeling prepared among older participants), some 14-17 year olds were uncertain how easy or difficult it would be to cast a vote. However, it was not a pressing concern overall. As one participant surmised, it would probably simply involve ‘ticking a box’. There was some awareness that votes were normally cast at a location in the local community. Some participants had seen them in the community and occasionally been to the polling station with their parents when they were younger. However, some younger participants and foreign nationals did not know where they would need to go to cast their vote or were unclear about what it involved exactly.
You can just walk up to a church, whoever is doing the voting thing, just tick a box and put it in the thing. (Male, 16-17, not in education, Cardiff)

There is like a thing that you go into, I don’t know what it’s called. . . . You can’t talk, you have to just like pick one and just get out basically, and don’t discuss it. (Male, 14-15, Newtown)

4.20 There was less awareness of the need to register to vote and the process involved, especially among young participants although those who were more politically engaged were more likely to be aware that they would need to register first. As an example, a small number of 16-17 year olds commented that they knew they had to register because they had heard it from their parents, received a letter about registering or had encountered on Spotify an advert to register to vote. The apparent risk of a fine for not registering had prompted one or two to register but they had not gone on to vote. Older participants were more likely to be aware about the need to register to vote, with a couple having made the effort to find out and register so they could vote in the EU referendum.

I did sign up . . . because I was afraid of that fine but I never went for it [voting]; I just thought there’s no point, I can’t be arsed. (Male, 18-24, ABC1, Torfaen)

Dwi erioed ‘di cael, ‘sti. Dwi erioed ‘di cael llythyr na’m byd. ‘Sneb erioed ‘di gofyn wrtha i fynd i nunlla i voteio. (I’ve never had anything. I’ve never had a letter or anything. No one has ever asked me to go anywhere to vote.) (Male, 25-44, DE, Caernarfon)

4.21 When prompted with a summary of the current voting process, some thought that it sounded satisfactory, fairly easy and ‘accessible’. Sometimes, however, younger participants felt it sounded quite ‘old-fashioned’ and had assumed that online voting would be an option.

Responsibility for helping people feel prepared to vote

4.22 Participants tended to think that the local council should be responsible for helping people feel prepared to vote in local elections; or whoever wanted their votes. When prompted, some felt that the National Assembly for Wales or Welsh Government had a role to play in this respect with Assembly elections. Young people sometimes believed their parents were partly responsible as well. Schools were also regularly highlighted as having a critical, broader responsibility with education on the subject.
Some foreign nationals and younger people stressed that they were responsible for doing their own research and finding out more along with the bodies mentioned above.

**Family influence on perceptions of politics and voting**

4.23 Overall, politics was not widely discussed among family. When younger participants did respond that there were discussions in the home, the conversations were not thought to be very constructive. Examples included arguments between older family members, feeling lectured and not understanding what a parent was saying or a parent seeming confused as well. These experiences were shaping younger participants’ perceptions of politics, causing some to find it unappealing and to ‘switch off’. In other examples, parents had attempted to pressure participants to vote the same way as they did.

> My mum’s tried explaining to me but . . . I just don’t understand and she gives up then because she can’t be bothered. (Female, 16-17, not in education, Swansea)

> My mum votes Labour and my dad votes Conservative, but my mum has always pushed me and says, ‘Vote Labour, vote Labour’, . . . . I just give up. (Female, 18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)

4.24 Some younger participants remarked that their parents did not discuss politics, did not seem interested and it was not known whether they voted.

> M: They don’t really explain [about politics]. M: They don’t really talk. Q: And how do you feel about that? M: I’m alright. It doesn’t involve me. (Male, 14-15, Torfaen)

4.25 A further reason for not discussing UK or Wales politics at home from some foreign nationals was that it did not feel very relevant to them because of their limited rights in the UK.

4.26 From time to time, young people explained that parents did discuss with them political issues and voting including the importance of making one’s own decisions on who to vote for. In one example a 14 year old was aware of the negative impact of Brexit on his parent’s retail business.
Some foreign nationals explained how discussing politics and voting were strong family traditions. Election day in their country of origin was a major event with the family getting together to go to vote and then sharing it on social media (e.g. in India, Ivory Coast, Mexico and Moldova).

**We get up at six o’clock in the morning and we dress up and go to the voting centre. And when they put the sign up and we have voted, we are uploading on social media, me and my family members that yes, we all voted. . . . All the family gather together and we go there for the voting.** (Male, Commonwealth national, Cardiff)

**Foreign nationals and eligibility to vote**

4.28 Foreign nationals tended to be aware of their eligibility for voting in elections in the UK, or to guess correctly, although it had come as a surprise to a couple of EU participants that they were ineligible to vote in a general election. Limited awareness of Council and Assembly elections meant that some had not previously given it much thought. They were therefore sometimes uncertain about their voting rights. Some non-EU/non-Commonwealth participants assumed that they would not be eligible to vote unless they became British citizens. Some thought that perhaps EU and Commonwealth citizens would be able to vote. Even so, voting rights in the UK were often not very clear to non-EU/non-Commonwealth participants.

**Commonwealth residents are eligible for everything within the UK but there’s a criteria of three and five years. You need to be here for the three years or five years in order to get everything.** (Male, Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

**I think people from all over the world, but who have got the British passport. I think they can vote.** (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)
Participants sometimes referred to what was likely to have been the Household Enquiry Form they received from the local council. Some had become familiar with it over the years they had been in Wales. Some, however, found it confusing and wondered if it meant they were eligible to vote because they had received it. There were examples of completing it, ignoring it and visiting the local library to seek help with understanding what it was for.

Because we get a letter from the council every year saying they need to know who lives here, who is eligible to vote. . . . I do not know [what happens after that]. We usually fill in the form and return it, that is it. (Female, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

We are not aware because sometimes we are receiving posts about elections. . . . For the occupier of that address, so we are not aware, is it for us? Do we have the right to vote, no? (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

Some non-EU/non-Commonwealth participants were frustrated that they could not vote in any elections in Wales (or the UK) given how much tax they paid and how they were part of the local community. It did not seem fair that other foreign nationals could vote, but they could not despite no obvious difference.

What is the difference between me and someone that was just born in South Africa or India? I’m here, I’m working in this community. I would like to contribute to the community. Why shouldn’t I be eligible to vote at least at a local level? (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

Non-EU and non-Commonwealth participants were in the main very receptive to the Welsh Government’s plan to give non-Commonwealth and non-EU citizens living in Wales the right to vote in local council elections. It was described as ‘very good’, ‘exciting’ and a ‘welcome decision’. They anticipated it would help them to have a voice and to feel more connected with their local community.

The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill originally made changes to electoral law to enable 16 and 17 year olds to vote in Assembly elections. Amendments tabled by the Welsh Government after this research began were agreed to also enable qualifying foreign citizens to vote in Assembly elections. Giving qualifying foreign citizens the right to vote in Assembly elections is consistent with the Welsh Government’s proposals for extending the franchise for local government elections to qualifying foreign citizens. The timing of this research meant that this option of voting in Assembly elections was not covered with foreign nationals.
I think that’s exciting. . . It’s just feeling you’re part of this community as well. . . .

