University of Sheffield

A Council of the Citizens?
Independent Local Parties
and Municipal Democracy

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Politics
September 2023

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Date ....

Abstract

This thesis studies the impact of localist Independent Local Parties (ILPs) on English parish and town councils, exploring whether they institute a democratic form of municipal government. Localist forms of political parties and small-scale municipal government are argued by advocates to have a role in democratic renewal; however, the current literature on these institutions is limited, particularly in the English context. After defining localist ILPs in terms of their aims, this thesis argues that localist ILPs necessarily make a claim to better align municipal policy with the preferences of citizens than national parties; a claim that can only be democratically achieved through increased citizen participation. This thesis then takes the analytical approach of the Democracy Cube, a tool designed to compare single processes of policy making, and develops the Democracy Mapping, an innovative approach that enables the mapping of participatory practices across systems of municipal government. The Democracy Mapping considers citizen participation in terms of who participates, what authority they have, how they communicate, and when in the policy cycle this occurs. Using the Democracy Mapping, informed by interviews and a range of documentation, this thesis finds that localist ILPs can institute participatory practices aligning with a standard of democratic municipal government. The research raises questions about the extent local norms shape the trajectory of localist ILPs, with different conceptions of local democracy appearing to shape their approach to citizen participation. Inequalities in participation and narratives of de-politicisation are raised as potential boundaries to the promise of ILPs, whilst their potential to politically engage the locality and institute participatory practices is also evidenced.

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Chapter 1.   Introduction

The good news is that local people are saying "hold on, I can fix my own troubles, I've got a say, I can do things". You're giving voice, not necessarily to the most literate, the most well thought out persons, but at least to a wider group of people, and that's proper democracy (Residents for Uttlesford councillor).

In a study of independent local political parties and councillors, unaffiliated to any national party, Wyn Grant (1977, p.1) argues that they 'represent a countervailing force … generating a distinctive political life of their own', based around local political culture and priorities. Councillors for independent local parties would typically claim to be citizens, different from councillors affiliated to national parties, creating a council of citizens that would direct municipal policy in a way that aligned with the preferences, interests and values of the locality. The implication is that the rejection of national parties in the locality leads to a more democratic form of local government that could enable 'completely new approaches to politics to emerge' that was 'rule by the people' (Macfadyen, 2019, pp.148-151). As localised experiments in political organisation, Independent local parties (ILPs) could institute democratic change (see Denters and Klok, 2013) and be a 'prototype of modernised party organisation' that is more flexible to political change and amenable to ad-hoc participation (Boogers, 2008, p. 166). This thesis asks whether ILPs institute more democratic forms of municipal government[1], strengthening participation in representative and direct forms to align municipal policy with the preferences of the locality, so creating a council of the citizens.

ILPs exist in municipal government at a variety of scales and this thesis explores them at the smallest-scale, within the parish and town council. There are narratives that parish and town councils could play a key 'role in the democratic process by providing an effective voice for local interests and concerns' (McIntyre and Halsall, 2011, p.270). In a detailed study of localism in England, Jane Wills (2016, p.1) advocates for the 'creation of new civic infrastructure and capacity at the neighbourhood scale', arguing for the potential transformative role of small-scale municipal government for democracy. Wills highlights the ILP as a potential mechanism to enable this transformation. The activity of ILPs within parish and town councils may appear to be politics at its most parochial, yet both ILPs and small-scale municipal government have been connected by scholars and practitioners to broad

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[1] 'Municipal government' here means a scale of government subordinate to national authority and at a smaller scale than regional authorities, with tax raising powers and elected representation. See Section 2.2.1 for a more complete definition.

proposals for democratic renewal. Through examining the impact of ILPs upon parish and town councils, this thesis will contribute to several important areas within the literature: the potential for participatory forms of democracy within small-scale municipal government; the role of political parties in instituting participatory practices; and, how to evaluate the democratic character of municipal government. In doing so, this thesis will connect with far wider debates around the how democracy can, and should, be structured.

ILPs are political parties that are not associated with national parties, being founded within the locality and often rejecting the role of national parties within municipal government. ILPs may have ambitions ranging from protecting a particular local service to achieving broader political reform and democratic renewal. Analysis by Lago and Montero (2014), amongst others, has shown how over time the prevalence of ILPs can change radically within countries, dependent upon political context and the structuring of local government. Some indication of this was given in the 2019 municipal elections in England and Wales, where ILPs performed better than at any point in the previous decade, both in terms of overall vote share, and their vote share within the wards they contested (see Chapter 2). This was in the context of a broader surge in support for candidates who were not affiliated to national political parties, prompting press talk of 'a legion of Independents' (Tighe and Bounds, 2019) who could initiate 'a seismic shift' in political control (Hardman, 2019) and 'a radical reinvention of the way that power works at a local level' (Harris, 2019). To caution against hyperbole, at this peak, ILPs remained a relatively niche phenomenon in English municipal politics, gaining 3.5% of the overall vote share at principal authority level. However, if ILPs may, through political circumstance or design, become more prevalent across municipal government, then it is important to ask the question:

Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?

To answer this question requires answering five research sub-questions:

1. What constitutes an ILP in the context of English municipal government?

2. What is an appropriate standard of *democratic* municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?

3. How can the impact of an ILP be evaluated across a system of municipal government?

4. Do ILPs institute or sustain practices aligned with democratic municipal government?

5. How do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government?

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 sets out the groundwork for this PhD, setting out definitions of: the ILP, municipal government, and citizen participation, as used in this thesis. The definition of ILPs, and localist ILPs in particular, is important because different political parties within a locality may have different aims and broad democratic commitments that are not well separated by current typologies – hence this being the first research sub-question. The development of these definitions, following the approach of Mair and Mudde (1998), is done in the context of this thesis, but given the method of demarcation is consistent and detailed, could be applied in wider scholarship. Following the development of this definition, Chapter 2 then draws together the literature on ILPs with that of parish and town councils and citizen participation. The discussion about ILPs and citizen participation is a novel contribution, given there is little exploration of this intersection in the current literature. The discussion finds that the institution of participatory practices by ILPs would align with their core claims, but this institution would be dependent to some extent upon, first, the broad ideological position of the ILP, and second, whether the ILP accepts pluralism in the locality with regard to municipal government.

Chapter 3 turns to answer the second and third research sub-questions, taking the approach of Archon Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube as a basis for the evaluation of municipal government, as this enables the consideration of a wide range of participatory practices and the linking to a democratic standard. A literature review of the uses and adaptations of the Democracy Cube subsequent to its introduction identifies that this approach has three stages: linking dimensions of participatory practice to democratic goods; mapping processes to the dimensions of participatory practice; and, the analysis of policy processes. The review finds that researchers have often used only one of these stages, borrowing and adapting elements of the tool as suits particular needs. Whilst preserving the stages used by Fung, this thesis will also adapt the approach and shifts to the democratic goods set out by Smith (2009) as being well suited to this context. This is a novel integration that develops the approach of both Fung and Smith, in particular with regard to the definition of popular control and developing a link between democratic goods and specific participatory practices.

Chapter 3 then moves to develop the approach of Democracy Mapping, critically reflecting and developing the Democracy Cube alongside considering the context of municipal government and the need to compare the impact of ILPs across whole systems of municipal government. This is a novel approach, contributing to the broader development of analytical tools for evaluating citizen participation, and particularly in relation to systems of municipal government. The need to consider citizen participation across the policy cycle is evidenced, the linkage of participatory practices with democratic goods discussed in detail, and the analytical stages of the Democracy Mapping approach set out. The chapter concludes by

setting out a standard of democratic municipal government using the Democracy Mapping framework, highlighting practices that are important for the production of democratic goods within municipal government.

Having laid the groundwork and set out the analytical approach, the next three chapters discuss and set out the empirical research carried out for this PhD. This thesis contains two case studies: Independents for Frome and Frome Town Council; and, Residents for Uttlesford and Saffron Walden Town Council. The rationale for the selection of these particular case studies, along with some background context, is set out in Chapter 4. Interviews with ILP members and town council staff, along with the analysis of documentary evidence, are used to evidence the mapping of municipal policy processes onto the Democracy Mapping. Chapter 5 finds that Independents for Frome initiated a number of participatory practices and instruments, considerably changing the nature of citizen participation in Frome Town Council. Chapter 6 finds that Residents for Uttlesford initiated some participatory practices, though largely initiated or facilitated through the party rather than through Saffron Walden Town Council.

Analysis of the case studies in Chapter 7 finds that the two ILPs instituted participatory practices aligned with democratic municipal government, though were markedly different in the extent to which they did this. Both ILPs instituted practices aligned with greater transparency, motivated partly by their campaigning commitments, and both enabled popular control. Residents for Uttlesford emphasised a commitment to *listening to* citizens. Independents for Frome emphasised a further commitment to *involving* citizens, instituting participatory practices expected to produce considered judgement and popular control. However, the impact of either ILP with regard to inclusiveness of those typically underrepresented in municipal processes was limited. The study highlighted the potential for a range of participatory practice to be introduced across small-scale municipal government, whilst also evidencing the range of approaches to participation that occur in practice. In doing so, this thesis makes a significant contribution to an understudied area within the literature.

In Chapter 8, this thesis concludes by considering the broad role of ILPs in municipal government at the small scale. There are a number of novel findings that indicate directions for future research. This thesis finds that where ILPs make clear democratic commitments, these can turn local elections into exercises of meta- deliberation and impact upon the shape of small-scale municipal government. However, this impact is strongly shaped by local circumstances - the extent to which these findings apply to ILPs in very different circumstances is also a matter for future research. The development of the Democracy

Mapping indicates the utility of considering participatory practices separately with regard to democratic goods, and the value of incorporating the policy cycle into the analytical framework. The crowdsourced manifesto of Residents for Uttlesford, has intriguing potential for allowing citizens influence across the policy cycle, with more research needed around this kind of participatory instrument. The actions by Independents for Frome in stimulating discussion in the public sphere, was another intriguing area deserving further investigation.

It has been decades since the research by Grant into independent local parties in England, yet the amount of scholarship on this topic has grown by a minimal amount over this time; independent local parties in England are a niche form of political life that remain understudied and little understood. In their study of parish and town councils, Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.312) note that much of the literature has focused on participation in civic rather than political life, 'meaning that there is an urgent gap for academic study of formal community politics' in this area. This thesis addresses these gaps and several others through this exploratory work, and develops an analytical roadmap to facilitate future research.

Chapter 2.   The locality and the ILP

It was combative, very traditional, people shouting at each other, not making decisions. The independents managed to change it, just by getting rid of party politics really … it seemed like I could stand for that ... rather than being tied to a political party … I live here so I want it to be as good as it can be (Independents for Frome councillor).

It's just keeping your distance from the big outside world because I can't do that, none of us in our position can fix what's going on there, but if it's here, yes, yes, we can work with it, we can fix it, we can make it better (Residents for Uttlesford councillor).

This chapter will set out three bodies of scholarship that underpin this thesis: on Independent Local Parties (ILPs); on municipal government at the scale[2] of the parish and town; and on citizen participation. The presence of ILPs in England and evidence on them in the literature is explored in Section 2.1, with the broader research from continental Europe introduced in Section 2.2. This section will answer the first research sub-question: **What constitutes an Independent Local Party in the context of English municipal government**? This chapter then moves to a discussion of English parish and town councils, with reference to citizen participation in this form of municipal government (see Section 2.3). In Section 2.4, citizen participation is defined and explored in detail, with particular reference to the relationship between citizen participation and representative municipal government. Finally, in Section 2.5, the chapter brings ILPs back into this discussion, focusing on the connection between the ideology or democratic conceptions within an ILP and the potential for democratic change.

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[2] Parish and town councils are often described as being the 'lowest tier' of municipal government (for example, Cole and Boyne, 1995), and authorities discussed in terms of levels of municipal government. However, parish and town councils are not in a formal hierarchical relationship with other municipal bodies, having autonomy over their, albeit more limited, resources; therefore, the term *scale* is used in this thesis, contrasting municipal government at the parish and town scale, with municipal government at the larger district or county scale of principal authorities.

2.1   Independent local parties in England

As noted in Chapter 1, ILPs are a niche phenomenon in England. In the past decade an average of 20 ILPs were registered per year in the UK, many of which were short-lived, with only half lasting longer than 5 years (see Table 2.1 below). Most scholarship on ILPs has been written with regard to continental Europe, where the proportional list system encourages the formation of ILPs, or "independent local lists" in that context (Göhlert et al, 2008; Lidström, 2021). Within England, the electoral process does not demand the formation of ILPs; for this reason, there is a practice of citizens standing as unaffiliated independents with no affiliation to any party, including any local party, particularly in more rural areas (Copus and Wingfield, 2014). Comparing the electoral success of ILPs and unaffiliated independents, where ILP candidates and unaffiliated independents stood head to head, ILP candidates gained a higher vote 55% of the time. Therefore, the electoral advantage an ILP candidate has over unaffiliated independents is marginal[3]. However, for a number of reasons, ILPs still form: groups of unaffiliated independents sometimes form ILPs in order to gain powers granted to political parties in municipal government, or to become more coherent around a policy platform; disaffected national party members and representatives may split to form an ILP; or, a civil campaign may be formed to take municipal power, or an existing civil campaign turn its attention to municipal government (see Berry, 2008; Macfadyen, 2014; Sulman and Bunn, 2019). ILPs range in size from single councillors in a small council ward to groups standing over 30 candidates across a principal authority. ILPs also vary widely in cohesion, from groups that share a label but with no common platform or activity, to more coherent bodies that campaign and form policy platforms (Grant, 1977; Berry, 2008; Macfadyen, 2014). ILPs in England are, therefore, relatively uncommon and diverse in their origin and organisation.

Alongside unaffiliated independents and ILPs, the prevalence of national political parties within English municipal government is substantial, including within larger parish and town councils (Pearce and Ellwood, 2002, Stapleton, 2011). National political parties have come to dominate local politics in a broader trend of party and government centralisation that has occurred from around the 1970s to the turn of the millennium. As Daadler (1990 p.86) notes, 'in Britain leaders and labels penetrated relatively early from the centre into the constituencies, thus drawing national and local elites into one reasonably unified system'

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[3] English Principal Authority elections, 2009 to 2019 (Teale, 2023), maximum ward vote of: independents with no party label; and, ILP candidates (see note 4) - within ward and year, (n=430); broadly similar relationship across year and regardless of size of ILP.

(see also Grant, 1977, pp.9-13; Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008). The performance of ILPs against national parties is difficult to estimate, given ILPs are only likely to form and stand in areas where they have strong support, whereas local branches of national parties often stand candidates 'even for wards where there is virtually zero chance of success' (Rallings et al, 2011, p.10). ILPs in England operate in a political landscape dominated by national political parties.

Table 2.1   Registration of local parties in England and vote share

at municipal elections (principal authorities) 2010 - 2022[4]

	Local Party registration			UK principal authority elections		
Year	Independent local party registration 2000-2022	Still registered as at 18/02/2023 N	%	Number of ILPs standing	Total ILP candidate vote share	ILP candidate vote share, in wards where ILP contested
2010	21	4	19%	50	1.2%	20.5%
2011	**21**	**1**	**5%**	**106**	**1.8%**	**28.2%**
2012	11	0	0%	37	1.5%	26.5%
2013	18	4	22%	43	1.9%	27.1%
2014	19	5	26%	56	1.8%	28.1%
2015	**34**	**7**	**21%**	**110**	**2.0%**	**23.8%**
2016	15	6	40%	35	1.5%	31.2%
2017	21	9	43%	50	2.1%	31.7%
2018	26	12	46%	67	2.0%	26.7%
2019	**26**	**15**	**58%**	**104**	**3.5%**	**37.2%**
2020	20	12	60%	-	-	-
2021	18	13	72%	79	2.6%	21.2%
2022	16	16	100%	49	2.5%	31.3%

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[4] Party registration data from the Electoral Commission (2023). Estimated vote share from local elections data for 2010 to 2022 (Rallings and Thrasher, 2021, 2022; Teale, 2023) for English principal municipal authorities; parties have been categorised as an ILP based upon party name explicitly stating the municipality or having municipal aims stated in available online materials; percentage is ILP candidate vote as a proportion of total candidate vote. Four-year local election cycle highlighted in **bold**.

Across principal authorities in England[5] the vote share of ILPs is small, though with a slight increase from 2010 to 2022, the vote share increasing from under 2% between 2010 to 2014, to over 2% between 2017 to 2022 (see Table 2.1 above). There is considerable fluctuation in the number of candidates ILPs stand from year on year, with many councils having all-out elections on a four-year electoral cycle, whilst other principal authorities hold elections on three out of four years. The average proportion of votes within principal authority wards where ILPs contest elections is significant, ranging 20.5% in 2010 to 31.3% in 2022, with the maximum within this period (37.2%) occurring in 2019. This was within an electoral context where many citizens moved away from the main national parties (Tighe and Bounds, 2019), with ILPs allowing an outlet for general anti-party or anti-establishment feeling (see Otjes, 2018; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Lundåsen and Erlingsson, 2023) and gaining control or shared administration of several principal authorities (Sulman and Bunn, 2019). Given the sensitivity of ILPs to electoral context and process (see Grant, 1971, p.211; also Section 2.2), this thesis will avoid making claims to broad trends in their prevalence. Rather, it is sufficient to note that ILPs are a fluctuating and niche phenomenon that can gain significant vote share and take control of municipal authorities.

The scholarship about ILPs in the context of English municipal government is limited, with a handful of studies that illuminate their nature and role. In what remains the most in-depth and scholarly contribution, Wyn Grant's (1977) study of unaffiliated independents and ILPs in England and Wales evidences the varied origin of ILPs, the anti-national-party and localist narratives of members, and the influence of local context upon the character of ILPs. Grant's discussion covers some evidence on how ILPs impact municipal government: first, the commitment of many ILPs to give representatives independence from any group whip, such that 'it will often be the vote of the council meeting that decides major policies', rather than an internal party meeting away from the public gaze (Grant, 1977, p.31; see also Stewart, 2000, p.143; Copus, 2004; Berry 2008); second, the presence of ILPs can pressure local branches of national parties to seek greater alignment between their policy decisions and the preferences of citizens (Grant, 1977, p.102; see also Hampton, 1970, pp.273-277; Berry, 2008, p.78), though if the ILP is very electorally successful it can have a 'debilitating effect' on political opponents being able to field candidates at all (Grant, 1977, p.75); and third, the commitment by ILPs themselves to reflect the preferences of citizens in municipal policy is placed in contrast to the party loyalties (so claimed) of national party representatives. This latter point is well evidenced in the example of Billericay Residents Association, formed in

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[5] No collated data is available on English parish and town council elections, with these results less widely disseminated and reported on.

response to a particular issue around development but succeeding in the long-term through responding to:

> a demand for a particular style of community politics which eschewed national political issues and concentrated on relatively trivial issues which were nevertheless of concern to the electorate (Grant, 1977, p.77).

ILPs were not here campaigning on *what* policies they implemented, though this may have been their initial stimulus, but on *how* these policies were formed in the first place. This is a claim to produce substantive democratic legitimacy (see Parkinson, 2006), an attempt to win elections on the basis of competence and responsiveness rather than a political cleavage, which makes them of particular interest with regard to the institution of participatory practices and wider questions of democratic renewal. However, this is not an inherently democratic claim, as will be discussed in Section 2.5 below.

Another notable work on unaffiliated independents and ILPs is the series of case-studies by Richard Berry (2008) who, along with points covered by Grant, evidences diversity in political orientation between and within ILPs. Berry also evidences the direct transfer of typical business practices into municipal government by leaders with a background in business (Berry, 2008, p.46; see also Sulman and Bunn, 2019), and more broadly how unaffiliated independents and ILPs tend to transfer practice from outside the political domain into it. More recently, the local party 'Independents for Frome' and the organisation of similar ILPs is the focus of Macfadyen's (2014, 2019) 'Flatpack Democracy' activist case study and campaign manual. For Macfadyen (2014, p.2), the ILP is a way of 'taking political power' to 'enable people to have a greater say in the things that are important to them'. The case of Independents for Frome has been studied in relation to the wider UK Transition movement for local self-reliance (Burnett and Nunes, 2021, p.233), with the finding that Independents for Frome acted as a 'radical niche–regime' that was 'innovative and transformative' in creating 'regime change and agenda-setting toward transition'. Whilst not focused on municipal democracy directly, this study suggests ILPs can transform the form of municipal government. The case of Independents for Frome has also been discussed in relation to 'neo-normative control', with a 'culture of independence that celebrates difference, encourages positivity, and views the authentic individual as the primary loci of competent political action' (Husted, 2021, p.155; see also Dahlman et al, 2022). Rather than ILP members being bonded through an orientation towards policy, this suggests that in this case they are bonded through a shared orientation around political behaviour and culture. The 'culture of independence' found by Husted here is a common thread through the study on ILPs, back to those studied by Grant (1971, 1977).

The literature on ILPs in England evidences: that ILPs emphasise councillor independence and the need to align policy with citizen preferences; that ILP councillors influence organisational practice; and, that ILPs have the ability to transform the local political and municipal environment. None of these studies have closely considered the impact of ILPs in England upon municipal democracy and citizen participation. Before exploring this more closely, it is necessary to consider the broader context of ILPs and properly define them, casting the net wider to bring in the continental European literature on ILPs.

2.2　　Defining the independent local party

There was an assumption in European political studies that ILPs, once prevalent at the local level, would disappear as centralised national parties gained dominance in municipal government (Åberg and Ahlberger, 2015). However, it has become increasingly evident the prevalence of ILPs could increase as well as decrease, and scholars in continental Europe have increasingly turned their focus upon ILPs. There is a growing body of evidence around the impact of national context upon the formation of ILPs, including: changes in state centralisation and the size of municipal government (Kjaer and Elklit, 2010; Lago and Montero, 2014; Kollman and Worthington, 2021); the centralisation of national parties away from the locality (Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008; Jankowski, Juen and Tepe, 2022); and, national parties being weak or rejected within the locality (Woods, 1995; Göhlert et al, 2008; Boogers and Voerman, 2010; Vampa, 2016). The impact of these trends are not linear, pointing to multiple and complex factors in play, with no uniform pattern across Europe, and shifts in the number of ILPs sometimes being volatile (Lago and Montero, 2014). Research has evidenced important insights about the extent and nature of electoral support for ILPs (see Otjes, 2018; Lundåsen and Erlingsson, 2023), the contextual factors that determine their electoral success (see Kopric, 2008; Soós 2008), and their ideological position (see Jüptner, 2008; Gross and Jankowski, 2020; Angenendt, 2022). The literature from continental Europe about ILPs, whilst set within a different context, is essential for understanding their role.

The terminology and definitions describing ILPs are various within the literature, partly reflecting that, aside from a branch of a national party, the 'boundaries are blurred' between different forms of party and representation at a local level (Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008, p.259; see also Boogers and Voerman, 2010); and also reflects that the nature of ILPs varies between nations due to differences in electoral systems, the regulation of parties, and political context (Dudzińska, 2008; Soos, 2008; Jankowski, Juen and Tepe, 2022). This

section will review the current definitions and typologies of ILPs, before following the approach of Mair and Mudde (1998) in examining party aims, ideology and origins.

Given that ILPs are excluded by some definitions of a political party (for example, those orienting towards national politics, see Daadler, 1990; LaPalombara, 2007), a relatively minimal definition is required (see Sartori, 2016, p.55). A defining characteristic that operates at all scales is the standing of candidates in elections. Political parties have been defined as: associations that intend to stand candidates (Pedersen, 1982); as actually standing candidates (Riggs, 1968, cited in Sartori, 2016, p.55); and, as being capable of having candidates elected (Sartori, 2016, p.56). Supporting Pedersen's conception, Copus, Clark and Bottom (2008) note that 'a declaration of standing for election can influence the behaviour of established parties', with ILPs having effects even prior to election. The relatively ephemeral nature of ILPs within the UK (see Table 2.1 above) also supports the use of this broader definition. For the purposes of this study, therefore, the inclusive definition of Pedersen (1982, p.5) is most appropriate: 'an organisation - however loosely or strongly organised - which either presents or nominates candidates for public elections, or which, at least, has the intention of doing so'. Whilst Berry (2008, p.137) notes that even unaffiliated independents tend to 'form some sort of co-operative arrangement with other independents' or national party representatives, an 'organisation' will be assumed to here share at least some common electoral label (see Ankar and Ankar, 2000). This broad definition covers any kind of association as a local party, so long as it was intending to stand or had stood candidates under a shared label, regardless of electoral success.

Table 2.2 below sets out the kinds of political party present in a locality, being: regionalist parties; the branches of national parties; and different kinds of local party. The first distinction to be made is with regard to regionalist parties. Dudzińska (2008) distinguishes between local parties running in several municipalities from those running in just one municipality as a way of separating ILPs from regionalist parties (see also Holtmann, 2008). This distinction is important, but will not be used to determine ILPs from regionalist parties in this thesis, partly because an ILP standing across several municipalities could still operate at a smaller geographic scale than an ILP standing for a single large municipality[6]. Boogers and Voerman (2010; see also Fagerholm, 2016; Otjes, 2018) argue that ILPs are defined as

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[6] 51 out of 409 (12.5%) ILPs registered in the UK from 2000 to 2022 were registered as minor parties, only able to contest parish or town council elections. ILPs that wished to stand at principal authorities were required to register as political parties. This offers a possible distinction in the English context; however, an ILP standing in one principal authority ward would cover a smaller area than many minor parties standing to a whole town or parish municipality, limiting its use.

being organised at a municipal level. However, the geography of municipal government may coincide with the geography of regional government, such that ILPs may stand candidates to regional government and be organised at the same level as regionalist parties (for example, Cornwall Council, see Whitehouse 2021). A distinction will instead be based on party aims (see Mair and Mudde, 1998). Regionalist parties are oriented around succession and devolution of powers from national government, typically advocating 'change as regards territorial autonomy, that is, they want to modify the vertical allocation of political power between centre and periphery' (Mazzoleni and Mueller, 2016, p.2; see also Massetti and Schakel, 2015). This is in contrast to ILPs, which are focussed upon changing policy within the existing powers of municipal government, their democratic aims oriented towards municipal policy (see Grant, 1977; Berry, 2008). This divide is not an absolute one, but is based upon the primary aims of such parties.

Table 2.2   Types of political party active within the municipal elections

	Geography	Political aims	Governing aims	Origin
Regionalist party	Sub-national region	National government law and policy	Govern on behalf of the region	Regional elites; popular movements; regional campaigns
Branch of a national party	Municipality	General municipal policy	Govern on behalf of the national party and locality	National political parties
Local party (including 'revealed party independents')	Municipality	General municipal policy	Govern on behalf of campaign, interest or the locality	National party members; local elites; local interest groups or campaigns
'Protest' Independent Local Party	Municipality	Specific municipal policy	Govern on behalf of the campaign	Local elites; local interest groups or campaigns
'Interest' Independent Local Party	Municipality	General municipal policy	Govern on behalf of the interest group	Local elites; local interest groups or campaigns
'Localist' Independent Local Party	Municipality	General municipal policy	Govern on behalf of the locality	Local elites; local interest groups or campaigns

The second important distinction to be made is between local parties associated with national political parties and local parties that are independent of national political parties (see Table 2.2 above). In this thesis, a 'branch party' is treated as an extension of the national party and not a local party. However, there are local parties that retain strong links with national parties, even though having declared independence from the organisation of the national party. This is the 'revealed party independent' (see Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008b, p.264), founded by former members of national parties, or those retaining some form of link to the national party, for example 'Featherstone Labour 1st' (Electoral Commission, 2023). In addition to these explicit links, the practice of 'concealed' parties has been evident, where a local party asserts its independence whilst retaining covert links to national parties (Grant, 1971, p.203; see also Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008). There is little evidence that there is currently a body of local parties in England covertly retaining links to national party organisations, as observed in some countries where local parties are much more common (see Dudzińska, 2008). Drawing together the discussion so far (see also Otjes, 2018, p.307), an 'Independent Local Party' (ILP), may be defined as:

> *An association that has presented, or intends to present, candidates at election, organised exclusively at, and oriented towards, municipal level, independent of national political parties.*

The independence from national political parties is the critical distinction between ILPs and other forms of local party, and as the following discussion sets out, is also a critical distinction made by ILP members.

ILP members tend to hold a strong anti-national-party sentiment, particularly where there is discontent with municipal policy decisions made by national parties (Holtmann, 2008, p.13; Jüptner, 2008). Whilst this might be characterised as simply being 'dissatisfaction with the national party politicians' (Berry, 2008, p.4; see also Angenendt, 2018; Jankowski, Juen and Tepe, 2022), Åberg and Ahlberger (2015, p.817) argue there is a connection to 'a latent and discursive feature of social and political power relations … an ideological thrust aimed at the failure of the established parties to manage issues relevant to the local community' (see also Grant, 1971, p.105). Boogers and Voerman (2010, p.85) evidence that the narratives of ILP members emphasise 'the contrast between municipal interests on one side, and regional, provincial, or national interests, on the other', in particular with regard to 'representatives of party branches' (see also Chou, Moffitt and Busbridge, 2022, p.132). In this way, ILPs claim that established parties and politicians are constrained by non-local values and interests, whilst the independence of ILPs from national structures means that they are free to align municipal policy with the preferences of citizens within the locality (Grant, 1977; Berry, 2008). The rejection of national parties as a central narrative of ILPs is, therefore, partly

founded on an assertion of localism, being that the values and interests of the locality imply municipal policy choices that are distinct from those implied by the values and interests of government at larger scales (Clarke, 2013; Wills, 2016).

Aside from a broad ideology of localism, the ideology of ILPs is not necessarily different from the ideology of national parties. Otjes (2018 p.309) states that ILPs are generally 'independent of the ideological left or right'. This resonates with Rosenblum (2010 p.128), who argues an independent party typically takes an anti-partisan position and 'casts itself as the voice of public interest, unwilling to organise on the basis of divisive interests'. For ILPs, this 'anti-partisan position' may manifest as a relatively centrist ideological position (see Gross and Jankowski, 2020), where valence issues such as competence and integrity may be used to distinguish themselves from other parties, rather than policy positions (see Padró-Solanet, 1996; Engler, 2020; Zur, 2021). However, there is evidence that some ILP members hold partisan affiliation to national political parties, believing national parties not to be relevant or necessary within municipal government but valuing the role of national parties in national politics (see Copus and Wingfield, 2014; Angenendt, 2022, p.412). Even where members do not hold partisan affiliations, there can be ideological tendencies to the left or right (Grant, 1977; Berry, 2008). Evidence points towards the initiation and sustaining of ILPs sometimes reflecting discontent and movements wider than the locality, a reflection of political and economic context at the national level (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015; Otjes, 2018; Jankowski, Juen and Tepe, 2022). An illuminating example is given by Soos (2008), who finds a class of ILPs in Hungary that adopt a far-right position in a reaction to a national political context, whilst not having explicit links to national parties. Whilst ILPs may declare independence from traditional cleavages, and many adopt relatively centrist positions, this appears sensitive to local and national context, with ILPs existing on many points of the traditional political spectrum.

This section now turns to exploring whether different kinds of ILPs may be defined with regard to their aims. Differences in the regulation of party registration, political context, and electoral systems, limit the extent to which typologies of ILPs are useful across national borders (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015). The empirically driven typology of Boogers and Voerman (2010, p.85) provides the most useful starting point within a UK context, dividing local parties into three kinds: protest, interest and localist. Protest ILPs within this definition are 'driven by opposition to a municipal plan, or by a general dissatisfaction with municipal administration'; interest ILPs are parties that 'stress geographical and demographic cleavages between neighbourhoods, communities, villages, or between young people and senior citizens'; and localist ILPs are parties that have a 'general focus on the quality of the local administration and democracy' where 'the main issue in their programs is the

preservation of the municipality's unique character', and are 'commonly independent local parties with a long history'. Whilst the typology of Boogers and Voerman is useful, this section will develop and refine this typology to more clearly separate out parties with regard to their aims.

The typology of Boogers and Voerman (2010) argues that protest ILPs include those motivated by a dissatisfaction with municipal administration. This is identical in aims to localist ILPs, which are motivated by the quality of the local administration, with the distinction being the length of administration. Whilst Boogers and Voerman rightly indicate that the length of incumbency of an ILP is important, it is not clear how the distinction between a protest and localist ILP could be consistently applied on this criterion. If a protest ILP was successful in gaining and retaining administration then it could not be said to convert to a localist ILP immediately after election, but it is not clear at what point it would then change. This thesis will instead turn to the typology of Göhlert et al (2008, p.144) and define a protest ILP as a local party 'founded in order to protest for or against a single particular issue', see Table 2.2 above. Any ILP that seeks to gain, or retain, general municipal administration on behalf of the whole locality is, therefore, defined within this thesis as a localist ILP, regardless of whether it is in administration. The localist ILP is the only ILP that would have a broad policy platform with a general focus on the quality of the local administration and democracy, making them of particular interest with regard to democratic renewal.