When, for example, last time I think I received a letter from City Council and I had to go to the website online, I put my information – Iran. Then suddenly, ‘You are not allowed to vote’. And well you just feel, okay, . . . because it looks like they’re saying, ‘You’re not part of this community’. But if something like this is the plan, I think it’s exciting. (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

Here as I understood there’s big communities from Africa, from Asia, who are not Commonwealth. So just excluding them from being listened to, especially for young people, is really, really [pause], it’s an issue. (Male, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Cardiff)

4.32 However, a Chinese participant was then concerned that people like herself would not be prepared as they did not understand the system or who they should vote for. She had no experience of ever voting in China so people might not give it a great deal of thought, she reasoned. Her partner who had obtained British citizenship had not felt prepared to vote in the EU elections because of a lack of understanding and interest.
5. **Civic engagement**

5.1 This chapter explores participants’ broad perceptions of their local community, any experience of attempting to raise an issue or get involved in local activity, and barriers to doing so. It also covers the civic activities of signing petitions and volunteering:

- Participants clearly cared about the neighbourhood where they live;
- They identified a range of community related issues with varying levels of importance to them. Issues related to antisocial behaviour were most prevalent;
- Acting on an issue or getting involved in the community was not often considered unless participants were immediately affected;
- It was frequently unclear to participants how to raise an issue, give an opinion or change anything;
- The potential for greater engagement was signalled by current petition signing and some voluntary activity.

**Perceptions of their local community**

5.2 Participants were able to identify positive aspects of the community they lived in. Common themes were appreciating the sense of community among people including, for some, the welcome received as a foreign national; and the environment with access to green spaces. Some participants went on to highlight access to local amenities, feeling safe, diversity, the local schools and the ability to use Welsh in their day-to-day lives.

5.3 Issues with their local neighbourhood were also identified, notably antisocial behaviour. This primarily covered drug and alcohol misuse, low level crime, litter and dog fouling. Some disengaged adults and foreign nationals drew attention to economic issues (lack of work options, low pay and a declining high street). Among young people, a further issue with the local community was a lack of things for them to do. A final negative point noted among some foreign nationals was that they did not always feel very welcome or safe.

**Raising an issue and getting involved in the local community**

5.4 The strength of feeling on such issues varied but some participants were quite vocal in highlighting less positive aspects of their neighbourhood. When asked about taking any action to do with an issue in the community or making their voice heard, however, they tended not to have taken any steps or made their views known to those who might be responsible or able to help. The main reasons given for not
having got involved or acted were that it was not obvious how to and that it would probably be difficult; and that it had not crossed their minds to do so or there did not seem to be a great need to act. Younger people were slightly more likely to feel it was important to get involved in principle but were less likely to have raised an issue.

5.5 The nature of some of the issues highlighted like antisocial behaviour meant that some participants did not think there was much they could do about it. Further barriers to wider civic engagement included:

- Not expecting to be listened to if they did try to raise an issue;
- Not feeling eligible to voice an opinion, as a young person or foreign national;
- Lacking the confidence to raise an issue or get involved, as a foreign national.

Os ni’n dweud barn ni, does neb yn really gwrando i ni. (If we say what we think, nobody really listens to us.) (Female, 18-24, C2DE, Ammanford)

M: Don’t know who to talk to. M: Too young. . . . M: I feel like because we’re children, we don’t get listened to. Our opinion doesn’t matter. Q: Is there anything that’s happened to make you feel that way or is it just a general perception? M: Just a general thing. (Male, 14-15, Torfaen)

I would be scared of the reaction of local people if they are not happy with what I say. (Female, EU foreign national, Wrexham)

5.6 Given these barriers elicited at a local level, it had generally not crossed participants’ minds to consider issues at a Wales level or how they might get involved.

5.7 Infrequently, there were cases where participants had raised an issue, made their voice heard or got involved in the local community. Examples of participants acting on issues they highlighted in their community normally occurred when they were directly affected: an antisocial neighbour, a criminal incident, a health issue, housing issues, refuse collection, fly-tipping or litter and dog fouling.

5.8 In these instances, participants had approached the police, the local council, ‘social services’, a local councillor, a local MP and community elders. Participants had therefore found a means of contacting an organisation who they believed were responsible for the issue but with mixed outcomes.
5.9 Positive outcomes included the police responding effectively, a council residents’ meeting being useful and a councillor and MP providing a good deal of support. In other cases, however, no change had been noted about a complaint or no support had been forthcoming (e.g. attempting to organise a charity event, an antisocial neighbour, refuse services, housing services, fly-tipping and dog fouling).

5.10 Foreign nationals were more likely than others to have raised an issue but this did not always correlate with their levels of engagement in their country of origin. Some had been very engaged and had taken part in political protests, signed petitions and volunteered in their country of origin. Some, for example in China and Iran, had not felt able to get involved (‘we don’t have voting, we don’t have any rights’) or it had been too dangerous to do so. In the UK, however, they had contacted the council or police when they needed to. It had struck a small number of foreign nationals that British citizens did not seem to care much about where they lived (e.g. the amount of litter) or recognise the importance of voting.

5.11 Some had signed petitions: these were mostly online petitions via Facebook or emails from change.org\(^9\). Online was convenient and allowed for impulsive engagement. They were mainly reacting to what they encountered rather than seeking out petition opportunities and the examples given were not normally local to Wales (e.g. animal welfare, Brexit, climate change and plastic use, Donald Trump visiting the UK, taxation on beer, the state pension age and Turkey’s military action against the Kurds). Examples of more local petitions related to a deportation case, keeping a library or pub open, protecting the Tryweryn Wall\(^10\), providing parking for a mosque on Fridays, reduced bus services, revamping a local skate park, school related issues and traffic calming. Participants aged 45 or older were less likely to have signed a petition.

\(^{M}\): It was on Facebook. I had seen it that someone had shared. . . . \(^{F}\): You got a lot of injured animals ones being posted on Facebook so you just can’t scroll past them without signing one. . . . \(^{F}\): I have no idea [what I’ve signed]. They just come up, if I like it, I just sign it. (18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)

\(^9\) See [change.org](https://www.change.org)

\(^{10}\) See [e-Petition: Make the 'Cofiwch Dryweryn' Mural a designated Welsh landmark](https://www.change.org)

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Wnes i neud hynna pan wnaeth wal Tryweryn gael ei fandaleiddio efo Elvis a phethau. Ac wedyn o’n i fatha ar Facebook, ‘Sign this petition’, ac oedd ‘na article ‘di cael ei gysylltu hefo hwnna. (I did that when the Tryweryn wall was vandalised with the word ‘Elvis’ and stuff. Then I was like ‘Sign this petition’ on Facebook and there was an article linked to it.) (Female, 14-15, Caernarfon)

5.12 Some participants had also volunteered in their local community for several reasons. For some it was a means of giving something back to an organisation that had helped the family in some way. It also helped participants to feel better about themselves. Some admitted that a key driver was that it would improve their CV and chances of paid employment. Another benefit was the positive impact it had on mental health and wellbeing, according to some older participants. In addition, for some foreign nationals volunteering provided a route into the community and helped them to feel more accepted. Caring about an issue was occasionally enough to volunteer for a couple of teenage participants who had taken part in a litter pick. Participants could see or feel the difference volunteering made.

Just the fact that I know people are needy for [food banks] and it will go to the right channel. I think the important thing was probably that it is going to reach there. (Male, 25-44, DE, Cardiff)

There was a community here and then I start more voluntary work to integrate myself, to get experience. . . . Achievement for your own self as well. (Female, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

Stakeholders’ perspective

How promoting citizenship and civic engagement fits in with stakeholders’ work

5.13 For some stakeholders, citizenship and civic engagement played an important role in their work when supporting specific groups of people. In one example, it was crucial to the organisation’s role which centred on informing people of their rights and how they can use laws to campaign for change. In another example, engagement with community issues and local government played a key part in helping young people with their personal development: ‘It literally is what we do’. Several young people had gone on to join local governance as a result.

5.14 In some instances, the role that citizenship and engagement played was not quite so emphatic. Some still found it difficult to engage with client groups on such subjects because of other more pressing areas that took priority. For one
stakeholder it formed part of an organisation’s work to an extent although elections, democratic rights and voting were not normally covered. The organisation kept its focus on children’s rights which had meant some involvement with a consultation on lowering the voting age in Wales for council and Assembly elections. In a further example, the funding received for a project with BAME people and migrant communities depended on a significant proportion of people doing voluntary work. However, democratic engagement was not covered because they did not have time and it did not relate to their funding. This participant felt it was a shame that they did not have the time or resource to cover these topics more thoroughly where appropriate.

5.15 Where citizenship and civic engagement overlapped with the ways in which one stakeholder supported Gypsies and Travellers, they would work with the groups to ensure their voice was heard, either taking up issues for them or supporting them in their own efforts to do so. However, the promotion of citizenship and civic engagement was not something that was actively pursued on a routine basis. Even so, it had been established that voting turnout among these groups had been extremely low in local elections and was therefore moving onto the stakeholder’s agenda.

Challenges facing stakeholders in promoting democratic and civic engagement

5.16 Stakeholders provided examples of approaches they used to engage with the groups they worked with and these are covered in the next section of the report. They also highlighted challenges they encountered which reflected many of the issues described in this report.

5.17 Low levels of awareness of politics in Wales were noted along with very limited wider civic engagement. Examples of groups where this occurred included young people, economically inactive people, disabled people, Gypsies and Travellers and foreign nationals. Dealing with deep-rooted apathy and a belief that voting made no difference were also key challenges: some referred to the people they worked with not seeing themselves represented in politics or not feeling valued. An example was given of the impact of welfare reform on disabled people who consequently did not feel their view counted. Attempting to convince people that they could stand as

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a local councillor was therefore even more difficult. A first vote as a young person on Brexit or against tuition fees might not have delivered the result they hoped, contributing to a sense of disillusionment.

People being disengaged [is a challenge], so people not seeing it’s for them. Not seeing themselves . . . particularly when it comes to elections and standing for election, becoming a councillor, things like that. I think there’s a lot of room for improvement there still. Diversity in democracy is not brilliant.

(Stakeholder)

5.18 There were also occasional examples of young people not being taken very seriously when they did make their views heard through official government related channels or through talking to politicians. In addition, where the effort had been made to get involved, there was sometimes no feedback or change as a result of the engagement activity.

It’s when young people are felt to be tokens, to be tokenistic, sort of a gesture to be sitting on a group. We have been involved in different local governments’ and government’s work in groups looking for opinions of young people, and I have had young people coming back and saying that they have felt that they were just there because of their age, and that they weren’t appreciated, and their views were not taken on board. (Stakeholder)

5.19 Further challenges mentioned included:

- A lack of resource to effectively encourage democratic and civic engagement (e.g. to organise an engagement event);

- Encouraging Gypsies and Travellers to register to vote, especially those who still travelled or lived roadside;

- How stakeholder organisations had to act as ‘intermediaries’ by helping the people they worked with to grasp the basics of how the political system worked and by conveying the views of the people they worked with to government bodies – rather than a more direct relationship with easy to understand communications;

- The added difficulty of engaging with young people on these subjects when their parents did not engage; and where young people had experienced negative interactions with authorities (e.g. on housing or social services);
• The cost associated with disabled people and young people accessing opportunities to get involved.

_We were delivering one-off workshops. In an ideal world you would build up relationships with groups of young people first and then open up that conversation around citizenship or around voting._ (Stakeholder)

5.20 Reaching and engaging with certain groups was sometimes a struggle for stakeholders. Where they were working with young people, some found it difficult to reach those who were: disabled; economically inactive; from asylum seeking communities; in private residential care; offenders; transgender; and rurally based (especially younger men). Illustrating this issue, a stakeholder in a local authority role stressed how economically inactive young people were not thought to be touched by any youth engagement work on formal ‘citizenship programmes’ and the programmes only seemed to reach those who were already engaged.

_A lot of the kids in the more deprived communities that we’re targeting, they haven’t got that . . . A lot of the statutory youth services which are doing a lot of the citizenship and the active citizenship and a lot of that stuff, they’re still not really targeting them._ (Stakeholder)

_Those who haven’t left their local communities. They don’t see how somebody maybe in rural North Wales can make a change at the national level._ (Stakeholder)

5.21 Regarding foreign nationals, the point was made that certain groups were more used to being told what to do, having arrived in the UK, rather than feeling their opinion was important. As a result, encouraging them to engage in the local community, for example as asylum seekers or refugees, was sometimes very difficult and required a good deal of support because they had not felt in control of their lives to date. Also, it could be a challenge to engage with them on politics in the UK and Wales given their negative experience with the regime in their country of origin. Highlighting the challenge, a stakeholder recalled how some foreign nationals had struggled to grasp that they were equally as entitled as others to visit a museum and that it was free to enter.
A further observation among stakeholders on groups that were harder to reach or engage with related to disabled people. It was sometimes harder to reach the deaf community where individuals did not perceive themselves as disabled. In a final example, economically inactive people, especially women with caring responsibilities, were thought by one stakeholder to be ‘the hardest ones to find’.
6. Participants’ suggestions for encouraging engagement

6.1 This chapter summarises participants’ suggestions for how best to engage with them to motivate them to vote and encourage them to get involved in local community matters. It also provides examples of what kind of messages participants thought might motivate them (or as stakeholders the people they worked with) in these respects. Ideas for motivating people to vote and encouraging civic engagement were broadly the same.