With regard to the origin of ILPs, localist, interest, and protest ILPs might form due to a range of different triggering actions, but those that become localist ILPs appear to have the greatest potential for survival (Boogers and Voerman, 2010). Grant (1971) identifies the perception of inappropriate development within the locality or other dispute over specific policies as common triggers for the formation of ILPs (see also Copus, Clark and Bottom, 2008b, p.256). As defined above, these would be protest ILPs; however, Grant notes that if the campaign of the ILP is successful, or local priorities change, the protest ILP needs to redefine itself to represent a broad range of policies if it is to survive, becoming a localist ILP (see Berry 2008, pp.73-76, 99-101; Boogers and Voerman, 2010, p.85). Similarly, whilst interest ILPs might claim to represent one particular local faction, examples of longer lasting administrations appear to be where the interest group has shifted to broader claims of representing the whole locality, as a localist ILP (see Grant, 1977; Stewart, 2000, p.143; Berry, 2008, p.50; Soos, 2008). As Grant (1971 p.204), argues, 'an important distinction may be made between the trigger action that provokes the initial formation of a local party, and the underlying sustaining factors that create the conditions for its survival'. Whilst protest and interest ILPs may experience this shift, it is less clear how localist ILPs might change over

time. A localist ILP may form directly in response to a generalised dissatisfaction with a municipal regime (for example, Macfadyen 2014) and appear to be relatively stable compared to other ILPs (Boogers and Voerman, 2010). Yet, many ILPs are short-lived, including those founded as localist ILPs. Grant (1977, p.83) argues that as small groups with no external supporting organisational structure, the longevity of ILPs 'can depend to a considerable extent on the skill and energies of a few key activists' (see also Berry, 2008; Macfadyen, 2020). The factors that sustain a localist ILP appear as important as the trigger that prompted its origin, and liable to be contingent on particular circumstances.

To conclude this discussion, following Pedersen's model (Pedersen 1982 p.5), a definition of a localist ILP may now be proposed:

> *An association - however loosely or strongly organised - organised exclusively at municipal level that has presented, or intends to present, candidates at election, and that claims to act on behalf of the whole locality, independent of a national political party or organisation, and with regard to the whole of municipal policy*

Localist ILPs may be defined as distinct from other kinds of parties in terms of their aims. In order to define themselves as distinct from branches of national parties, localist ILPs emphasise their identity with the locality, the distinctiveness of the locality, and their freedom from non-local interests and preferences. Protest ILPs act with regard to *a part of municipal policy* rather than whole, whilst interest ILPs act on behalf of *a section of the locality*, rather than the whole. This definition acts to distinguish ILPs from other forms of party operating in municipal government, and can distinguish ILPs from each other, clarifying the typologies currently used within the literature.

There are a number of important factors with regard to the nature of any particular ILP, including whether they stand candidates to single or multiple municipalities, their origin and membership, and their longevity. The influence of some of these factors will be evidenced in this thesis, whilst others will be largely set aside. One of these factors is the scale of municipal government in which localist ILPs stand. As this thesis is interested in municipal government at the small-scale, this chapter will now turn to discuss municipal government at the scale of the parish and town.

2.3   Municipal government at the small-scale

This section considers the role of parish and town councils, but it is necessary to first briefly define municipal government, distinguishing this from the broader concept of municipal governance, and municipal policy. The definition of municipal government set out is a definition based on which 'subset of the characteristics of pure local government is relevant to the purposes of the research' (Cole and Boyne, 1995, p.203; see also Lowndes, 2010). Municipal government is defined for the purposes of this thesis as:

> *a body that has tax raising powers, that is under an administration of public representatives subject to elections (when contested), and that is subordinate to national or devolved regional administrations.*

The concept of municipal government as used in this thesis is distinct from the conception of municipal *governance*, which has been developed to accommodate and reflect blurred boundaries between state, business, and civil society in the governing of a locality in practice (see Peters and Pierre, 2012; Stoker, 2018). The greater involvement of non-state organisations and citizens in the shaping and delivery of municipal services has typically meant a need to consider broader networks of actors within the locality. Also bounding the powers of municipal government is national government, which defines: what statutory services are to be delivered; the kinds of non-statutory roles and local innovation that are permitted; the broad decision-making processes; and, the resources and powers to deliver roles and services (see Stoker, 1991; Newman, 2014). This thesis conceives of municipal government as one of many actors within the locality, constrained by national government, but also fulfilling a distinctive and impactful role within the locality. This section will consider the nature of parish and town councils, their potential contribution to democratic renewal, and some key critiques.

It is necessary to define 'policy' and the 'policy cycle' as used within this thesis. Here it relates to policy that is formed and implemented by municipal authorities, being municipal policy that operates within the legal framework set by national government. Taking the broad view that 'public policies are the result of efforts made by governments to alter aspects of behaviour — both that of their own agents and of society at large' (Howlett and Mukhurjee, 2014, p.57), municipal policy may include a range of actions by municipal authorities. For example, municipal government may implement policies to: provide training and advice; charge citizens fees for the use of services or assets; offer grants and loans; buy and administer assets; and, deliver or commission services (see Howlett, 2000). Municipal policy can aim to address a range of issues using financial powers and political pressure - attempting to patch or layer a municipal policy onto existing national government policies

(see Howlett and Mukhurjee, 2014), or seek to influence national government policy (for example, Arnold and Long, 2019). The ability of municipal government to construct and implement policy is dependent upon their freedom to act (Pratchett, 2004; de Vries, 2008). As set out below, apart from regulations around process and a policy requirement on the provision of allotments, parish and town councils mostly act independently of the policy priorities of government at the larger scale. The constraints that small-scale councils often place on the range of policy they consider is not due to regulation or external policy priorities, but rather reflects common practice and tradition, and the perception of what they can do with relatively limited resources (Kambites, 2010; Jones, 2020).

This thesis will explore the role of localist ILPs in relation to parish and town councils, being a distinctive form of small-scale municipal government in England and Wales. As Poole and Keith-Lucas (1994, p.79) note, 'the statutory functions of parish [and town] councils are almost exclusively powers, not duties', with the powers to undertake a range of activities around municipal facilities and a sole duty to provide allotments if there is local demand. Parish and town councils also have unlimited tax raising powers and, in the past few decades, have gained near complete independence on spending, if meeting thresholds of staff training and the election of councillors (Poole and Keith-Lucas, 1994; Sandford, 2021, Jones, 2020). Parish and town councils tend to hold assets such as community buildings and green spaces, and have control over an annual budget that ranges from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of pounds (Jones, 2007, Sandford, 2021). Staffing consists at a minimum of a Clerk, being the Chief Executive Officer and sometimes also the Financial Officer. However, larger parish and town councils may employ over 50 staff across administrative, service delivery and asset maintenance roles (Ellwood and Nutley 1992, MHCLG 2020). Struggling with austerity-level reduced government funding, larger municipal authorities have increasingly transferred services and assets to parish and town councils (Hastings et al, 2015; Copus and Wall, 2017, pp.91-96), producing 'a new geography of local government with a greater role for local parish and town councils in managing the public realm' (Wills, 2020, p.828). Parish and town councils typically operate alongside other statutory bodies, businesses, associations and individuals, providing a place-based coordination and communication function (see Wills, 2016; Jones, 2020, pp.65-78). In summary, parish and town councils are the smallest form of municipal government in England, but nonetheless may have significant resources and influence within the locality to deliver a range of public goods.

Turning to the democratic processes of parish and town councils, decision-making authority is held by councillors. Elections to the municipal authority are majoritarian, as mandated by national government, and usually in multi-member wards, such that voters in a ward will be

represented by several parish councillors. Many seats in parish and town councils are not contested, resulting in candidates being selected or co-opted into administration without election. A municipal administration at this scale has a minimum of five councillors, though in the largest councils may get to over 30 councillors. In their ground-breaking contribution on the voice of councillors, including those from parish and town councils, Copus and Wall (2017, pp.90-91) find being elected was felt to confer legitimacy on parish and town councillors. Where councillors were not elected, this risked the decisions of a council being de-legitimised by other actors within the locality - for example, elected councillors and staff within larger municipal authorities. Where councillors are publicly elected, rather than selected or recruited, then the council is distinct from other local bodies due to their democratic mandate.

The structure and processes of the political administration of a town council is largely defined by the Standing Orders, a set of rules for council processes, with most councillors adopting the 'Model Standing Orders' written by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC, 2020). Town council decision-making meetings are regulated by legislation that requires them to be public, held a minimum of three times a year, with decisions made by majority vote (Local Government Act 1972, s.12, Part II). Any spending by a council of over £800 has to be discussed in a public meeting (NALC, 2019) and most decisions made by a town or parish council have to be discussed in public meetings. Typical practice, set out in the model Standing Orders (NALC 2020a), includes a range of formal speaking procedures and the allowance of a set time for public participation at the start of the meeting. The bulk of practices around the procedure for meetings are not statutory, with council administrations having considerable legal flexibility on how to institute public participation and policy-making processes. With regard to decision-making within parish and town councils, Copus and Wall (2017, p.87) find there is often a 'strong culture of cooperation … and a shared desire to work as a team for the betterment of the area', though personal or political conflict does occur. In particular, the mayor (as chair of the councillors) and town clerk are very influential over the policy direction and success of the council. Whilst the structure and processes of a parish and town council are set out in guidance, the relationships and capacity of individuals involved are highly influential on actual practice.

The sector body for parish and town councils positions the election of councillors as the key route to political participation of local citizens (NALC, 2015). For example, the participatory instrument of 'participatory budgeting' is suggested by NALC (2017, p.13) to include where funding is allocated 'for local areas to be spent on local priorities agreed between the town and parish and the principal authority elected representatives'. Similarly, the report of Copus and Wall (2017, p.88) evidences that 'councillors spoke with intensity and pride about being

the 'voice' of their communities and about the parish speaking for, and on behalf of, those communities'. These narratives suggest parish and town councillors are a kind of lay stakeholder or civic representative, as might be involved in any other local community group. The workload and political status of a parish or town councillor, having part authority over a budget of £1 million and 50 staff appears several magnitudes different to a councillor in a principal authority having part authority over a budget of £1 billion and 5000 staff (Ellwood and Nutley 1992, MHCLG 2020). The intensity of participation and budget responsibilities do not clearly define a town or parish councillor from a stakeholder in a local civic body or pressure group (see Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). However, parish and town councillors are public representatives and accountable decision-makers. They have a term of office within a municipal authority that has statutory powers and responsibilities. It is the formalised representative role that is taken in this thesis to classify parish and town councillors as an elite, rather than citizens participating within a process.

Broader conceptions of the democratic role of the parish or town council has shifted over time, though advocates of localism have been consistent in favouring municipal government at this scale (for example, Toulmin Smith, 1851; Hampton and Chapman, 1971; Wills, 2016). Reforms around the turn of the millennium to improve public participation largely favoured non-state institutions of governance, such as neighbourhood forums (Coulson, 1999; Bonney 2004); however, more recently there has been increasing national policy emphasis on the potential role of parish and town councils on democratic renewal (McIntyre and Halsall, 2011; Willet and Cruxon, 2019). Within discussions of localism and citizen participation, a range of civic organisations (for example, NALC, 2015; Rural Action Yorkshire, 2011), think-tanks (for example, Onward, 2021; Locality, 2022), and political actors, position parish and town councils as potentially impactful bodies. In a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Bevan (2003, p.3) argues that councils at the scale of parish and town:

> offer a powerful way for residents to engage in community self-help. They provide residents with an input into the governance of their areas that is independent and permanent, and, crucially, cannot be dissolved by any external agency.

With regard to the participation of citizens in municipal policy making, Pearce and Ellwood (2002 p.40; see also Copus and Wall, 2017, p.95) argue that:

> local councils have become more proactive in seeking out community views and opinions to assist in making representations to other bodies and promoting local services and community development.

Evidence points to a broad shift by parish and town councils towards greater community engagement, with the 'Neighbourhood Development Plan' process in particular being found to strengthen the role of town councils in coordinating local participation and civic capacity (Gallent and Robinson, 2013; Wills, 2016; Jones, 2020, pp.24-27). This is in the context of a broader shift towards community engagement within larger municipal authorities in England (Wilson, 1999; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001b; Newman, 2014). The parish and town council is, therefore, part of a broader policy focus on democratic renewal and citizen participation, with their role apparently shifting as part of this.

More broadly, a systematic review of municipal size and political participation by McDonnell (2020, p.331; see also van Houwelingen, 2018) found 'unequivocal' evidence that 'citizens of smaller municipalities feel a greater sense of political efficacy and participate to a greater degree in local politics', with a particularly sharp drop off in participation in a municipality of over 50,000 people. The scale of municipal government below 50,000 people is almost identical with that of parish and town councils. Reviewing kinds of citizen participation where citizens have a level of authority over outcomes, Johnson and Gastil (2015, p.15; see also Fung and Wright, 2003a; Smith, 2009) state:

> Many of the best known experiments in empowered deliberation have occurred at the neighbourhood or city level, in contexts in which stakeholders can be more easily identified, problems are often of immediate and tangible importance to members of the public, and fewer logistical barriers to participation exist.

The potential role of parish and town councils to coordinate these forms of participation has not been evidenced, as this role is one usually performed by principal authorities. However, parish and town councils operate at a scale and hold a position within communities that many suggest is suited to them playing an important and distinctive role.

In contrast to the body of scholarship and evidence advocating the role of the parish and town council as an enabler of democratic renewal, there are also those sceptical of such assertions. The model of the local council as an impactful body with regard to citizen participation needs to be placed alongside the testimony of those in local government reporting that the task of engaging citizens is like 'flogging a dead horse' (McIntyre and Halsall, 2011, p.280). In their study of participatory reforms in the French town of Saillans, Gourgues and Mabi (2020, p.114) find that whilst most citizens support such reforms, the 'enlistment of citizens in participatory experiments remains laborious', with few having time to engage and a significant number of citizens sceptical about the value and outcomes of participation. This echoes a number of studies that find citizens prefer ad-hoc participation related to concrete needs at a particular time and place (Bang and Sørensen, 1999; Fox,

2009; McIntyre and Halsall, 2011; De Graaf et al, 2015), not a continuing commitment to engaging with the breadth of municipal policy.

Alongside concerns over the limited resources of citizens to participate are concerns over the limited resources of municipal government to engage them. Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006) set out an evidenced model for municipal government to improve engagement with participatory practices (see also Bakker et al, 2012; De Graaf, Van Hulst, and Michels, 2015); however, such measures require capacity and resources. Smith's (2005, p.113) review of participatory instruments found 'effective participation does not come cheap – dedicated resources (for staff, training, capacity building, etc.) are needed' (see also Baiocchi, 2003; Speer, 2012). Finally, there are concerns over the freedom of municipal government to meaningfully act at all. Considering if 'local government can play the part of organising a healthy, democratic public sphere', Barnett (2011, p.284) questions the extent to which local government structures are sufficiently politicised and independent to play this role, given the powers and resources of local councils are: subordinate to and dependent upon central government; subject to wider socio-economic forces beyond their political authority; and, within a network of other powerful actors in the locality. Taking these critiques together with the above advocacy, it is useful to bear in mind Gourgues and Mabi's (2020, p.114) conclusion that participatory reforms of small-scale municipal government 'cannot, per se, be considered a sufficient response to the criticism of democracy and to citizen distrust'. This thesis will take the position that municipal government has freedom and resources to negotiate and act with a level of autonomy (Pratchett, 2004; John, 2014), such that parish and town councils may play a part in democratic renewal, even if they are by no means identical with it.

If the forms of citizen participation open to parish and town councils are shaped by their scale and resources, then within existing constraints any 'inquiry of the present, becomes the site of critical shortcomings' where recommendations inevitably push 'local government into a future where it has to become what it is currently not' (Barnett, Griggs, and Sullivan, 2020, p.513). Dreams of the 'councils-to-come', as Barnett, Griggs and Sullivan (2020) put it, risk failing to engage with the actually existing parish and town councils as they are now. This thesis seeks to understand parish and town councils as they are, but in the context of an intervention by an ILP, which is an exceptional but apparently replicable intervention arising from civil society. Prior to considering the potential impact of the ILP upon municipal government in more detail, it is important to consider what is meant by citizen participation, which it will be argued is central to making municipal government more democratic.

2.4   Citizen participation and the representative

Those who advocate for citizen participation have 'different ideas about the purposes of participation, different standards for fairness, and different metrics of success' (Polletta, 2016, p.235). Given this diversity, it is necessary to carefully set the bounds of what is meant by citizen participation, and its purpose, within this thesis. To begin, 'citizens' in this thesis are not described by a particular legal basis but include all 'members of a democratic society by virtue of living within it and being affected by it' (Kahane et al, 2013, p.8). Citizens are also those who freely participate on the basis of being 'non-professional, non-paid, amateurish'; in contrast to councillors, bureaucrats, or other professionals (van Deth, 2014, p.356). Within this group are unaffiliated citizens and lay-stakeholders, with the latter defined here as the non-professional representatives of community groups and other civic bodies (see Kahane et al, 2013, pp.5-8). In small scale municipal government the difference between a citizen who participates on behalf of a local community group and a citizen who participates as a local resident may be minimal, given: both may make a representative claim, such as acting on behalf of a kind of citizen or particular neighbourhood (see Saward, 2008); both may have a 'stake' in decision-making that affects the locality, whether they belong to an organized group or not (Kahane et al, 2013, p.7); and, both may have gained expertise through repeated participation (see Fung, 2006). Despite these similarities, an analytical differentiation is necessary given unaffiliated citizens and lay-stakeholders tend to have different roles within participatory instruments, as well illustrated by Kahane et al (2013; see also Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016). In this thesis, 'citizens' and 'interested citizens' will cover both unaffiliated citizens and lay-stakeholders. When there is a necessary distinction to be made, the terms 'unaffiliated citizens' or 'lay-stakeholders' will be used. ILP party members are significantly different from the non-partisan lay-stakeholder described by Fung (2006; see also Fung and Wright, 2003), but are non-professional citizens with an active ongoing role, and are treated as lay-stakeholders in the context of this thesis. Citizen participation in this thesis, therefore, considers the amateur participation of residents of the municipality, though the role of more professionalised actors is important (see Chapter 3).

Considering what kinds of activity count as participation, Van Deth (2014) argues that political participation necessarily includes some form of behaviour, including the choice not to participate, rather than simply holding a political attitude or opinion. Fox (2014) notes a distinction between where participation is deliberate and intentional, compared to where it is accidental, with intentional participation of interest in this thesis. Active behaviour can include direct forms of participation, such as writing a letter or attending a public meeting. However, unless citizens attend to information about what policies may be, or have been,

implemented, they would not be aware of where there was misalignment between their preferences and those of decision-makers (see Lafont, 2020a, p.23), and so not be aware of the need to participate. As Cornwall (2008, p.272) argues, 'keeping a flow of information going is in itself important, rather than being simply a "lesser" form of participation'. This thesis will use the 'minimalist definition' of participation set out by van Deth (2014, pp.354-356), with reference to the discussion above. Citizen participation is here defined as:

> *being voluntary behaviour, whether active or passive, undertaken on an amateur basis, having some intended political goal, acting within the arena of government, state, or associated political structures, including political parties*

This is a conventional definition of political participation in that it focuses on the arena of government and party that is appropriate for this thesis, though somewhat narrower than has come to be typical within the literature (for example, Parry, Moyser and Day, 1992, p.16; Norris, 2002, p. 222). Citizen participation would here include voting for councillors in elections (Dahl, 1989; Christiano, 1996), and the practices of participation through political parties and contact with councillors (Pizzorno, 1970), but also more direct citizen participation in the processes of municipal government and governance (Arnstein, 1969; Pateman, 1971; Parry, Moyser, and Day, 1992, pp.23-31; Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

Representative and direct participatory forms of democracy have often been perceived, as Geurtz and Van der Wijdeven (2010, p.534) note, as having 'differences in internal logic, such as different types of accountability, different takes on legitimacy, and different types of steering', such that they have often been considered as separate systems (for example, Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984). In their investigation of 'local citizen democratic systems', Denters and Klok (2013, p.676), found that 'the stronger citizen democratic institutions in local government were, the less councillors maintain contact with citizens and local groups'. The implication is that the more that councillors are focussed upon participatory forms, the less that they are focussed on representative forms. Yet, an expanding body of literature is examining how, as Stoker and Evans (2019, p.133; see also Thompson, 2019; Alexandre-Collier, Goujon, and Gourgues, 2020) propose:

> participatory reforms can reinforce the quality of representative democracy and representative democracy can provide the basis for effective and legitimate public participation. It's about combining those things. It is the mix that matters.

The balance of this 'mix' is likely to present a challenge that will need to be continually navigated by those within any particular situation of municipal government. How ILPs might navigate this mix is a topic to which this thesis now turns.

2.5 ILPs and participation in the parish and town

Political parties have typically been considered as the 'major actors in the system that connects the citizenry and the governmental process' (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994, p.5; see also deLeon, 2014) and not a body that might change the character of that linkage and the democratic structure of the state. However, political parties and political leaders have been critical to the initiation, enabling, and sustaining of participatory practices across a range of contexts (for example, Isaac and Heller, 2003; Geurtz and Van der Wijdeven, 2010; Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016; Alexandre-Collier, Goujon, and Gourgues, 2020). Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.234) argue that shifting participation in parish and town councils is a 'chicken and egg problem', where:

> a broader demographic is needed to help to modernise the councils, but different types of people are reluctant to get involved because they perceive councils to be old-fashioned and as such difficult to get involved in.

Willet and Cruxon find that some of this modernisation process would require a significant impulse to change (see also Ryan et al, 2018), which Wills (2016) suggests may be a role taken on by ILPs. This section will discuss how municipal democracy might be impacted by the character of the localist ILP, with regard to their ideology, their conceptions of what municipal democracy should be, and their conceptions of whether the local is a place for politics.

ILPs may hold coherent ideological positions with regard to broader political cleavages, which is salient given 'political affiliation is a powerful indicator of perceptions about the effectiveness of public participation and participatory tools' (Copus, 2010, p.587). Left-wing and Green parties are found to commonly support participatory innovations as a means of enhancing or accompanying representative processes, whilst being 'an investment and a renewal of citizens' interest in politics' (Pascalo, 2020, p.12; see also Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003; Biard et al, 2020; Kübler et al, 2020). Both left and radical right-wing parties have been found to support direct participatory instruments within the locality for strategic reasons, sometimes to contradict the policies of central government or otherwise assert local identity against the centre (Gyford, 1985; Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003; Pascalo, 2020; Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2021). The, albeit more limited, evidence on ILPs in particular suggests that the tendency of ILPs to institute direct participatory forms may be similarly associated through left-right cleavages (for example, Gourgues and Mabi, 2020) and centre-periphery cleavages (see Denters and Klok, 2013).

In locating ILPs with regard to participatory conceptions of democracy, it is important to note that this orientation is unlikely to be simply uni-dimensional between representative and participatory forms. Gherghina and Jacquet (2023) set out how political parties may focus upon strategic goals (for example, seeking to increase electoral appeal) or normative goals (for example, seeking to increase citizens' political efficacy), and focus upon different political processes. Following Haus and Sweeting (2006), the balancing of participatory and representative forms may also overlap with: managerialist conceptions of local democracy, which place the citizen as a consumer of services; and, networked conceptions of local democracy, where political actors form relationships with other influential individuals and organisations to solve local problems. Whilst parties may broadly hold these positions, Heinelt (2013; see also Thompson, 2019) finds that the conceptions of democracy vary between individual representatives within parties. If ILPs do institute a democratic form of municipal government, they are likely to do so in different ways.

Turning from how municipal government is conceived to how ILPs are conceived, ILPs can be viewed as vehicles *of* citizen participation that enable citizens to 'organise themselves to create the civic structures through which they might act' (Wills, 2016, p.201; see also Macfadyen, 2014), rather than vehicles to *enable* the participation of the wider citizenry. This is a similar standpoint to the conception of parish and town councillors being citizens rather than politicians. As discussed above, this thesis takes the position that once a citizen enters a role as an elected representative and municipal decision-maker, they are distinct within municipal government from unaffiliated citizens or lay-stakeholders. Yet, ILPs can and do claim that they are vehicles for ordinary citizens. This can lead to claims that the gap between policy and the preferences of the citizens of the locality disappears with the election of the ILP, with no further participation of citizens required, on the basis of general political homogeneity, or homogeneity with regard to municipal policy. This section will now turn to consider these claims, which are central to some criticisms of, and some arguments for, local democracy.

First, ILPs have been characterised as promoting 'a territorial and homogenous community' (Veenhuysen, 2020, p.26) where they represent 'a general community will' (Grant, 1977, p.67), essentially a populist position (Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2021). An ILP asserting it was the representation of the unified political preference of the locality would be advocating an exclusive and undemocratic form of municipal government. As Jane Mansbridge (1980) found in her seminal study of New England town government, a 'community will' is only sustained through the suppression of the heterogeneity and disagreement that exists in even the smallest of social units. Asserting that political preferences were unified within a community would institute a 'more or less violent process

of exclusion and rejection' for those finding themselves at odds with that preference (Fraser, 1996, p.94; see also Frug, 1993, p.322; Christiano, 1996, pp.22-23; Parvin, 2009). Contrasting with a characterisation of the ILP as promoting homogeneity is a common claim of ILP representatives to be independent from party control (Grant, 1977; also Section 2.1). The assertion that ILP councillors are at liberty to advocate for, and vote on, policies as they see fit is an assertion of heterogeneity within the municipality (see Wolin, 1996, p.41), though not necessarily one that would represent or connect with a wider heterogeneity amongst the citizenry. Were an ILP to claim it was able to align policy with the citizenry because it was the embodiment of the citizenry, this would not be democratic, and would appear to conflict with a common (though not essential) narrative of ILPs.

Second, if pluralism and heterogeneity were a given, an ILP might still assert that municipal government was a place of depoliticised democracy or administrative management (Wood and Flinders, 2014; Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2021), where small groups of interested citizens, administrators or experts solve shared challenges for the good of all (Peritz, 2001; Fung and Wright, 2003). This approach would align with the wish of many communities to avoid disharmony by bracketing out areas of political contestation as not appropriate for the local level (see Eliasoph, 1997; van Wessel, 2010; García-Espín, 2017), again suppressing heterogeneity with regard to municipal policy. However, following Landwehr (2015, p.42), it can be argued that 'the distinction between regulatory and distributive decisions is not easily made' – it is a political decision whether the taxes levied from citizens by a town council are used for wildflower planting, firework displays, or food banks. Democracy requires 'pluralism, participation and responsiveness' and 'local government' rather than 'local administration' (Edwards, 1995, p85; see also Clarke, 2013; Barnett, 2020; also Chapter 3).

The localist ILP makes a claim to a greater alignment between citizen preferences and municipal policy, criticising other parties not only on the substance of policy but on how those policies were formed. For this claim to be democratic it implies the need to listen to or otherwise include citizen preferences through citizen participation, seeking the alignment of a heterogeneous locality to municipal policy. Where a localist ILP admitted that the locality was plural and political such that some form of participation was needed to better align citizen preferences and municipal policy, this would imply the need to institute a democratic form of municipal government. However, it is not clear what form of participation a localist ILP might favour, nor whether localist ILPs actually do so.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter has set out the current position of ILPs within the UK, which is as an impactful but diverse and niche phenomena. Bringing in the literature from continental Europe, a typology of ILPs has been defined, developing and critiquing the current definitions in use. Defining ILPs with regard to their aims allows them to be separated them from other forms and distinguishes between different types of ILP in a consistent way. Defining localist ILPs in relation to their aims clarifies their central substantive claim: to align municipal policy and citizen preferences to a greater extent than national parties can. However, how a particular localist ILP would conceive of this alignment and the place of citizen participation remains a largely open question. In particular, the chapter concludes that where an ILP asserted that a locality was homogeneous with regard to municipal government policy, this would not be a democratic claim. For municipal government to be democratic requires a recognition of pluralism with regard to municipal policy.

The chapter has also introduced the parish and town council as an intriguing site for citizen participation and democratic renewal, though there is little literature evidencing the extent to which this has occurred. A definition for citizen participation has been set out, highlighting how it may have both a representative and direct participatory focus, with the relationship between these two conceptions again unclear. These are gaps in the literature that are receiving increased focus, and where this thesis will make a contribution.

This thesis now turns to explore what would be an appropriate standard of democratic municipal government, and how to evaluate whether ILPs institute participatory practices aligning with this standard.

Chapter 3.   Evaluating municipal democracy

It's the front line of democracy, because people walk into the town council offices and they tell you about stuff, and it's really small stuff that we look after. Small relative to other big things, but we're very accessible and our councillors are quite well known ... it is a first port of call (Saffron Walden Town Council staff member).

Obviously the Town Council is in the centre and it goes outwards, as opposed to a hierarchy [to larger scales of government] (Frome Town Council staff member)

The previous chapter has laid the groundwork for this thesis, defining and discussing the localist ILP, municipal government and citizen participation, and exploring the overlaps and gaps in the related bodies of scholarship. This chapter shifts to exploring an analytical approach to answer the main research question of this thesis:

Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?

In Chapter 2, through critiquing and developing existing literature, the first research sub-question was answered:

1.   What constitutes an ILP in the context of English municipal government?

This chapter will consider how municipal government might be evaluated to establish the extent to which it is democratic and the role of the ILP in instituting this. Through this exploration, the second and third research sub-questions will be answered:

2.   What is an appropriate standard of *democratic* municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?

3.   How can the impact of an ILP be evaluated across a system of municipal government?

After setting out a standard of democratic municipal government and an analytical approach that will allow the impact of an ILP to be evaluated, the case studies and discussion of these will answer the final two research sub-questions:

4.   Do ILPs institute or sustain practices aligned with democratic municipal government?

5.   How do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government?

As discussed in Chapter 2, for municipal government to be democratic requires citizen participation in some form; however, the type of participatory practices instituted might vary considerably dependent upon the particular ILP. An ecumenical approach, which minimises the assumptions made around what constitutes a democratic form of municipal government,

is required. This chapter addresses this by turning to Archon Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube approach, noting its strengths with regard to the research question, how this approach facilitates the comparison of participatory instruments and policy processes, and its uses within the literature (see Section 3.1.1). This chapter then sets out an argument that the democratic goods used in the analytical stage of the Democracy Cube are not sufficiently connected to the dimensions of practice, turning instead to the democratic goods proposed by Smith (2009, see Section 3.1.2) as the basis of a standard of democratic municipal government that fits well with the broader approach. Noting that the Democracy Cube was developed to compare individual processes, the Democracy Mapping approach is developed in Section 3.1.3, allowing systems of municipal government to be compared and the impact of the ILP to be determined. The rest of the chapter then explores the dimensions of the Democracy Mapping and the relationship of practices in the Democracy Mapping to a standard of democratic municipal government.

In summary, this chapter sets out the development of a structured analytical approach that accommodates many forms of citizen participation and can be used to compare systems of municipal government, evaluating them against a democratic standard. In doing so, it responds to current debates in the literature: highlighting the importance of understanding citizen influence across the policy cycle, acknowledging the complexity of relationship between citizen participation and democratic goods, and accommodating different kinds of participatory practice. As a starting point, it uses the approach of the Democracy Cube, which is now introduced.

3.1   Evolving the Democracy Cube

3.1.1   Defining democracy through practice

Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube was first presented as part of a symposium on collaborative public management, where the focus was on participatory innovations in public administration at the municipal level (O'Leary, Gerard, and Bingham, 2006). In this sense, the use of this approach as a basis for the analysis of citizen participation in municipal government is very appropriate. The Democracy Cube first aims to answer the questions: '(1) Who participates? (2) How do they communicate and make decisions? (3) What influence do they have over the resulting public decisions and actions?' (Fung, 2015, p.514). It does this through placing decision-making processes in a three dimensional space - *participant selection, communicative mode,* and *authority* – through which 'any particular

mechanism of public decision can be located' (Fung, 2006, p.66), with each dimension being a scale such that a location further along the dimension indicates the presence of participatory practices aligned more or less with inclusion, authority, and intense communication (see Figure 3.1 below). Having located the process on the cube, its position could be analysed with regard to desirable democratic goods, providing an evaluation against these democratic goods and a comparison between different kinds of policy processes.