- Key themes were: knowing more about the subject and how to raise an issue; feeling listened to, feeling that they were being taken seriously and feeling that voting or community involvement could make a difference;
- Messages that could motivate centred on change, action, evidence, honesty and sometimes the future;
- Key suggested engagement routes were through school, reaching people face-to-face in the community and via social media;
- High profile individuals might help engage 14-15 year old boys;
- Stakeholders saw a valuable role for those already working with people to help with education and engagement.

Encouraging people to vote and wider civic engagement– participants’ suggestions

6.2 The suggestions put forward for what might encourage participants to vote in council and Assembly elections and to get involved in community issues often overlapped. The main themes are highlighted in the diagram below and the key findings under each theme are discussed, in turn, below. There remained some older participants, however, who could not see what would encourage them to engage and vote.

Figure 6.1: Main participant suggestions for encouraging voting and wider civic engagement

Knowing more about it

6.3 Improving awareness and understanding of how politics in Wales works and its connection with people’s day to day lives were common suggestions among participants. Some young people and foreign nationals displayed greater curiosity about politics in Wales. Some wished to be equipped with the confidence to vote that knowledge would bring. Participants were not necessarily sure what it was they needed to know because of their lack of understanding of the subject.

F: Maen nhw’n defnyddio geiriau, mae pobl hyd yn oed hynach na fi ddim yn gwybod beth maen nhw’n ddoed. . . . M: Dim clem sut mae fe’n gweithio. (F: They use words, even older people than me don’t know what they are saying. . . . M: No idea how it works). (18-24, C2DE, Ammanford)

6.4 From a voting perspective, some wanted to know:

- What local councils, the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales do, the powers they have, how they relate to each other and how the Welsh political system relates to the UK system;
- Why politics in Wales is important;
- The identity of the political parties and what each party stands for;
- What is the reason for an election;
- Who the politicians / candidates are, what they will do and what they believe in;
- How to decide who to vote for in an election;
- How voting can make a difference and what is the outcome of voting;
- Clarity on voting eligibility (foreign nationals);
- How to vote including registration (more so among younger participants and some foreign nationals).

It’s not important to me but . . . there’s nothing to help young people understand or learn about politics. There’s no like groups who like to help people understand and entice them to want to know about it. (Female, 18-24, ABC1, Torfaen)
Not overly clear. . . . But that’s probably by my own choice because I’m just caught up with the children and work and I probably could be more involved in thinking more about it. (Female, Commonwealth foreign national, Welshpool)

It’s great that Wales has its own parliament. However, I do not feel that it’s powerful enough to make policies or any developments in Wales, compared to England. Still confused ‘HOW’ the communication between central government and NAW is happening. (written comment) (Female, Commonwealth foreign national, Swansea)

6.5 For wider civic engagement, some participants first wanted to know how they could raise an issue and get involved.

F: I don’t feel like we have enough outlets to go to, because who would we go to? . . . F: It’s like, if you don’t get in really drastic situations, you don’t really get the option. (16-17, in education, Wrexham)

**Listened to and taken seriously**

6.6 The second common suggestion for encouraging participants to vote and engage was for people to feel that they were being genuinely listened to and taken seriously. For some young people this meant being reassured that they had the right to express their views or raise an issue and that their input would be welcomed.

Anodd [i bobl ifanc fynegi barn] bydda i’n gweud achos os bod pobl yn teimlo’n gryf am rhywbeth, fel gwedwch nawr y protestiadau oedd yn digwydd tu allan i’r adeiladau Llywodraeth am newid hinsawdd, fel mae pobl yn gweld hynna, maen nhw jyst yn kind of chwerthin arno fe a dim yn cymryd e o ddifri o gwbl. Maen nhw jyst fel wel, dim ond plant ‘dyn nhw yn chwarae rownd. (It’s difficult [for young people to express an opinion] I’ll say because if people feel strongly about something, like now the protests that were happening outside the government buildings about climate change, people see that, they just kind of laughed at it and didn’t take it seriously. They’re just like, well, they’re just kids playing around.) (Male, 16-17, in education, Aberystwyth)
Participation will make a difference

6.7 Some participants felt that they would be convinced they were being listened to if they saw action being taken that was linked to the issue they raised – making a difference\(^\text{13}\). A ‘you asked, we did’ approach was suggested. One group of young people felt that getting involved needed to become the norm rather than seemingly only being possible for those qualifying for some sort or youth support or social services; or something that only ‘boffins’ at school got involved with.

*If we were actually listened to for once, then I think a lot more people will stop being like, ‘oh I don’t care’, because it’s like ‘oh, we’re actually changing things’. (Female, 16-17, in education, Wrexham)*

6.8 Some participants were interested in the idea of being part of the process aimed at creating a solution to an issue raised or at least being kept abreast of the outcome. Some stakeholders also highlighted this approach as effective for engagement if handled appropriately. According to one stakeholder, encouraging and supporting people to stand as councillors was important as well.

*If say it was a [mountain bike] trail, I’d help build it. (Male, 14-15, Torfaen)*

*When we’re coming up for national elections or the local elections you always encourage people to vote and to stand themselves. So it’s about developing people’s self-confidence and belief as a disabled person to work alongside non-disabled people on an equal basis. (Stakeholder)*

Visible, accessible politicians / candidates

6.9 Participants often suggested that more visible and accessible local politicians, candidates or local decision-makers – and having the opportunity to meet them on a face-to-face basis – would encourage them to engage more and consider voting. It would also add a human touch and make the experience more ‘personalised’. This suggestion was sometimes accompanied with the condition that politicians should not just be seen around election time. It would be more likely to convince participants that the councillor or candidate was genuinely interested in people’s views and concerns and potentially to encourage them to vote. Ideally, they would

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be able to get to know the politician or decision-maker. Adults were more likely than 14-17 year olds to make this suggestion.

*M: Dyna’r unig adag ti’n gweld [cynghorydd lleol], pan mae o isio vote. F: Ac maen nhw’n rhoi’r pishyn o bapur ‘ma, a dwi’n meddwl iawn, oce, ond dwi heb ‘di gweld chdi cyn heddiw. (M: That’s the only ad you see [local Councillor], when he wants your vote. F: And they give you this piece of paper, and I think, well okay, but I haven’t seen you before today.) (25-44, DE, Caernarfon)*

**Messages about change, action, evidence, future, honesty, environment**

6.10 Certain message themes were identified that participants felt could catch their attention and encourage them to engage more. The themes of *change* and *action* were prominent in terms of: seeing evidence of change; how an individual’s vote could change something that was important to people; and being able to help with change by voicing opinions about the local issues. Some stakeholders had found that change was a good starting point for people to think about any issues in their community, making it as tangible as possible. From there, they could explore what could be done to raise an issue and how the political systems in Wales worked. Change at a local level was considered an important element to stress because it could be positioned as where an individual could have most impact; and on issues that mattered to them locally or regionally. This would include highlighting in messaging where the Assembly had power to make a difference, or pointing out local initiatives, programmes or work and how they were funded.

*I find if you link it to change and you link it to real life examples of change that makes a big difference. (Stakeholder)*

*Wanting changes [would motivate me] but usually you’ve got to be really disgruntled. Like in South Africa, I voted because I was really feeling disgruntled and passionate, whereas over here, things kind of run smoothly so you don’t have that passion of change. . . . Well mental health needs changing, there’s a lot of drug use, there’s big poverty. (Female, Commonwealth foreign national)*

*[Evidence of] something good happening, but you don’t hear of something good happening in Newtown. (Female, 45+, DE, Newtown)*
6.11 Relevant messages about the future were sometimes suggested among 14-17 year olds, those with young children and foreign nationals. These messages might relate to their own future or their children’s future.

Deud na dyfodol ni ‘di o a dyla ni gael deud be ‘dan ni isio neud yn lle bod ni’n tyfu fyny a mond y bobl cynt oedd yn gwybod be oedd yn mynd ymlaen. Dyna fydd yn digwydd, os ‘dan ni’m yn gwybod be ‘dan ni’n neud. (Say it’s our future and we should have a say on what we want to happen instead of growing up and only the previous people knowing what was going on. That’s what will happen if we didn’t know what we’re doing.) (Female, 14-15, Caernarfon)

Like something they’re going to change for our future rather than the future generation of people much older than us. (Male, 18-24, ABC1, Torfaen)

6.12 Messages regarding honesty and transparency were felt by some to be important; but they would need to be underpinned with reasons to believe those messages.

6.13 Some participants were concerned about the environment and climate crisis. Messages that addressed this concern were therefore suggested. Further possible messages put forward were: that residents had a duty to vote or get involved, for example focusing content on the individual; how one vote can make a difference; and education, health and housing.

Relevant, inclusive messages

6.14 Among foreign nationals and some 14-17 year olds, there was a desire for messages of inclusivity and diversity that made them feel valued. Some foreign nationals referred to tailored content that reassured them they were genuinely part of the community and that their views count. They wanted to be reassured that they were not perceived as ‘spongers’, their vote is important and their contribution is appreciated. Similarly for young people, it was to know that they had a right to give their opinion, that they would be listened to and their views taken on board.

Other ideas for community engagement

6.15 Other ideas for local community engagement from the general public included helping involvement to become ‘cool’ and the norm; and tailored, personalised responses to any issues raised, for example via online channels, which would help to close the feedback loop. Further suggestions from stakeholders were:
• Ensuring accessibility to any kind of event or initiative is planned. This covered aspects like physical access, British Sign Language interpreters\textsuperscript{14}, loop systems etc. and parking;

• For young people, to focus on using rights-based language and stressing to young people that everybody has rights regardless of their age or background;

• Providing expenses or funding for people where needed to ensure they could get involved with civic engagement (e.g. travel expenses);

• Volunteering which could act as a valuable starting point for civic engagement for a range of different groups of people. An example was given of asking economically inactive people to volunteer as part of a support programme and as a first step in helping them to feel more included in society. They still had to feel that they were getting something out of it as well, like a sense of achievement. The point was also made that getting involved in the community was a useful first step towards voting engagement;

• Using case studies – a participant working with disabled people used them to help give people the confidence and practical tools to act, like challenging a local decision about a care package.

**Desired councillor or candidate qualities**

6.16 When discussing what they would look for in a councillor or candidate, participants identified certain characteristics that overlapped with the themes described above: accessible, approachable (friendly, unintimidating, down to earth), visible (proactively sought people’s views in the community), genuinely interested in people, listens, honest, trustworthy, clear on what they stand for, acts and / or closes the feedback loop. Some also wanted their councillor or candidate to know the local area well and to have experienced some of the issues facing the community. The ideal representative might already have a track record of making a difference in some way in the local community or at least getting involved in some way. They would already be respected for achievements within the community.

*There’s not many councillors that go around and actually get involved with many things. I think there’s one, . . . I think he’s a councillor, he gets out and goes to clean the roadsides. (Male, 18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)*

\textsuperscript{14} See British sign
I would vote for people who are not committing any crimes and who actually are out there to make a difference, you know they’re not all from Oxford. (Male, 25-44, DE, Cardiff)

I never heard back [about fly-tipping]. I mean one of the things that I would improve is at least saying: ‘thank you for your report. We are planning to do something’ or ‘we already did something about it’. (Male, 45+, DE, Newtown)

6.17 There were also references among younger participants to wanting to be represented by an individual who was younger and easier to relate to, and cared about the issues they did, like the environment. In a few cases, foreign nationals wanted to see people from a diverse background representing them and to feel that the councillor or candidate ‘embraced the whole community’

I think they should have some younger people on there who are going to be more relatable to what we see and do. (Female, 16-17, not in education, Swansea)

F: If there’s one from China, Chinese. Yeah it would be, it might feel closer because they may understand more when you’re talking about something. M: Someone that understands us, understands our community. (Female, non-EU/non-Commonwealth foreign national)

Suggested methods of information provision and engaging with people

6.18 There were three main suggestions for channels to provide people with information and to use for engagement. These suggestions (summarised below) were made by the general public and stakeholders.

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Schools and colleges

Schools were widely considered by participants to be a critical channel for fostering democratic and civic engagement. Younger participants cautioned that the way it was presented and taught would need to be interactive, enjoyable and tailored to issues pupils felt were directly relevant to them. Inviting someone in to discuss voting and civic engagement was more likely to hold their attention, they advised. This might be a visit from people representing the council, Welsh Government or National Assembly for Wales. One participant explained how pupils voted for Head Girl and Boy which was thought to give young people a good introduction to the concept of voting. It was also suggested that school could be an effective way of reaching parents with information on the subject.

We need to learn more about it in school. So, yeah, that would just make us more comfortable in what we’re voting for because I don’t even know.

(Female, 14-15, Cardiff)

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16 For context, see:
M: Maybe if they came into schools and talked about it, but made it interesting, so put on games and stuff like that. . . . M: If you get to miss lessons! (14-15, Newtown)

Sicrhau bod gennyn nhw ddiddordeb mewn gwleidyddiaeth yn oedran ifanc. Wedyn maen nhw’n tyfu fyny. . . . Jyst cael unrhyw fath o addysg am wleidyddiaeth neu economeg neu gyfraith, achos ‘dyn ni’n cael dim, ond eto ni’n gorfod dysgu am tecstilau! (Getting them interested in politics from an early age. Then they grow up. . . . Just have any kind of education about politics or economics or law, because we get nothing, but we still have to learn about textiles!) (Male, 16-17, in education, Aberystwyth)

6.20 Differences also occurred among young people by age, according to one stakeholder, regarding interaction methods. Secondary school children, when engaging on children’s rights, tended to want the approaches to be more serious (e.g. with debates and peer-led discussions) than those used for younger children which were more ‘hands-on’. Also, ‘allowing them to take on a role, sometimes works really well. . . . I think empowering young people helps them to engage better’.