Figure 3.1   The three dimensions of Fung's Democracy Cube
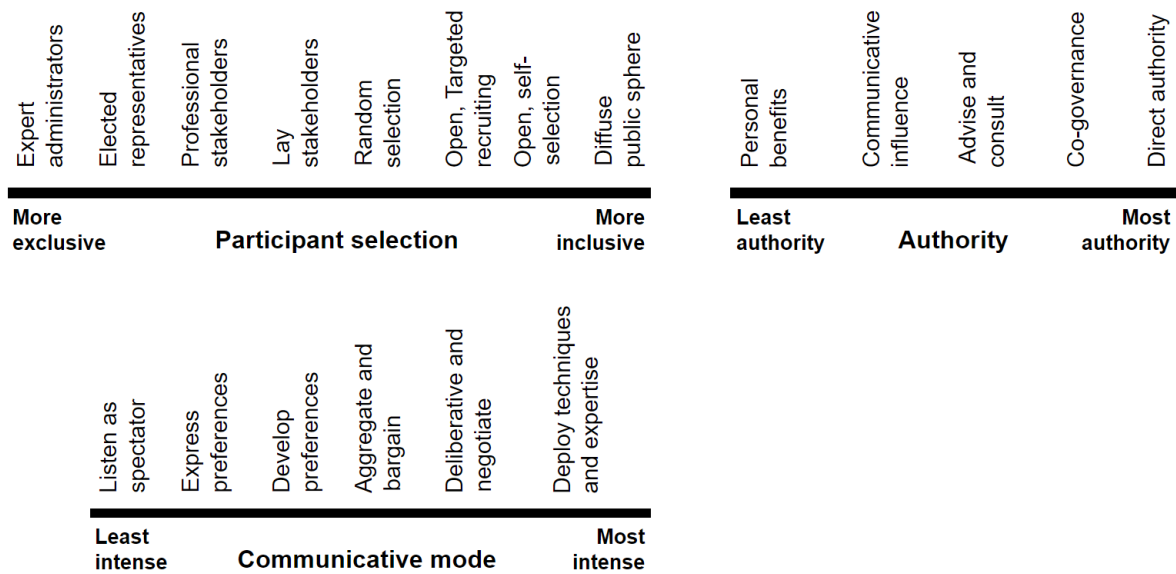
Before progressing, it is necessary to clarify some of the terminology used here in relation to the development of this approach, which otherwise risks elision between different concepts. Each Democracy Cube dimension, set out in Figure 3.1 above, sets out a range of related *participatory practices*, from the participation of 'lay-stakeholders' as a practice of participant selection, to the 'development of preferences' as a practice of communication. A *participatory instrument*, such as participatory budgeting or a public meeting, is characterised by a particular combination of these practices. A participatory instrument is part of a wider *municipal process* that is characterised by being a kind of sub-case of either the municipal authority or ILP and defined by municipal policy or directed towards municipal policy, for example being a whole participatory budgeting cycle instituted by a parish council or a public consultation about municipal policy carried out by the ILP. A municipal process might include one or more participatory instruments along with practices that are not participatory at all. Finally, the *policy cycle* covers the policy process from formation to implementation (see Section 3.4 below), with participatory instruments and practices in place at single or multiple stages of a policy cycle, across single or multiple policy cycles. To some

extent these terms cover organisational forms and practices that in reality will interact, overlap, and shift; however, broadly they are distinct.

Fung (2006, p.70) has an ambition for the Democracy Cube to be ecumenical as an approach such that it includes 'varieties of participatory mechanisms', accommodates 'a range of institutional possibilities', and covers 'any particular mechanism of public decision' (Fung, 2006, p.66). However, the appropriateness of the framework depends 'partly on the context and problem in question' (Fung, 2006, p.66), a point that is important in understanding the subsequent variety of uses and critiques of the Democracy Cube. Adaptations of the approach have ranged over a wide set of applications beyond municipal policy processes, for example studying: the development of national measures of social progress (Rondinella, Segre and Zola, 2017); the integration of public participation in computer games (Plumley, 2018); and, the extent of public participation in science (Schrögel and Kolleck, 2019). The literature review finds four main ways in which the approach is used: as a normative measure of participation; as a visual illustration of difference between participatory instruments; as an analytical tool for connecting participatory practices to democratic goods; and, as a set of democratic goods that provides a framework for the analysis of participatory instruments. These will be set out below, as the usage of the Democracy Cube in the literature helps illustrate the particular features of Fung's approach, including when these uses depart some way from the original model.

The first kind of use of the Democracy Cube in the literature is assigning a normative value to the three dimensions, where practices higher up the three scales are interpreted as indicating greater (and desirable) participation (for example, Mukhtarov, Dieperink, and Driessen, 2018; Bustillos Ardaya, Evers, and Ribbe, 2019). This aligns with approaches to evaluating participation, where greater participation is linked to a range of democratic goods (for example, Arnstein, 1969). However, Fung's approach to the Democracy Cube is more nuanced, taking the position that different kinds of practices could be linked to different kinds of democratic goods, and 'particular designs' of participatory instruments 'are suited to specific objectives' (Fung, 2006, p.74; see also Michels et al, 2011). In this approach, 'analytical tools should separate empirical and normative criteria' (Elstub and Escobar, 2019b, p.19), with the framework of the Democracy Cube enabling the empirical identification of practices present in decision-making processes, and the subsequent analysis then used to evaluate and compare participatory instruments with regard to democratic goods (see Fung, 2009).

The evaluation approach of the Democracy Cube is summarised in Figure 3.2 below. These stages are not explicitly separated by Fung (2006, 2015), but for clarity are considered

separately here. In the first stage, Fung (2015, p.515) links positions in the Democracy Cube to 'three central democratic values' that are the 'desirable outcomes' from participatory instruments (Fung, 2015, p.514; see discussion in Section 3.1.2 below). Participatory practices within a single participatory instrument or broader policy-making process are then mapped onto the Democracy Cube. Finally, a comparative analysis is carried out, comparing how each case links to the desired democratic values given their position in the Democracy Cube. In this way, a range of participatory instruments or policy-making processes may be evaluated with regard to a set of democratic goods and be compared.

Figure 3.2   Schematic of the Democracy Cube evaluation process
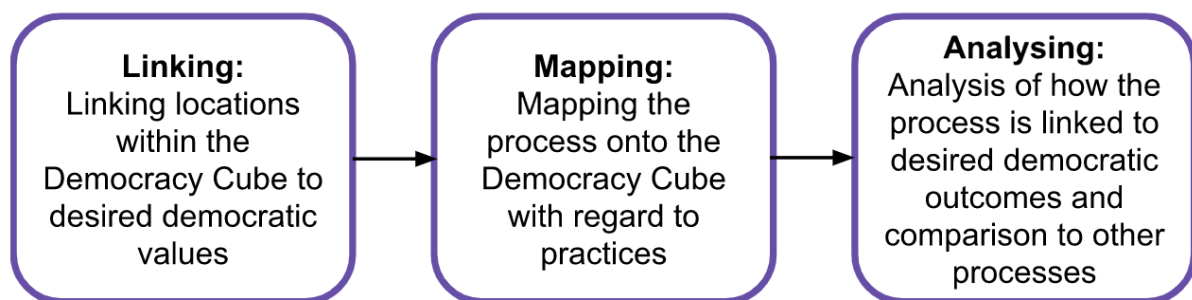
This approach to analysis is critiqued by Miller, Hildreth, and Stewart (2019, p.1264), who argue it is 'not immediately apparent … whether figures farther from the graphspace's origin point indicate more desirable (viz. more democratic) practices'. They adapt the Democracy Cube into a normative tool that sets minimum standards for Participatory Budgeting processes. Such clarity is useful for a particular class of participatory instruments, but would be less easy to defend in relation to the multiple and diverse processes of municipal government (see Bishop and Davis, 2002; Hendriks, 2009). Different participatory practices might be expected to serve different functions across different processes to maintain democratic goods. The approach taken in this thesis is to retain the approach of Fung (2006, 2015) in linking kinds of participatory practices with democratic goods or values, rather than treating practices as being located along a normative scale.

The second main use found in the literature is the mapping of participatory instruments and policy-making processes onto the Democracy Cube (the second stage in Figure 3.2 above), providing a visual comparison between different instruments and processes with regard to citizen participation. Scholars have used this mapping to: highlight differences between cases of the same kind of participatory instrument (for example, Laycock, 2014); to compare between different policy making processes (for example, Rondinella, Segre, and Zola, 2017); and, to indicate the diversity of participatory practices present within a policy making process (for example, Wichowsky, Gaul-Stout and McNew-Birren, 2022). This visual comparison

does not itself give much analytical depth, but does enable the difference between instruments and processes to be demonstrated. In discussing practices of participation in decision making, Fung (2006, p.67) states that 'actual decision-making processes are frequently composed of multiple points', but takes the approach where 'varieties of participatory mechanisms can be located' as broad positions within the Cube (Fung, 2006, p.70). This assumes a level of contiguity between practices and the assumption that participatory practices produce democratic goods as a 'mathematical function' along each dimension of the Democracy Cube (Fung, 2015, p.514). This is an approach implemented literally by Bustillos Ardaya, Evers, and Ribbe (2019), where the extent of participation in a process is summarised by a numerical score for each dimension. However, this thesis will instead follow the visual presentation used by Oliveira e Costa, Kellecioglu, and Weber (2018) to present the scales as a discrete mapping (see Bishop and Davis, 2002; also Table 3.9, at the end of this chapter) that will allow for an additional dimension of participatory practices to be introduced and more flexibility in allowing for the 'multiple points' of practice that participatory instruments consist of.

The analysis of how practices within a participatory instrument or policy process link to democratic goods is the third main way in which the Democracy Cube is utilised, and evidences the greatest depth and practical relevance. The combination of the broad mapping on the cube alongside the analysis of practices is particularly useful in assessing participatory instruments with regard to democratic goods (for example Van Maasakkers, Oh and Knox, 2020) and the comparison of practices across different processes (for example, Wehn et al, 2015; Prosser et al, 2017). Some analyses focus purely upon practices presented within the Democracy Cube, rather than attempting to map the participatory instrument or policy process onto the Democracy Cube (for example, Smith et al 2020; Sivashankar and Hajosy, 2021); here, recommendations may be made for altering specific practices to align with those thought more likely to produce democratic goods. However, the analysis of practices with regard to democratic goods has not been commonplace in the literature, with the complexity of the undertaking evident (for example Rondinella, Segre, and Zola, 2017). Indeed, the linking of practices to democratic goods forms the large part of this chapter and requires the consideration of a range of empirical and theoretical literature to underpin both development and interpretation.

The final use of the Democracy Cube found in the literature is in framing a holistic analysis of participatory instruments or policy processes (for example, Visser and Kreemers, 2020). This analysis uses the dimensions of the Democracy Cube, or the related questions of "Who?", "How?" and "What?", or the democratic values set out by Fung. For Fung (2006, 2015), this final holistic analysis, the third stage of analysis in Figure 3.2 above, allows consideration of

broader questions of how different cases link to democratic goods. For example, it allows for consideration of the broader context within which a participatory instrument may sit, and the transmission of preferences through formal and informal settings (see Hendriks, 2016; Bachtiger and Parkinson, 2019, pp.104-131), or the extent that different participatory instruments may be complementary or counterproductive (see Bherer and Breux, 2012). Whilst the use of the Democracy Cube might tend towards a relatively mechanistic evaluation of citizen participation, it is important to emphasise that the use of the approach is not only to evaluate and compare processes in a structured manner, but also to structure a broader and more qualitative analysis that informs this evaluation and comparison.

Before progressing, it is useful to position the approach of Fung with regard to the wider literature, which informs the development of the Democracy Cube carried out below. Considering the function of democratic practices to produce democratic goods is a kind of 'functionalist approach' (Jäske and Setälä, 2020, p.467; see also Warren, 2017). Such approaches explore how particular participatory instruments have the function of producing particular kinds of democratic goods[7] that will lead to democratic change. This process may involve a mapping combined with analysis, as used by Fung (2003, 2006; see also Geissel, 2012), or directly analyse different kinds of participatory instruments with regard to democratic goods or models (for example, Smith, 2009; Dean, 2017). Functionalist approaches tend to focus on the role of participation as a democratising force, which contrasts with approaches focusing on the analysis of 'conflict and power' (Bherer and Breux, 2012, p.382; for example, White, 1996; Barnes, Newman, and Sullivan, 2007; Hendriks, 2009) or those that seek to descriptively 'distinguish the participatory styles of governance in different regimes' rather than making normative judgements (Bishop and Davis, 2002, p.28; see also Hendriks, F. 2019). These differences in approaches may simply reflect a matter of emphasis, or reflect a difference in underlying epistemology and ontology. In terms of democratic theory, the functionalist approach is both substantive and procedural, where participatory practices and instruments are procedures judged on the substantive democratic goods they produce, with certain procedures then judged to be preferable on this basis (and so not being substance or procedure-independent, see Estlund, 2008; also Beitz, 1996).

A common critique made with regard to functionalist analysis is that mechanisms are claimed to produce democratic goods without the connection between process and outcome

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[7] The use of 'democratic goods' (following Smith, 2009) rather than democratic 'values' or 'principles' is a reflection of the functionalist approach that implies goods being produced, as well as reflecting the normative standpoint of this approach.

being evidenced (Rowe and Frewer, 2004, pp.514-515; Mutz, 2008; Sabl, 2015; Ianniello et al, 2019). Some outcomes, such as the impact of citizen proposals on policy (for example, Smith, 2019, pp.575-577; Mohandas and Purayil, 2023) or whether the process fulfilled its aims as defined by participants or bureaucrats (for example, Lauber and Knuth, 1999; Fung, 2015), may be relatively accessible to researchers. The evaluation of other outcomes, such as the extent of preference change through a process (for example, Fishkin et al, 2021), may depend upon the ability to implement experimental conditions. The links between participatory practices and democratic goods set out in the later sections of this chapter are informed by wider empirical evidence and theory, but such links could not be assumed to hold within any context. There is a necessary level of caution needed around claims that democratic goods are produced from any particular participatory practice or instrument (see Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Ryan, 2019).

The use of the Democracy Cube as a comparative tool, specifying a range of particular practices and relating these to democratic outcomes, lends itself to assessing the impact of localist ILPs upon municipal government. However, the approach has some key limitations and constraints that, to answer the research question this thesis orients around, requires significant development. The rest of this chapter will develop the Democracy Mapping approach, an evolution of the Democracy Cube, beginning by shifting from the democratic values set out by Fung to a set of coherent democratic goods, which will be used to produce a standard of democratic municipal government.

3.1.2   Evaluating the municipal democratic system

This section will develop a standard of democratic municipal government, based upon a minimal set of democratic goods, so starting to answer the second research sub-question: **what is an appropriate standard of democratic municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?** It will begin by briefly setting out why such a standard is necessary and appropriate, given the evaluation of citizen participation against an externally defined standard might reasonably be challenged. This section will then explore the democratic goods used by Fung (2006) before turning to the analysis of Smith (2009) and considering the overlap between this minimal set of democratic goods and the dimensions of participatory practice used in this thesis.

Given that the evaluation aims to establish the impact of ILPs across diverse localities and ILPs, it would be inappropriate for an evaluation to focus, for example, on narrow and specific evaluations of the extent to which communication within participatory instruments met ideal deliberative standards or specific kinds of communication (for example,

Steenbergen et al, 2003; Landwehr and Holzinger, 2010). Smith (2009, p.11) advises against the use of relatively narrow models to inform the evaluation of democratic processes: first, as this risks 'leaning too heavily on one theoretical position such that significant elements of democratic practice and institutional design can be overlooked'; and, second, as it 'would limit the range of institutions that could reasonably be discussed' (Smith, 2009, p.10; see also Warren, 2017; Elstub and Escobar, 2019a; Asenbaum, 2022). One approach could be to avoid the use of an external standard, for example orienting the evaluation around the democratic conceptions held by the ILP itself (see Hanburger, 2006), or assessing the extent to which democratic processes within the locality aligned with different conceptions of democracy (Dean, 2017; see also Fung, 2007a; Hendriks, F., 2019). Whilst these are valid approaches, this thesis will seek to evaluate municipal democracy against a minimal set of democratic goods that, if they were not produced by practices in the locality, could be reasonably critiqued from a range of standpoints as not being democratic.

In using the Democracy Cube, Fung (2006, p.70) evaluates processes against one of the democratic goods of legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness, arguing these are 'three important problems of democratic governance' or 'central democratic values' (Fung, 2015, p.515). This is a broadly pragmatic selection (see Fung, 2007a), with these democratic goods connected to Fung's (2003, 2005; also Fung and Wright, 2003) earlier work on citizen participation and governance. Fung's description of legitimacy is that 'policies are rendered legitimate because citizens have had opportunities to influence the politicians and parties that make those policies' (Fung, 2015, p.515). This is a bottom-up substantive form of legitimacy that assesses the extent to which municipal policy responds to citizen preferences. Fung's conception of justice is related to political equality and social welfare distribution, in a sense of policy processes acting to redress broad inequalities and social injustice (see Fung, 2005; Fung, 2015, pp.519-520; also Beitz, 1989, pp.16-24). With regard to the effectiveness of citizen participation, this concept is well summarised in Fung and Wright (2003, p.25), which sets out effectiveness as being where a process acts 'to advance public ends … more effectively than alternative institutional arrangements'. In contrast to Fung's (2003) earlier analysis of mini-publics, in the Democracy Cube analysis Fung (2006) carries out an analysis against only a single democratic good, argued to be the most relevant to each case. In Fung's (2015) retrospective on the Democracy Cube, the framework of the Democracy Cube itself is largely absent, with Fung focusing on evaluating the values of legitimacy, justice and effectiveness through a broad analysis of processes. The evaluation of whether municipal processes are 'capable of solving the substantive problems they are set' was highlighted as central both to the good of effectiveness and justice (Fung, 2015, pp.517-519), but this kind of evaluation is not incorporated within the Democracy Cube approach.

The link between the democratic goods proposed by Fung, particularly the role of effectiveness, and the framework of the Democracy Cube is not clear.