Social media and online

6.21 Social media was a regular suggestion across different types of participant for how to reach and engage with them. Facebook was the most prevalent platform mentioned (e.g. adverts, video, shared posts) and it was already providing a convenient means for signing petitions. Facebook Events was considered an effective channel by a small number of participants because people could easily find out what was happening in the community and see who else was going to get involved.

Just try to get us on social media rather than websites because no one really ever goes on the website. (Male, 18-24, ABC1, Torfaen)

6.22 Although Facebook was mentioned among 14-17 year olds, they tended to focus on Instagram (e.g. via adverts or stories), Snapchat (e.g. stories) and YouTube (in-video adverts or video content) as platforms they thought could be used to reach them. Further social media ideas included via Spotify and, for Chinese foreign nationals, WeChat which the participants reportedly used exclusively. Social media was believed to provide the ideal platform for promoting short videos to help with
education and engagement. According to some 14-15 year old boys, their interest would grow if the content centred on a well-known sporting figure from rugby. Live question and answer sessions could be streamed as well.

F: I’d say Facebook Events, most of the time. That’s how you’d find out about most things. F: Yeah, definitely Facebook Events because you can easily see who’s interested in stuff and going to stuff. . . . F: Or stuff that’s shared on Instagram through re-sharing it on stories and stuff. Snapchat’s a bit difficult because you’ve got to add all the accounts. (Female, 16-17 in education, Wrexham)

M: Snapchat stories. . . . So, like sometimes they have interviews on them and stuff. M: Someone will post on them. Yes, and then everyone will go and watch them. You just click it. . . . I’d click on it and watch it [if it was Shane Williams]. (14-15, Torfaen)

6.23 Sixteen to 17 year olds in one group (still in education) thought it would be engaging if there was a video explaining how the political systems worked and who the different political parties were. They also wanted videos from each of the political parties explaining what they stood for so they could have a mix of partisan and non-partisan information. They emphasised that videos needed to be simple and clear so everyone could understand.

6.24 Stakeholders considered social media a valuable channel to use with some groups for example young people, disabled people and Gypsies and Travellers, given the limited literacy skills sometimes encountered with the latter. Social media helped to maintain a sense of community, informality and was an important tool for inviting people to events (mainly Facebook). Some acknowledged that they were not using social media as effectively as they could do through a limited presence or lack of expertise.

6.25 Less positively, some younger participants not in education doubted that they would take much notice of any content on social media because of the subject matter, a point echoed among stakeholders. According to one stakeholder, some marginalised young people they worked with were rarely online because of cost and the chaotic nature of their lives. Further caveats raised were accessibility issues for some disabled people; and how social media was a noisy place, making it difficult
for content to stand out. There were also trust and authenticity issues to contend with.

[Young people] are very aware of what is an advertisement and what is a genuine reach-out and they will just skip past an advert. I think this idea that social media is the answer is incredibly simplistic and naïve. (Stakeholder)

6.26 An independent website to match an individual’s beliefs and values with political parties was an additional idea some participants wanted to see, to help them with decision-making on voting. A clear, independent website could also provide information on how the process works, how to vote, policies and candidates.

Initiatives in the community and use of existing networks

6.27 A range of ideas was put forward regarding community related channels for informing and engaging people. A key theme was to take politics into the community and provide residents with regular opportunities to interact with councillors. Some participants stressed, especially foreign nationals, that a face-to-face approach was beneficial for engagement. It would allow for guaranteed discussion (perhaps candidate debates or questions and answers), feel more important and help to convey sincerity on the part of those organising the engagement activity. Fourteen to 17 year olds were less likely to make this suggestion. Face-to-face could also be a way of getting to know local politicians and understand what they stood for. The option to visit local council offices had been used by some participants and they had found it a positive experience.

If you could actually meet the people that are representing you then that would be better, you can actually ask them how they would go about representing your ideas and things like that. (Female, 18-24, C2DE, Wrexham)

M: With meeting. I would go if they say like, . . . to explain how it’s working, the Brexit after we go out. I would go. F: Because I think it’s better to just speak personally than to just receive a letter you might or might not read, you might or might not keep. . . . [Discuss] what we can do also like a community. (EU foreign nationals, Caernarfon)

6.28 However, some believed that politicians, candidates and those responsible for areas where they might be an issue should be meeting with residents in existing settings rather than expecting people to travel to meetings: going to ‘where the people are’. These might be at the school gates, community groups (e.g. a
volunteer repair group), faith centres, health settings, on the doorstep, pubs, shops, sport clubs, via charities and youth clubs. Some from minority ethnic backgrounds might also be reached via elders who played a prominent role in their community.

*If they took the time to actually meet people, go out in the pubs, go where the people are. Don’t set up a little meeting, go where the people are. Introduce yourselves. Be a bit more open and friendly with people, rather than us having to go to them because I don’t know where they are.* (Female, 45+, DE, Newtown)

*I’d get the people that were making the changes, sitting in the Senedd, to actually come out and speak to the individuals and listen to what they’ve got to say, rather than there being a wall in between people having engagement.* (Stakeholder)

6.29 Stakeholders identified existing local face-to-face channels as well as themselves as an effective way of reaching and engaging with the people they supported. Despite acknowledging the importance of social media, some pointed to the success they had with face-to-face interactions with young people, for example via interactive and enjoyable activities (e.g. people moving about the room, using Kahoot!\(^\text{17}\), drama based approaches, film-making and hands-on activities so that those who might struggle to read and write are included). They explained how free food and sometimes activities (e.g. paintballing) as part of the arrangement helped with engagement. Some wanted to continue to use outreach officers from the Welsh Government, National Assembly for Wales and Westminster and wanted to see greater investment in this resource.

*We have these clubs and they are itching to get involved. These are engaged young people, and they just want the opportunity to be listened to and to understand things.* (Stakeholder)

6.30 As part of this approach, training or funding those who already had links into harder to reach groups like the economically inactive was suggested, rather than attempting to engage from scratch. ‘Youth workers’, ‘support workers’, ‘social workers’ (especially for young people not in education), charities and community activists were sometimes identified as being well placed to help. They had developed trusting relationships with the groups they worked with and would ensure

\(^{17}\) See [Kahoot](https://kahoot.com), a game based learning platform.
that the interactions were sensible and comfortable for people. As a result, these
groups would be more prepared to participate in engagement activity with an
outside organisation or individual.

*People they trust. That’s who’s most likely to convince them. With young
people that’s teachers, that’s youth workers, that’s people they actively
engage with in a really positive way. . . . Because of the principles of youth
work for example, I just think it’s so suited to it to be honest.* (Stakeholder)

*Absolutely [via our organisation would work] because we’re one of those
spaces where people feel comfortable and where people hang out.*
(Stakeholder)

*They’ve got some really good community activists up in [x], not necessarily
political activism but there’s people who just want to get the community better
and they would be somebody they’d listen to.* (Stakeholder)

6.31 Some stakeholders also highlighted the importance of peer-to-peer strategies for
improving engagement. Case studies and ‘storytelling’ with people who had
engaged in some way were believed to be quite powerful. One stakeholder
explained how they had recruited ‘young ambassadors’ across a large number of
schools in Wales who helped to promote children’s rights to their peers.