Rather than adopt the democratic goods proposed by Fung, this thesis shifts to the democratic goods proposed by Graham Smith (2009). This combination of approaches was suggested by Wright (2012, p.465), who after using Smith's (2009) analytical approach, argued 'a more formal combination of the "democratic goods" and democratic cube approaches may also be fruitful, as it would enhance the structure' of Smith's approach, with particular reference to the kinds of participant within the process. Smith (2009) references the seminal work by Dahl (2000) to argue for the use of four democratic goods - *inclusiveness*, *popular control*, *considered judgement* and *transparency* - that should be produced by democratic innovations to qualify as democratic. Smith (2009, p.13) proposes that 'the democratic status of institutions that fail to realise these goods in a compelling combination is likely to be challenged'. For any chosen set of goods, theorists 'may well interpret and weight these goods in different ways' (Smith, 2009, p.12) and 'it is unlikely that any systematic mechanism can be set forth for reconciling conflicts' (Beitz, 1989, p.117; see also Christiano, 1996; Saward, 2003). Therefore, the approach is broad, setting a minimum bar over which a number of different configurations of democratic practices might exist. The utility of Smith's (2009) particular approach is that these chosen democratic goods align well with the dimensions of participatory practice used in the Democracy Mapping, as set out below, such that these values may be developed in relation to the framework directly.

Regarding *inclusiveness*, Smith (2009, p.24) argues from a point of redressing political inequality in participation, which is argued to be 'a persistent concern across various modes of political participation' (see also Dahl, 1989, pp.180-92; Christiano, 1996, pp.47-101; Warren, 2017, p.44). In her consideration of participatory practices within the setting of municipal government and business, Mansbridge (1980, p.249; see also Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995; Young, 2000; Ryfe and Stalsburg, 2012) summarises the reasons for this inequality well:

> the immediate costs and benefits of political participation usually vary considerably from one individual to the next, depending on the individuals' other obligations, financial resources, verbal skills, social ties, and information about the problem on hand.

The more intense the demands of citizen participation, the more exclusive it typically becomes, which is well reflected in the participant selection and communication dimensions in the Democracy Cube. However, given that even minimal forms of participation, such as voting or attending to news, reflect the same broad tendencies of exclusion, forms of

intensive participatory practice that involve those typically underrepresented by design may also be viewed as a route towards greater inclusiveness (for example, Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016). Section 3.2 below considers participant selection with particular regard to inclusiveness.

Smith (2009, p.26) then turns to *popular control*, defined as 'the extent to which citizens are afforded increased influence and control within the decision making process'. Smith (2009, pp.17-18) draws particular attention to the process of policy formation being much wider than the single point of decision-making, with popular control necessary across the policy cycle for it to be meaningful. This consideration of the policy cycle is integrated into the Democracy Mapping approach in Section 3.4 below. With regard to the concept of popular control as a democratic good, Wright (2012, p.465) argued it was 'unduly blunt for a generalizable framework'. If popular control were taken to be a simple responsiveness to popular will, then this would suggest that the more authority citizens had, the more popular control would result; however, popular will is plural and continually formed and reformed through the process of communication, reflection and (ideally) considered judgement between citizens (Sabl, 2015; also Niemeyer, 2004). Rather than conceive of popular control as pure responsiveness of state to citizen, popular control is conceived in this thesis as a continual alignment between citizens, and between citizens and policy, facilitated by different institutions, elites, and discussion in the public sphere (see Lafont, 2020a). Popular control in this interpretation would benefit from different forms of citizen authority, as set out in Section 3.3 below.

The final two democratic goods considered by Smith (2009, pp.27-28) are *considered judgement*, being 'the capacity of citizens to make thoughtful and reflective judgements' either individually or towards a collective agreement, and *transparency*, being, the 'openness of proceedings to both participants and the wider public' (Smith, 2009, p.12). However, if openness of processes was insisted upon, this would conflict with the finding that 'sometimes, perhaps often, crucial parts of public policy debate must go *in camera*' to achieve just and reasoned outcomes (Chambers, 2004, p.409), or as Mansbridge (1999, p.221) poetically puts it, 'secrecy often produces better deliberation than "sunshine"' (see also Briggs, 2008; Bachtiger and Hangartner, 2010). This exemplifies the tension that can exist between different democratic goods and will be discussed further in Section 3.5 below, along with a wider consideration of the role of considered judgement and transparency in the context of different modes of communication.

This section has set out a set of minimal democratic goods that are coherent with the dimensions of participatory practices used in this thesis. These may be used to form a

democratic standard that will admit a range of different kinds of citizen participation. The standard of democratic municipal government is defined as being where there are participatory practices, linked to the production of inclusiveness, popular control, transparency and considered judgement, such that a system of municipal government would be expected to have these democratic goods. This chapter now turns to the Democracy Mapping, considering how a system of municipal democracy might be linked to democratic goods such that it can be used to evaluate the influence of an ILP.

3.1.3 Mapping municipal democracy

This section will set out several significant modifications to the Democracy Cube approach set out by Fung (2006), in addition to the shift in democratic goods, to adapt the approach to the needs of this thesis, whilst retaining the ecumenical consideration of participatory practices and linking to democratic outcomes. This will be done: first, because although Fung (2003, 2004) has noted the importance of agenda setting in shaping the democratic outcomes of citizen participation, consideration of the policy cycle was not integrated into the Democracy Cube; second, the Democracy Cube was designed within a particular research context that was oriented towards public administration rather than citizen participation (O'Leary, Gerard, and Bingham, 2006; Fung, 2015; Elstub and Escobar, 2019b); and, third, the research programme within this thesis needs to compare two systems of municipal government, rather than contrast particular participatory instruments or policy processes, which is a distinct and novel application, requiring a modified approach. In setting out these modifications, this section will introduce the Democracy Mapping approach, the development of the Democracy Cube that will be used in the remainder of this thesis.

Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube approach accounts for the "Who?", "What?" and "How?" of policy making and citizen participation, considering: participant selection; their level of influence; and, the mode of communication. However, the Democracy Cube fails to account for the "When?", not considering at what stage citizen influence occurs within a policy cycle despite this being broadly, and increasingly, acknowledged as critical to democratic outcomes (Young, 2001; Fung 2003; Smith, 2005; Boswell, 2016). This is well illustrated by the study of Li and de Jong (2017), who perform separate analyses using the Democracy Cube at the stages of decision-making and policy implementation, finding citizens being allowed greater authority in the implementation of development policy than over the shaping of that policy. The Democracy Mapping incorporates "When?" through considering whether citizens have influence in different stages of the policy cycle, from the design of the process to the review of outcomes (see Section 3.4 below).

The second main modification of the approach is the shift to an explicit focus on the citizen. Here, whilst the dimension of participant selection practices covers a range of different actors who might influence a participatory instrument or policy process, the analysis of practices across other dimensions focusses specifically upon citizen participation within these practices. Therefore, the analysis of authority is related to *citizen* authority, the analysis of the policy cycle related to *citizen* influence in the policy cycle, and the analysis of mode of communication related to *citizens* and communication. Further minor modifications reflecting this shift will be made in the following sections, largely following the approach of Elstub and Escobar (2019b). This does not mean that the consideration of other actors is excluded from these dimensions, given councillors and council staff would likely have a significant influence over these practices, but that the Democracy Mapping will ultimately reflect the participation of citizens.

A third important modification is the inclusion of a measure of the extent of participation. The Democracy Cube reflects Fung's focus upon empowered deliberative processes involving small groups (for example, Fung 2004; 2006, 2007b), rather than the extent of participation. Prosser et al (2017, p.262) argue this is:

> a weakness in Fung's framework, for it fails to distinguish between processes that generate only small-scale and unrepresentative participation and those leading to large-scale and/or representative involvement.

It would be difficult to argue that a participatory instrument with few participants would produce the same democratic goods as an instrument that involved a large proportion of the citizenry (see Lafont, 2020a); and citizens themselves view democratic goods as being related to the extent of participation (see Persson, Esaiasson and Gilljam, 2013; Johnson, 2015). For this reason, the Democracy Mapping will incorporate a measure of the proportion of citizenry included within a municipal process.

Finally, considering the relationship between participatory practices and democratic goods, the approach of Fung (2006) does not assume each dimension is a normative scale, but does assume some relationship between the position on the dimension and democratic goods. However, Fung (2006, p.67) states that 'actual decision-making processes are frequently composed of multiple points', with the assumption of continuity a simplification of this complexity (for example, Smith et al, 2020, p.19). Similarly, Elstub and Escobar (2019b, p.13) argue there is an increasing 'hybridity of practices across democratic innovations' such that multiple participatory practices may be present within any one participatory instrument or municipal process. In an influential review of Arnstein's Ladder, Bishop and Davis (2002) introduce the concept of discontinuous mapping, such that different kinds of participatory

instruments are linked with different kinds of democratic functions. Not only is the position on the scale not normative, but even a broad location in the scale could not be described as producing desired democratic goods. Each participatory practice would be assessed to the extent it is partially or fully present within a participatory instrument or process (for example, Fung, 2003; Elstub and Escobar, 2019b, pp.24-27; Jäske and Setälä, 2020). For Bishop and Davis (2002), such an approach means that any kind of participatory instrument and any combination of participatory practices could produce democratic goods, but their use and function would be dependent upon context and purpose. In this thesis, particular participatory practices are conceived to have tendencies to generate particular democratic goods, such that some generalisation across context is possible (see Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This thesis will use the discontinuous mapping approach, considering the link between participatory practice and desired democratic goods, as set out in the following sections.

This thesis will be structured around the stages of the Democracy Mapping approach, which are set out in Figure 3.3 below. This chapter undertakes the linking stage, which connects participatory practices to the democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement and transparency. The Democracy Mapping approach shifts the approach from linking *scale positions* to democratic outcomes (see Figure 3.2 above) to linking *participatory practices* to democratic outcomes. The outcome of the linking stage is a Democracy Mapping of democratic municipal government – the extent to which participatory practices should be present across policy cycles within a municipal authority to create the democratic goods desired. This Democracy Mapping is shown at the conclusion of this chapter, in Section 3.6.

Figure 3.3   Schematic of the Democracy Mapping evaluation in this thesis
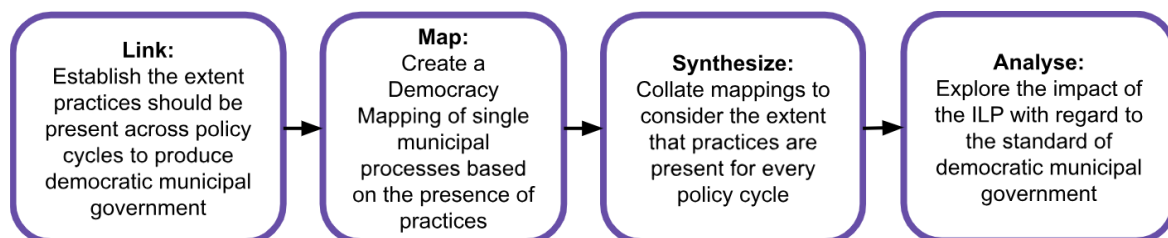
Having carried out the linking, the approach then maps the presence of participatory practices within municipal processes of policy formation and implementation across a system of municipal government (which will be undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6). For this thesis, the mapping will include a consideration of whether the ILP has influenced the presence of those practices. The Democracy Mapping then moves to synthesis (carried out

in Chapter 7) collating the Democracy Mappings of individual processes and considering the extent to which participatory practices are present across the municipal democratic system for every policy cycle, and how this aligns with the standard of democratic municipal government developed in this chapter. Finally, the analysis stage compares the synthesised Democracy Mappings for each authority, considering the role of the ILP in influencing each case, with the initial analysis for this stage carried out in Chapter 7 and the concluding analysis presented in Chapter 8. This is a more holistic consideration that aims to account for the 'messy imperfection, overlap, and interaction of real-world political systems' (Hendriks, Ercan and Boswell, 2020 p.143; see also Arnstein, 1969, pp.217-218) and the shifting context within which participatory practices occur (Lowndes, 2010, pp.68-69; Bherer and Breux, 2012; for example, Smith, 2009; Kahane et al, 2013; Elstub and Escobar, 2019a). As with the Democracy Cube, the Democracy Mapping sets out a structured approach to the understanding of participation that seeks to provide a foundation for analysis rather than be a methodological prison.

The Democracy Mapping approach allows for the collation of the mappings of municipal processes into a mapping for a whole municipal authority, which is an innovation developed in this thesis. The introduction of the policy cycle as a dimension of evaluation is also an innovation, ensuring that analysis includes when citizen participation occurs in the policy cycle. This chapter will now move through the different dimensions of evaluation: participant selection, the extent of authority, the policy cycle, and modes of communication; exploring the links between practices and democratic goods, and further detailing the Democracy Mapping approach.

3.2　Selecting participants

This section develops and discusses the dimension of participant selection, first setting out some amendments to Fung's (2006) participant selection scale for the Democracy Mapping (see Table 3.1 below). The roles of *council staff*, *councillors* and *professional stakeholders* in initiating and sustaining participatory practices towards popular control is then considered, informed by the work of Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks (2019; see Section 3.2.1). The discussion then moves to considering how many citizens participate in any particular process or practice, developing this concept for the Democracy Mapping. Noting how inclusive popular control rests upon the extent of participation, the kinds of practice that enable extensive participation are explored, including *open / self-selected* processes and participation in the *public sphere* (see Section 3.2.2). The exploration of participant selection then turns to the interested citizen, including *lay stakeholders*, discussing advantages and

disadvantages of interest (see Section 3.2.3). Considering the limitations of interest, the role of *targeted involvement* is then considered, and argued to be important for the democratic good of inclusiveness. The consideration of participant selection concludes with a discussion of how practices would be present for a standard of democratic municipal government, and how these might be evaluated with regard to the impact of an ILP (see Section 3.2.4).

Table 3.1   The dimension of participant selection

Less inclusive	Kind of participant
Council staff	Municipal government staff directly employed by the council
Councillors	Elected and co-opted representatives on the council
External professionals	External facilitators or experts acting in a professional capacity.
Lay-stakeholders	Those involved in local voluntary associations, clubs, etc.
Open / self-selection	The process is partly or wholly open to any citizen
Informal public sphere	The process occurs partly or wholly in public spaces
Targeted involvement	Practices to increase presence and voice of underrepresented citizens
More inclusive	

The participant selection dimension is divided between kinds of participant (council staff to lay-stakeholders) and kinds of citizen involvement (open / self-selection to targeted involvement). This is modified from the scale set out by Fung (2006, p.67), who differentiates between three practices of citizen involvement: processes with 'self-selected' citizens, those that have 'targeted recruitment' of citizens, and those engaging in 'random selection' of citizens (see Table 3.1 above). Four modifications are made for the Democracy Mapping. First, the concept of targeted recruitment is broadened to 'targeted involvement' (following Smith, 2009, pp.25), including practices that 'provide citizens with equal substantive opportunities to express their views and be heard on the issue under consideration'. This is because a citizen who is silent or ignored within a municipal process is effectively absent from that process. Second, random selection as used by Fung (2006) that aims to produce a 'mirror' of the broader population, being a particular kind of targeted recruitment to a closed process, will not here be defined as a separate practice but be included under 'targeted involvement'. Third, Fung's scale ranges from least to most inclusive, but it is not clear on what basis the judgement is made (Elstub and Escobar, 2019b, p.20). The ordering used in this thesis distinguishes kinds of participants from how those participants are recruited, with targeted involvement placed as the most inclusive practice, given its role in emphasising inclusiveness (see Section 3.2.2 below). Fourth, the kinds of participant are made relevant to

English municipal government: council staff (expert administrators in Fung's (2006) typology), councillors (elected representatives), and external professionals (professional stakeholders, see Table 3.1 above; also Section 2.4). This set of modifications enables a better fit to the Democracy Mapping approach and the context of this thesis.

3.2.1   Elite participation and democratic municipal government

This thesis now moves to the linking of participatory practices with democratic outcomes, moving through the participatory practices of the democracy mapping. Each section considers a set of related participatory practices in relation to the literature, which informs the construction of a Democracy Mapping of democratic municipal government against which the cases will be evaluated, and will also inform the subsequent analysis.

Council staff and councillors are elites within municipal processes, but they can also initiate and sustain processes of citizen participation, and facilitate the production of democratic goods. Reviewing the impact of citizen participation on government accountability and responsiveness, Speer (2012, p.2380) finds 'cases of successful participatory governance were characterized by the presence of a high capacity and motivation among public officials and citizens' (see also Johnson and Gastil, 2015; Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016, p.23; Font et al, 2018; Dzur, 2019). Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks (2019; p.220) argue bureaucrats take multiple roles in relation to participatory practices: those who engage in 'Democratic Professionalism', initiating and sustaining processes of citizen participation; those engaged in 'Front-line work' who connect with citizens and councillors in the shaping and implementation of policy; those enabling citizen participation through 'Facilitating'; those connecting citizens with formal processes of government through 'Boundary Spanning'; and those engaged in 'Meta-governance' to shape processes such that citizens can participate. Councillors may also take these roles, and also the role of decision-maker, being the focus of practices of representative participation. The presence of council staff and councillors at some point in any policy cycle appears inevitable given the embedded nature of most participatory instruments associated with municipal government (see Johnson and Gastil, 2015). The literature suggests both council staff and councillors could play a key role in enabling democratic goods; however, their orientation to participatory practices is critical, as discussed further in Section 3.3.2 below.

Whilst potentially positive, the involvement of council staff and councillors in these roles carries a risk that the influence of citizens will be, intentionally or unintentionally, reduced. For example, in the facilitation of group discussions and meetings, the facilitator has a considerable impact on the dynamic and decisions of the group (King, Feltey, and Susel,

1998; Gilman 2012; De Graaf, van Hulst, and Michels, 2015; Lightbody and Roberts, 2019).
Participatory instruments facilitated by external professionals can support processes of
citizen participation, contributing expertise and knowledge independent from immediate
political and bureaucratic interests (Dryzek 1990; Font et al, 2018) and shifting the dynamics
of conversations and relationships to more productive discussion and argument (Fung, 2004,
p.217; Escobar, 2019, p.184). External professionals can provide a very useful resource with
regard to enabling considered judgement and inclusive popular control, particularly where
there may be disagreement between citizens and elites.

The participation of council staff and councillors in most or all policy cycles, at least at some
stage, would align with democratic municipal government, as indicated in the Democracy
Mapping (see Table 3.2 below). Along with those embedded in municipal government,
external professionals would support participatory instruments and practices, supplying
substantive and procedural knowledge and experience. Whilst much of the Democracy
Mapping focuses upon the citizen, the role of others within this process is also critical to the
production of democratic goods.

3.2.2   The extent of participation

The Democracy Mapping will use a consistent measure of the extent of participation based
upon the population of citizens, but with one significant adjustment from how this population
is usually understood. Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.324) argue for the involvement of those
younger than voting age in parish and town council government, and there are a number of
broader initiatives to involve school-age children in participatory activities (for example,
Lansdown, 2001; Wyness, 2001; Keating and Janmaat, 2016). Those below voting age need
to be considered as potential participants in municipal processes. To reflect that many
participatory instruments and practices require a level of independence on the part of the
citizen, and that political and citizenship education is more extensive at secondary level in
England, this thesis will define the population of citizens as those aged 14 years or older
who are resident in an area. Whilst the non-participation of citizens is a democratic right, it
will be assumed that every citizen would engage in some way, however small, with municipal
government (giving assurance that every citizen consents to municipal government, see
Kuyper, 2017; Lafont, 2020b). The limitation of participation to municipal boundaries
inevitably excludes citizens outside these boundaries (Kambites, 2010; Barnett, 2011), but
the participation of non-local interests could be addressed through inter-local communication
(see Young, 2000, pp.205-15) or centrally facilitated resolution (see Mansbridge, 2014). In
practice, the measure of the extent of participation is likely to be an estimate given that, even
if a participatory instrument recorded participation, it would be unlikely to also record

residency and age. This measure will enable the discussion of to what extent the democratic goods that might be associated with a participatory practice are produced for the whole citizenry.

Any participatory practice may involve extensive participation (for example, Ackerman and Fishkin, 2002); however, given the relatively limited resources of parish and town councils, two practices will be considered in relation to extensive participation of democratic goods: the aggregative practice of elections, considered further in Section 3.5.2 below; and citizen participation in the public sphere. Citizen participation in the public sphere refers here to where citizens participate in municipal processes in everyday spaces and alongside routine activities (see Manbridge, 1999; Ercan and Dryzek, 2015), being in the 'the diffuse public sphere of mass media, secondary associations, and informal venues of discussion' (Fung, 2006, p.68; see also Bang and Sørensen, 1999; Gaventa, 2006), the informal part of the wider public sphere where 'our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Emirbayer and Sheller, 1999, p.155; see also Graham, 2012). Citizens within informal 'public spaces' have the authority to act within any legal (and even non-legal) bounds, with these spaces tending towards being more inclusive and engaging, 'as there are fewer rules and constraints' (Hendriks, 2006, p.501; see also Hain, 1980, pp.180-190; Cornwall, 2002b; Eliasoph, 2009). Claims to inclusiveness have to be placed alongside the caveat that, as with any form of participation, 'social and economic inequalities often mean that it is the more privileged actors in the public sphere who dominate discussion and debate' (Hendriks, 2006, p.495). The role of municipal government could be in providing 'an enabling framework of support' through giving resources and technical advice to citizens who acted autonomously within the public sphere (Pretty, 1995, p.1252; for example, Smith, 2005, pp.46-48; Rolfe, 2016); or providing routes for citizens to participate in everyday spaces (for example, Parkinson, 2012, p.15). Councillors themselves already perform a connecting role in the public sphere, as Freeman (2020, p.569) found; 'councillors report many and various unplanned, informal encounters in the course of their working weeks' with constituents 'expressing claims, raising an issue or identifying a problem, suggesting what they might like to happen' with such communication being valued (see also Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2018). Whether direct or mediated, participation in the public sphere could enable an extensive practice producing popular control.

In summary, the extent of participation is important with regard to the democratic goods produced by participatory instruments. The Democracy Mapping will include an estimate of the extent of participation in each process measured against the population of all citizens aged 14 or over. The engagement of citizens in the public sphere is a participatory practice that could produce inclusiveness and popular control, also indicated on the Democracy

Mapping (see Table 3.1 above), placing this kind of practice as more inclusive than open semi-formal or formal processes.

3.2.3   Interested and targeted participation

For Fung (2007, pp.446-447), citizen participation in municipal processes works best:

> where a handful of residents take a deep and ongoing interest in these affairs. The individuals in that small group gain the expertise necessary to comprehend the complexity of urban governance choices. They serve as a focal point for other neighbours who lack participatory inclinations to communicate their needs and interests.

Interested citizens gain skills and confidence through ongoing participation (see also Skelcher and Torfing, 2010; Baccaro, Bächtiger, and Deville, 2016) becoming better at engaging with complex policy processes, providing the convenors of processes with informed, articulate, and potentially diverse viewpoints (Kahane et al, 2013). Interested citizens may also perform elite roles such as facilitation (Escobar, 2019, p.183; Hendriks, C. 2019) and boundary spanning, with interested citizens being able to 'bring non-participants' values, wishes, and experiences to the forum and transmit back to their principals the reasons for and against those points of view' (Parkinson, 2006, p.153; see also Frug, 1993, p.297; Hendriks and Tops, 2005, p.488; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007, p.15). If the issues discussed are relevant to groups typically underrepresented in democratic processes (see Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016, pp.156) then the mobilisation of interest can be a form of targeted involvement, so producing inclusiveness. Interested citizens within open processes may also articulately advocate for the preferences of underrepresented citizens who are not present in the process, producing increased popular control.

As a counter to this view, typical patterns of inequality in participation are found in parish and town councils (Copus and Wall, 2017; see also Kambites, 2010, Willet and Cruxon, 2019), with citizens' participation depending both upon having interest and having the resources to express that interest. The capacity and skills of interested citizens underscores their difference from ordinary citizens, raising the question of which citizens are included and which not (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). Lay-stakeholders are often perceived to act out of a partisan interest for the groups they have membership of, whilst unaffiliated citizens are perceived to act out of self-interest (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001b; Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016, pp.90-96; Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2020). On this evidence, the extent that democratic goods are produced by the involvement of interested citizens has limitations.

Rather than rely upon citizen interest to motivate citizens towards open processes, an alternative is targeted involvement within closed processes. This practice could aim to produce 'a microcosm of the polity as a whole' (Johnson and Gastil, 2015, p.17). This could enable a diversity of viewpoints from across the citizenry being articulated within a participatory instrument (see Parkinson, 2006, pp.154-155; Kahane et al, 2013, pp.15-16), which may then increase both considered judgement and inclusiveness (see Young, 1997, p.230; Smith, 2009, pp.167-168; Fournier et al, 2011; Eseonu, 2022). However, involvement within closed processes still remains partly dependent upon the interest of those invited (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006, p.221; Lang, 2007, p.41) and as it is likely to exclude interested citizens, the institution of closed processes implies 'relentlessly contested political work because it prescribes who is organised in and out of a democratic innovation' (Escobar, 2019, pp.188-189; see also Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2020). Whilst potentially benefiting inclusive considered judgement, closed processes would be open to challenge on the extent to which they frustrated inclusive popular control, an argument discussed further in Section 3.3.3 below.

In summary, the interest of citizens is a resource for municipal democracy, with the involvement of lay-stakeholders and other interested citizens in open processes likely to align with a democratic municipal government. The engagement of less interested and underrepresented citizens is important, with targeted involvement – through open or closed processes - necessary to increase inclusive popular control and transparent considered judgement across all policy cycles.

3.2.4 Linking and evidencing selection

In Table 3.2 below, a Democracy Mapping shows the extent to which different kinds of participants would be present across policy cycles (in at least one stage of policy formation and implementation within those policy cycles) to align with a standard of democratic municipal government (DMG[8]). As discussed in Section 3.2.1, the participation of council staff and councillors is necessary to facilitate the production of democratic goods and the practice of targeted involvement within the municipal authority. The participation of council staff and councillors in municipal processes can act to frustrate as well as facilitate

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[8] The initialism DMG is used in this thesis where it aids formatting, being the short form of 'the standard of democratic municipal government defined by the democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, transparency, and considered judgement', and not intended as a broader concept.

participatory practice, and their involvement is far from sufficient to institute democratic municipal government (see Section 3.3.2 below).

Table 3.2   Participant selection and DMG

Less inclusive		Participant Selection				More inclusive
Council staff	Elected councillors	Professional stakeholders	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of citizen participation:		*100% of citizens participate in some way*				

Key	A practice in one / some policy cycles	A practice in most / all policy cycles	Practices that do not align with DMG

Professional stakeholders can give independent facilitation and expertise, contributing to the production of democratic goods, and the practice of targeted involvement. The use of professional stakeholders by ILPs in at least some policy cycles would align with the institution of democratic municipal government. The motivation of interested citizens, including but not limited to lay-stakeholders, to open processes can produce democratic goods. Where ILPs instituted the practice of targeted involvement across policy cycles, and instituted at least some involvement in the public sphere, this would tend towards the institution of democratic municipal government (see Section 3.2.3).

3.3   The extent of authority

This section develops and discusses the dimension of authority, first detailing an amendment to Fung's (2006) authority and power scale (see Table 3.3 below). The authority of citizens over wider public opinion is discussed as being a meaningful form of influence (see Section 3.3.1), followed by an exploration of the minimum necessary level of authority for popular control to be said to be present (see Section 3.3.2). Having discussed the need for citizens to have some influence, the discussion turns to the potential for citizens to have too much influence. This sets the provocative arguments for full citizen control made by Sherry Arnstein alongside arguments for political mediation by Christina Lafont and others (see Section 3.3.3). This consideration of authority concludes with a discussion of how participatory practices would be present in democratic municipal government and the role of the ILP (see Section 3.3.4).

Fung (2006, p.69) defines the dimension of 'authority and power' as asking the question 'how is what participants say linked to what public authorities or participants themselves do?' This dimension is, therefore, closely linked to the idea of popular control.

This dimension ranges from practices where citizens just gain 'personal benefits' by attending, through to citizens giving advice and being consulted, to citizens having 'direct authority over public decisions or resources' (Fung, 2006, p.69). One form of influence that is not included in this set of practices is influence over the public sphere, where participatory instruments are designed to inform wider public opinion. This might include: opinion polls being used to prompt public debate about 'what it is that we really want' (Chambers, 2009, p.343); a mini-public being used to prompt wider discussion, through being publicised by advocacy groups (see Lafont, 2020a, pp.148-158) and the media (see Parkinson, 2006, pp.155-157); and, the facilitation of campaigning civil networks by a municipal authority (Gyford, 1985; Fetherstone et al, 2012). Therefore, the Democracy Mapping introduces the participatory practice of influence over the public sphere (see Table 3.3 below). Given that basic freedom of speech is a feature of any minimally democratic society, this will only be indicated as a practice where a municipal process was explicitly designed to influence the public sphere.

Table 3.3   Authority of processes over decisions

Least influence	
Public Sphere	Activities directed towards public will- and opinion-forming
Personal or Civic Benefits	Citizens gain development of skills and knowledge, or fulfil civic obligations
Communicative Influence	Citizens are able to express their viewpoints to decision-makers
Advise and Consult	Citizens are consulted or otherwise are invited to give advice
Co-Governance	Citizens act alongside decision-makers within a participatory process
Direct Authority	Citizens become the decision-makers over a policy or resource
Most influence	

3.3.1   The personal and the public

Turning first to the two practices in the dimension of authority that do not have direct influence over municipal policy, this section will consider the development of personal benefits and influence over the public sphere. Regarding personal benefits, from the review of Ianniello et al (2019), some level of personal or civic benefit may be assumed for any process of citizen participation, even those that produce no other democratic goods. The Democracy Mapping will focus on where a process explicitly aims to facilitate personal or civic benefits, such as the development of skills or civic engagement. Even if a participatory instrument only gave citizens skills or confidence in engaging with municipal government and no other authority, this would contribute to the ability of other participatory instruments to

produce democratic goods, such as inclusiveness and considered judgement (see Pateman, 1970; Young, 2000).

With regard to participation that is designed to influence the public sphere, this is advocated by Christina Lafont (2020a, p.71; also 2020b; though in contrast see Fishkin, 2020) who argues 'only the long deliberative road' of broad discussion across the public sphere, in part stimulated by participatory instruments, would create the democratic goods of popular control. Whether other democratic goods of inclusiveness, considered judgement and transparency were produced would rely upon the extent to which the process aligned with those goods (see Section 3.5.3). Given this caveat, citizen participation within municipal processes that aimed to influence the public sphere through everyday communication, media, or protest, will be taken to align with democratic municipal government (see Table 3.4 below).

The participatory practices of developing personal skills or influencing the public sphere are indicated as supporting alignment with democratic municipal government if they are present in at least some policy cycles. However, these would not produce democratic goods unless there were also impactful routes of citizen participation (see Fung, 2003; Cornwall, 2008; Lafont, 2020a, pp.170-179). Therefore, the alignment of such practices with democratic municipal government is dependent upon citizens having some influence through other participatory instruments, which is where this exploration now turns.

3.3.2   The minimum of authority

Whilst it might be assumed that the presence of a participatory instrument would imply citizens having communicative influence, the least influential form of direct authority (see Table 3.3 above), this is not the case. This section will consider two ways in which influence from participants may be denied: first, preferences of citizens having no influence over councillors, aside from when citizens are given direct authority through elections; and second, the selective exclusion of citizen preferences by councillors.

Advocates of citizen participation have long raised concerns that citizens within participatory instruments may have no influence over decisions. Evidence indicates representatives typically view participatory instruments with ambivalence and scepticism (Lowndes, 2001b; Copus, 2010: Bobbio, 2019; Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019; Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2020). In the extreme case, citizens are told that they have influence, but in fact participation is purely for display, being 'used to persuade [participants] to accept decisions that have already been made' (Pateman, 1970, p.68; see also Arnstein, 1969, p.218; White, 1996).

The use of participatory instruments for display or manipulation would actively frustrate popular control, transparency and considered judgement.

Where councillors and council-officers institute participatory practices with the intention of giving citizens influence, they still act as gatekeepers over citizen participation in many situations. That councillors act as gatekeepers is inevitable, given that the expression of preferences by any single citizen will not be wholly reflected in the subsequent actions of their representative, who ideally balances often contradictory demands of democratic goods such as inclusiveness, popular control and considered judgement (see Urbinati, 2006, pp.40-48). However, councillors and council staff can also set boundaries on what is considered appropriate kinds of participation, such that citizens who do not express themselves in ways that are considered appropriate can be excluded from influence (Young, 2001; Fung, 2006; Bevir, 2010). Councillors tend to place different weight on the preferences of citizens, depending upon: the perceived legitimacy of the citizen; the alignment of citizen preferences with their own preferences; the alignment of citizen preferences with their party; and, relevance to their role in the council (Copus, 2010; Öhberg and Naurin, 2016). Rico Motos et al (2021, p.125; see also Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016) note another form of gatekeeping, where expert knowledge acts to constrain what is considered a 'reasonable' solution, and external professionals and bureaucrats:

> play a critical but unobserved role in producing the final recommendations of the process. They filter, order, and modify citizen proposals – in other words, the process is open to 'cherry-picking' through the application of expert criteria.