*Further suggested channels for information provision and engagement*

6.32 Stakeholders gave examples of: factsheets and guidance they produced to help
people create their own campaigns; integration activities for foreign nationals; mock
polling stations to help prepare people for the voting process; parent workshops;
referring people to the Simple Politics website\(^\text{18}\); and Senedd visits. A suggestion
was made for radio adverts for visually impaired people.

6.33 Leaflets were sometimes suggested among members of the public as a way of
reaching them, for example with a clear and visually engaging explanation of how
the local council, Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales function and
relate to each other.

\(^{18}\) See [Simple politics](#). At the time of writing, this site provides articles on how the Scottish Government is
formed and how the Northern Irish Government is formed. It was not possible to find a similar article for how
the Welsh Government is formed.
Using high profile individuals to engage

6.34 Some 14-15 year old male participants thought they might be engaged by high profile individuals via social media, like Welsh sport stars and possibly Welsh bands. In addition, young people occasionally spoke admiringly of Greta Thunberg and had joined the school strikes.\(^{19}\)

_We did a lesson on [Greta Thunberg] in science with our biology teacher and she showed us videos of her giving speeches and she’s only our age and she tries to encourage people to go on school strike with her so that her voice can be heard around the world._ (Female, 14-15, Cardiff)

6.35 Some 16-17 year olds, however, did not think it would feel very credible to have someone high profile encouraging them to vote or engage, unless the individual had experienced issues similar to theirs. Some 18-24 year olds wanted instead to hear from politicians and candidates direct.

6.36 An individual within the local community might have some influence as a role model, according to some young people. 14-15 year old male participants in one location talked about a community project organised by an environmentalist aimed at reducing plastic in rivers.\(^{20}\) The locally prominent figure had also spoken at their school about his work which the boys had found engaging. In another instance, 16-17 year old female participants in one location talked about the community work an individual carried out within the arts sector. They spoke very positively about the individual and felt that he had influence.

_ M: They’re trying to clean up all the rivers in Wales. He’s all over social media._
_ M: There’s an assembly. He goes to schools. M: Goes to shops to put up posters to ask people to do it. He gets people to like clean up the source of the Severn and stuff._ _M: He’s really making a difference._ (14-15, Newtown)

Language tips from participants

6.37 General public participants emphasised that content about political information and engagement should be as straightforward as possible. In a few cases, foreign nationals felt that they would welcome the inclusive effect of content provided in

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\(^{19}\) See [School strike for the climate](#).

\(^{20}\) See [Sending a message in a bottle](#).
their own language. The example was given of receiving a healthcare letter in their own language which had been a surprise and greatly appreciated.

_Dwi’n meddwl dylai'r government siarad mwy fel iaih pobl normal. (I think Government should speak more like normal people.)_ (Female, 25-44, DE, Caernarfon)

_I’m okay reading in English, but I would be happier to see it my own language as well [Greek]. . . . I would pay more attention and I would feel like . . . more personal._ (Female, EU foreign national, Wrexham)

Stakeholders offered several tips about communication. Regarding language, they suggested avoiding where possible:

**Figure 6.3: Stakeholder suggestions for phrases to consider avoiding**

* This stakeholder was referring to how some people do not think they have a disability.

6.38 Further stakeholder suggestions about communication included the following:

- Encourage young people to challenge any jargon;
- Never assume knowledge levels of communication recipients and do not be afraid of simplistic, basic and bite-size information;
- Use a friendly, informal tone for some foreign nationals as a contrast to their formal and sometimes daunting interactions with the Home Office;
- Use terms like ‘community’, ‘your local area’, ‘where you live’, ‘have your say’ and rights based language with young people;
• Work with partners like Learning Disability Wales\(^2\) to check the language used.

\[\text{I think had we advertised ‘come along to this event we’re running on democracy’, I don’t expect those young people would have necessarily come along. (Stakeholder)}\]

\[\text{I wouldn’t call it ‘citizenship’ or ‘civic engagement’ for a start. . . . I would say ‘community’. ‘Your local area’. ‘Change’ is a good word to use. ‘Positive change’ is a better phrase. (Stakeholder)}\]

\(^2\) See Learning disability Wales
7. **Conclusions and implications**

7.1 The conclusions begin with key observations regarding three of the research objective themes.

**Objective - views on voting in elections:** the likelihood of participating in Welsh elections, the influence of family and friends on participating in Welsh elections and the process of registering as a voter and current methods of casting a vote.

**Objective - knowledge, understanding and representation:** knowledge and understanding of local government and how this compares with their understanding of decision making at Wales / UK levels of government; the link between voting in local elections and decision making that affects local matters; the degree to which participants felt their views are represented by local government candidates.

**Objective - engagement and communications:** views on how it would be best to engage and communicate with potential voters to encourage and enable them to vote and participate in democracy more widely, and to provide information on government and candidates.

7.2 The main barriers to voting overlap with barriers to broader civic engagement. The conclusions and suggestions described in the diagrams in this section can apply to engagement and communication themes and channels overall.

7.3 A key conclusion is the need to address the lack of knowledge about the subject and its capacity to confuse. The research also identifies a disconnection between a reasonable awareness of local council services and caring about the community but still not voting. Work is needed on helping people make that connection and improving knowledge of how local government functions.

7.4 The diagram overleaf highlights how this knowledge barrier can be tackled. The research finds that schools and the education sector have a significant role to play in this respect through embedding citizenship and political education in Wales’s new curriculum\(^{22}\). This is consistent with the recommendation made by the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform\(^{23}\). The research also concludes that a high profile awareness advertising campaign is needed for the widespread reach required.

*Young people, younger disengaged adults and foreign nationals showed more potential to changing their perceptions and behaviour than the older disengaged adults.* Non-qualifying foreign nationals are generally very receptive to

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\(^{22}\) See *Curriculum for Wales*

the idea of voting in local elections and would benefit from targeted communications to improve their knowledge.

**Figure 7.1: Tackling the barrier of a lack of knowledge and associated confusion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested solution</th>
<th>14-17 mixed SEG</th>
<th>18-24 mixed SEG</th>
<th>25+ DE SEG</th>
<th>Foreign nats mixed SEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School, college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness ad campaign</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media, online</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Face to face in community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Existing networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support workers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7.5 The profile of Welsh politics was mostly low among participants in this research who were not hearing anything about it in the media. Quantitative research into media consumption and current affairs sources of information in Wales that built on existing analysis would help illuminate this issue further. Online social listening and sentiment analysis may also have a part to play.

7.6 Education can help to challenge perceptions that elections and politics are unappealing and boring. Messages of change, the future and tackling antisocial behaviour would feel relevant and may catch attention. Ensuring politics feels relevant is key, together with making the engagement process enjoyable and fun for young people. This barrier was less of an issue with foreign nationals. The diagram overleaf summarises how this barrier can be tackled.

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24 For examples of existing analysis of media consumption and current affairs sources of information in Wales, see Awan-Scully, R. (2017). *Why there is an accountability deficit in Welsh politics*, Cardiff University. Cushion, S. and Scully, R. (2016). *British media is failing to give voters the full picture ahead of elections*, LSE.

25 Online social listening is the process of monitoring on social media platforms the general public’s mentions of and conversations about a topic or organisation. Sentiment analysis uses artificial intelligence to analyse text data and classify opinions.
7.7 The perceptions that voting and getting involved do not make any difference need to be proactively challenged. Whenever the general public’s views are sought, guarantees are required that meaningful feedback will be provided. The research also indicates that more work is needed to dilute the confirmation bias which is driving the cynicism shown towards politicians generally. An initial step could be to raise the profile of and learn from the petitions process of the National Assembly for Wales which closes the feedback loop between petitioners and policy action\textsuperscript{26}. The diagram overleaf summarises how this barrier can be tackled.

\begin{itemize}
\item Education / information
\begin{itemize}
\item Make it relevant, engaging
\item Minimise jargon
\item Challenge apathy
\item How is Wales different?
\end{itemize}
\item Messages: change, future, tackling antisocial behaviour
\item Environment messages
\item Message: why I should vote
\item Guest ‘speakers’, interactive, fun
\item Younger councillors / candidates
\item Role models, support workers
\item Seeing politicians regularly
\item Can get involved in the process
\item Less of an issue
\item Foreign nats mixed SEG
\item 25+ DE SEG
\item 18-24 mixed SEG
\item 14-17 mixed SEG
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{26} See Petition timeline. For an example of policy action based on a petition, see P-05-817 Specialist prosthetics for child amputees
Figure 7.3: Tackling the barriers of voting or getting involved making no difference and trust issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested solution</th>
<th>14-17 mixed SEG</th>
<th>18-24 mixed SEG</th>
<th>25+ DE SEG</th>
<th>Foreign nats mixed SEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes no difference, lack of trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenge perceptions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Considerations:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Give evidence of it making a difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Show action based on feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Be honest and transparent</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is different about Wales?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguishing Wales from UK politics / Brexit perceptions</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing the feedback loop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing politicians regularly</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, information to counter any negative legacy from their country of origin</td>
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</table>

7.8 The final main obstacle to voting and getting involved is feeling disconnected from it all. Improving knowledge and information provision is integral, together with:

- Getting to know local politicians;
- Greater politician / candidate diversity;
- Providing easy ways for people to be heard;
- Seeing evidence of how engagement makes a difference at a local level;
- Messages of inclusivity.

7.9 Using the behavioural nudge of social proof may have a part to play: people can engage with an initiative or change behaviour because they find out that others are already involved. The petitions process of the National Assembly for Wales may provide useful case study content and good practice principles to support greater efforts to reconnect with people.

7.10 However, the levels of disengagement displayed among older participants suggest that it could take an inordinate effort to address such disillusionment at scale. The diagram overleaf highlights suggestions for how this barrier can be addressed.
7.11 The **voting process** did not emerge as key barrier to voting overall. More fundamental issues were identified as described above which need to be tackled first. Even so, it was apparent that younger participants and some foreign nationals did not feel prepared for voting partly because of not knowing how to register and what to do on the day. They would therefore benefit from being familiar with these aspects.

7.12 ‘Politics’ did not appear to be discussed much among disengaged participants and their **family and friends**\(^{27}\). Some conversations at home about politics reportedly had a detrimental effect on engagement with arguments, confusion and boredom. Some more engaged young participants and foreign nationals, however, referred to the positive influence of family discussions on their interest in the subject.

7.13 If democracy and civic engagement are incorporated into the new curriculum, there may be the added benefit of young people influencing family members on the importance of engagement in the longer term.

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Objective - wider civic engagement: the degree to which participants felt they were able to engage in political debates affecting their local area and Wales more widely; the importance of community engagement (e.g. volunteering) and other forms of political engagement (e.g. petitioning, marches, social media campaigns) and how this compares with voting in elections

7.14 The research shows that some potential exists for greater civic engagement: participants care about their communities, sign petitions and sometimes volunteer. However, support is needed to help activate this potential. There need to be clear, accessible and actively promoted channels for raising an issue and getting involved. There also need to be reassurances that everyone’s view is welcome and will be genuinely listened to. Greater civic engagement at a very local level would help to form the basis for broader civic engagement at a Wales level which was not a consideration for these participants overall. Citizens’ juries and assemblies, for example, could be used more widely to help in this respect.28

7.15 The examples of relevant engagement activity provided by stakeholders were often labour-intensive and tended to be relatively small scale. Stakeholders also recognised the challenge of democratic and civic engagement but found success where trusting relationships had already been formed. With the right support, stakeholders provide a further important channel for reaching disengaged and unheard groups. Engagement would be enhanced with communications content developed from this research being shared with stakeholders to then share via their own platforms and activities.

28 See Wales’ first Citizens’ Assembly reports back
### Annex 1 – Participant sample achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research sample</th>
<th>Sample detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Young people:** 4 focus groups with 14-15 year olds | 2 groups with female, 2 groups with male participants  
Mix of socio-economic grouping across the sample  
1 group was convened in the medium of Welsh  
4 Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) participants |
| **Young people:** 4 focus groups with 16-17 year olds | 2 groups with female, 2 groups with male participants  
2 groups with participants in education  
2 groups with participants not in education  
Mix of socio-economic grouping across the sample  
1 group was convened in the medium of Welsh  
3 BAME participants |
| **Disengaged adults:** 4 focus groups with 18-24 year olds | 2 groups ABC1, 2 groups C2DE  
Mix of female and male participants in each group  
2 groups were convened in the medium of Welsh  
1 BAME participant |
| **Disengaged adults:** 4 focus groups with people aged 25+ | 2 x 25-44 years old, 2 x 45+ years old  
4 groups DE  
Mix of female and male participants in each group  
1 group was convened in the medium of Welsh  
4 BAME participants |
| 28 participants of **foreign nationality** | Living in Wales and intend to live in Wales for the foreseeable future  
Length of time in Wales varied from six months to 25 years  
15 participants were of EU or Commonwealth nationality  
1. German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Indian, Romanian, South African, Sri Lankan, Tanzanian  
13 participants were of non-EU or non-Commonwealth nationality  
2. Chinese, Chilean, Iranian, Iraqi, Ivorian, Mexican, Mongolian, Nepalese |
| **12 stakeholders** | 7 participants focusing on young people  
2 participants focusing on people with a disability and protected characteristics  
1 participant focusing on economically inactive people  
1 participant focusing on supporting Gypsies and Travellers  
1 participant focusing on migrant communities |