In a consideration of the role of listening in democratic processes, Dobson (2014, p.108) argues for a form of listening 'which resists the inclination and temptation to hear what is said through pre-existing interpretive frames, and especially those which are the result of the exercise and reproduction of power'. Such a form of listening by councillors appears unlikely to happen without a degree of self-reflection and equal respect for citizens, a matter returned to in Section 3.5.3 below. The implication for the Democracy Mapping is that the existence of communicative influence needs to be directly evidenced, and the extent to which councillors act as fair gatekeepers needs to be assessed.

Without communicative influence, citizens would have no authority through participation; therefore, to align with democratic municipal government this participatory practice should be instituted across all policy cycles. Such a standard would produce inclusive popular control and considered judgement, but is dependent upon the orientation of elites.

3.3.3 The maximum of authority

This section turns to participatory instruments that do not rely upon the mediation of councillors, placing citizens in situations of co-governance or direct authority, where councillors concede authority partly or entirely over an element of policy. Fung (2006, p.72; also Fung, 2005) argues that participatory instruments that aim to 'increase justice can only do so if they exercise direct authority over relevant decisions'. For Arnstein (1969, p.223) citizen authority is necessary across the whole policy cycle, where:

> participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which "outsiders" may change them.

This argument is predicated on the assertion that policy implemented by small groups of interested self-selected citizens or a group of citizens invited through targeted involvement, produces more democratic goods than 'the authorized set of decision makers — typically elected representatives or administrative officials — [who are] somehow deficient' (Fung, 2006, p.67; Arnstein, 1969; Goodin and Dryzek, 2005). For example, the transfer of authority might be on the basis of inclusiveness, involving citizens alongside councillors to enable greater diversity in considered judgement - a mini-public that mirrored the wider citizenry on selected criteria might be given direct authority on this basis (see Section 3.2.3). The institution of practices of co-governance or direct authority would produce democratic goods such as inclusive considered judgement, aligning with democratic municipal government.

Cautioning against the transfer of power to small groups of citizens, Lafont (2020a, p.98) argues that popular control rests upon 'the justifiability of the policies in question to those who must comply with them … and without whose cooperation many of the policies intended outcomes will not materialise' (see also Parkinson, 2006; Chambers, 2009). As a guiding principle, this thesis will follow Lafont (2020a, p.23) in noting that the principle of popular control is one of alignment between citizens and policy, such that there needs to be:

> institutions in place that facilitate an ongoing alignment between the policies to which citizens are subject and the processes of political opinion- and will-formation in which they (actively and /or passively) participate [with] effective and ongoing possibilities for citizens to shape the political process as well as to prevent and contest significant misalignments between the policies they are bound to obey and their interests, ideas and policy objectives.

Practices supporting alignment could be specific, for example, Parkinson (2006, p.171) proposes elected representatives committing to 'own and justify' small-group decisions such that they confer accountability, or the wider citizenry exerting direct control through referenda

(see also Johnson and Gastil, 2015, p.14). Alternatively, as Cornwall and Coelho (2007, p.11) point out, citizens are not passive recipients of opportunities to communicate with elites, but can turn any participatory instrument into 'spaces of possibility, in which power takes a more productive and positive form: … enabling citizens to transgress positions as passive recipients and assert their rights' (see also Button and Mattson, 1999). The more participatory instruments are instituted, the more opportunities citizens have to challenge decision-makers and seek alignment, regardless of how these instruments were constituted by councillors and council staff. The critical point is that participatory instruments exist to align preferences, including with regard to where citizens are given direct authority.

3.3.4 Linking and evidencing authority

In Table 3.4 below, a Democracy Mapping is used to show the extent to which participatory practices of authority would be ideally instituted across policy cycles (in at least one stage of policy formation and implementation within those policy cycles) to produce democratic goods, aligning with a standard of democratic municipal government. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, where practices influenced the public sphere or developed personal or civic benefits, this would produce more inclusive popular control. Where the ILP instituted instruments with the intention of influencing the public sphere or creating personal benefits, this would align with the institution of democratic municipal government.

Table 3.4   Authority of citizens and DMG

Less influence		Citizen Authority			More influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise or consult	Co-governance	Direct authority

Key	A practice in one / some policy cycles	A practice in most / all policy cycles	Practices that do not align with democratic outcomes

Discussing the minimum of authority, Section 3.3.2 concluded that communicative influence would need to be present across all policy cycles to align with democratic municipal government. With regard to influence from the ILP, this could be evidenced through the institution of practices that evidenced citizen influence, or the ILP instituting practices that gave citizens authority beyond communicative influence. For practices that gave citizens a level of direct authority (see Section 3.3.3), there would need to be practices in place enabling a level of alignment between decisions made and the wider citizenry. The institution

of practices of co-governance or direct authority in at least some policy cycles would align with democratic municipal government, but subject to practices that enabled broader popular control.

3.4   The policy cycle

This section introduces a dimension enabling consideration of the policy cycle (see Table 3.5 below), beginning with a broad discussion of this dimension before turning to *process design*, the stage of the process that gives citizens most control (see Section 3.4.1); noting how the practice of process design is in tension with inclusiveness. Section 3.4.2 sets out how citizens could participate in *defining problems*, *setting the agenda*, *defining solutions* and *indicating the solution*; with each of these stages having a different relationship with democratic goods (see Section 3.4.2). Moving to the *implementation* of policy and *review* of outcomes, the discussion follows the contribution of Boswell (2016) in setting out the importance of citizen influence over the implementation of policy decisions (see Section 3.4.3). This section concludes with a discussion of how practices of citizen influence in the policy cycle would be present for a standard of democratic municipal government, and how the influence of the ILP will be evidenced (see Section 3.4.4).

Table 3.5   Citizen influence in the policy cycle

Least control	
Review	Review the outcomes of the implementation
Implementation	Control the implementation of the indicated solution
Solution indication	Indicate preferred predefined solution for collective action
Solution definition	Define solutions that could address an issue
Agenda setting	Set the agenda and prioritise issues
Problem definition	Define the nature of the issue
Process design	Define the design of the municipal process or participatory instrument
Most control	

The shift to the mapping approach taken in this thesis allows the Democracy Mapping to accommodate analysis of the policy cycle, which is critical to understanding the production of democratic goods. The policy cycle set out in Table 3.5 reflects that the formation and implementation of policy occurs across distinct stages (see Dahl, 1989, p.107; Rochefort and Cobb, 1993; Minogue 1997); this does not suggest that these are, or should be, discrete well-ordered practices. Policy making in municipal government may involve public

discussions that are simply 'rationalisations for decisions already taken' (Bachtiger and Parkinson, 2019, p.89), being the result of non-public bargaining or opportunism (see Howlett and Mukhurjee, 2014). However, as Jenkins (1997, p.31) notes, idealised models of policy cycles may be 'useful in drawing attention to the ordering of policy activities - certain bodies at certain times are more likely to be connected with one stage of the process rather than another' (see also Smith, 2009, pp.26-27). The policy dimension here seeks to illuminate where citizens are included, or excluded, from influence over stages of the policy cycle.

Following the discussion in the previous section, it is assumed that only citizen participation with at least communicative influence would produce democratic goods aligned with democratic municipal government. Therefore, this dimension describes 'citizen influence in the policy cycle', not only where citizens might observe stages of the policy cycle. The relationship between different stages of the policy cycle, with regard to where citizens have influence and the actions of elites, is another aspect that needs to be considered with regard to democratic goods (see Boswell, Hendriks and Ercan, 2016; Knops, 2016; Bartels, Wagenaar, and Li, 2020). The analytical stage of the Democracy Mapping process accommodates this more holistic consideration of how citizen influence in the policy cycle aligns with a standard of democratic municipal government.

3.4.1   Designing the process

The highest level of control in the policy cycle is where citizens *define process design*, defining the policy cycle itself. As Bachtiger and Parkinson (2019, p.89) argue:

> she who can decide the duration and timing of an event—a referendum, a consultation process, a policy announcement, a scrutiny process—exerts a large measure of control over the substantive content of the event itself.

The practice of process design used in this thesis is related to the broader concept of 'meta-deliberation' (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011, p.1867), which may include 'whenever citizens comment on or criticize the way discussions proceed' (Holdo and Öhrn Sagrelius, 2020, p.637). However, rather than indicate any practice where citizens raised concerns about procedure as process design, the Democracy Mapping will indicate participatory practices specifically oriented towards process design (which may be described as an element of 'meta-organisation', see Jessop, 2004, p.111). This could be through citizens being consulted on the design of processes of citizen participation (for example, Hendriks, Ercan and Boswell, 2020, pp.132-4), or where a body of citizens are directly 'responsible for the 'proper functioning' of participatory bodies and respect for methods' (Gourges and Mabi,

2020, p.102; see also the 'forum of forums' in Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016, p.148); or where a body of citizens produces recommendations that are then considered by councillors or the wider citizenry (for example, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on electoral reform, Thompson, 2008, p.515). Popular control would be enabled through such processes, which would ideally facilitate the alignment of municipal policy about procedural matters with citizen preferences (see Beitz, 1989, pp.95; Landwehr, 2015, 2021). Following this principle, citizen influence over process design should be present across every policy cycle to align with democratic municipal government.

Regarding inclusiveness, scholars have raised concerns that any inequality in participation would apply even more to the practices of process design (see Christiano, 1996, pp.40-42; Holdo, 2020, pp.112-114), with evidence that the more abstract and strategic nature of process design tends to be more exclusive than where participation is focussed on concrete topics (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016, pp.146-148). Conversely, Lowndes and Paxton (2018, p.706) argue that inclusiveness demands citizens have the 'opportunities for democratic design', where 'temporary and experimental democratic forms … allow for the practical elaboration of contesting perspectives', to disrupt established processes where they were disputed (Lowndes and Paxton, 2018, p.707; see also Holdo, 2020). For both positions, the extent to which citizen influence over process design might facilitate or frustrate inclusiveness is, ultimately, related to the extent underrepresented citizens participate in this practice. This resonates with the critique of Owen and Smith (2015, p.230) with regard to the institution of meta-deliberation:

> meta-deliberation would itself have to be structured by the general presumption of priority such that those who would be disadvantaged in terms of deliberative equality by a particular arrangement of overall deliberative capacity would enjoy a degree of power,

The accompanying practice of targeted involvement, already indicated as important in Section 3.2.3 above, appears particularly critical to the link between process design and the production of democratic goods.

3.4.2   Defining problems and solutions

Turning to substantive elements of the policy cycle, there are four stages relating to the formation and decision-making on policy. It is simplest to consider these in order of increasing control, taking the stage with least control first - this is where citizens may *indicate the solution*, for example, a public vote on what the colour of wallpaper should be in a town hall committee room (after Parkinson, 2007). This practice is instituted in municipal elections where citizens have direct authority; it can also be observed in manipulative forms of public

consultations where, as Cornwall (2002b, p20) states, participatory instruments promoted as 'transformatory processes … simply serve as an elaborated form of market research, testing out and assessing potential reactions to new policy products'. Participants have greater control where they may *define a solution*, for example, where participants discuss how to make the Town Hall committee room more welcoming and suggest a painted mural rather than wallpaper. This kind of control is exercised in consultations (for example, Smith, 2005, pp.27-38) and many forms of empowered deliberation (for example, Fung and Wright, 2003a; Smith, 2005, pp.39-55; Fagotto and Fung, 2006; Parkinson, 2007; Warren and Pearse, 2008). These practices are relatively constrained, but may be particularly effective at engaging citizens' interest on concrete topics (Warren, 2002).

Where participants *set the agenda*, they have control over which problems will be considered for discussion. For example, participants in a public meeting might argue that childcare for councillors and public attendees is a more important topic for discussion than the redecoration of a committee room. Even more freedom is given to participants where they can *define problems*, such that a group of citizens might wish to discuss whether the issue with childcare was not about providing more facilities, but instead about encouraging both parents to take a more active role in parenthood (after Sayer, 1997). Smith (2005, p.110) finds 'very few innovations ... that actually increase the influence of citizens in setting the agenda' (Smith, 2009, p.26; see also Young, 2001, p.684). However, these practices are critical for allowing citizen challenge of municipal government, particularly at parish and town council level, where citizens might otherwise be unduly constrained on what topics are permitted for discussion and decision (see Eliasoph, 1997; Kambites, 2010; García-Espín, 2017; Section 2.5).

This section has set out the stages of the policy cycle, with stages ordered by extent of control, but this is not necessarily the order that they will have in any one policy cycle, nor may they be distinct. For example, Button and Mattson (1999, p.623) describe a public meeting with a constrained agenda where citizens nonetheless had control over the definition of problems within that agenda. It is also important to note that the dimensions of authority and the policy cycle are independent - each different kind of practice in the policy cycle implies a different kind of interaction with municipal policy, and not necessarily an influential one. Following the same example, Button and Mattson (1999) note how the meeting that granted citizens influence over the definition of the problem had no influence over the policy decision, which would inevitably have an impact on any production of democratic goods. The substantive stages of the policy cycle imply different forms of citizen participation. The minimal standard taken here is that citizens would have influence over at

least one stage in any one policy cycle, and would have influence over all stages across a system of municipal government (see Table 3.6 below).

3.4.3 After the fact? Control over implementation and review

The two practices set out at the top of Table 3.5, being 'review' and 'implement', describe stages in the policy cycle where the decision over the policy has already been made. For citizens to have influence at this stage may seem somewhat after the fact. However, Boswell (2016, pp.727-728) argues there is significant 'ambiguity' and 'wiggle room' in how a single municipal policy may be implemented, such that 'the drawn-out nature of the policy cycle favours powerful interests, allowing them to neutralize inconvenient concerns and issues' (see also Minogue 1997; Ganuza, Baiocchi, and Summers, 2016; Dzur, 2019). For this reason, this thesis will agree with Boswell (2016, p.730) that it is necessary to subject the 'political conflict, complexity, and uncertainty' present in the process of policy implementation to 'greater public scrutiny over these otherwise opaque matters' through 'establishing routinized or responsive institutions and practices … to mitigate the distortions that pervade will execution' (see also Hendriks, F. 2019). The practice of citizen influence over implementation across all policy cycles can help ensure that policy outcomes remain aligned to the citizen preferences that drove policy formation.

With regard to the practice of review, this practice would enable citizens to hold decision-makers to account, and 'increase trust that councils were interested and listening to what they had to say' (McIntyre and Halsall, 2011, p280). The analysis of Minogue (1997, p.21) cautions that politicians and administrators may not want to be held to account for the outcomes of policy implementation that 'at the very least are always likely to have unintended consequences'. Within parish and town councils a notable process of review is the elections to municipal council, an opportunity for councillors to be held to account, though this relies upon elections being contested. The ability of citizens to have at least communicative influence in the process of policy implementation and review across policy cycles would act to increase the alignment of future policy with the preferences of citizens, producing popular control.

3.3.4 Linking and evidencing the policy cycle

In Table 3.6 below, the Democracy Mapping shows citizen influence at different stages of the policy cycle, and the minimum for the standard of democratic municipal government defined in this thesis to be met. As discussed above, the policy cycle is critical to the democratic good of popular control, with citizen influence over process design an important

practice to enable the shaping of the policy cycle (see Section 3.4.1). Where the ILP institutes specific practices to incorporate citizen preferences, or directly involve citizens, within the design of processes then this would be indicated as aligning with the institution of democratic municipal government, particularly where accompanied by targeted involvement.

Table 3.6   Citizen influence in the policy cycle and DMG

Less control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				More control
Review and evaluate	**Implementation**	Indicate solution	**Define solutions**	**Set the agenda**	**Define problems**	**Design process**

Key	A practice in one / some policy cycles	**A practice in most / all policy cycles**	**Practices that do not align with democratic outcomes**	

Moving to citizen control over solutions and the agenda, whilst the stage of citizen influence might vary across different processes, a minimum of communicative influence over some element of the substance of policy is necessary for popular control, with influence over the agenda and defining problems giving more popular control (see Section 3.4.2). Citizen influence over policy implementation and review is argued to be necessary across most or all policy cycles to align with producing popular control (see Section 3.4.3). Where the ILP implemented specific practices, such as a citizens' forum to discuss the municipal agenda or a meeting to review a policy process, this would be a stronger alignment with democratic municipal government than a general receptiveness to citizen preferences.

3.5   Modes of communication

This section begins by setting out three modifications to the mode of communication scale of Fung (2006): shifting the emphasis of this dimension towards the citizen; highlighting the practice of voting; and, including kinds of communication that would frustrate the production of democratic goods (see Table 3.7 below). The discussion then turns to the least intensive forms of communication, considering the *observation* of processes, the *expression and seeking of preferences*, and the *development of preferences* without needing to find agreement (see Section 3.5.1). *T*he *aggregation* of preferences without discussion and *voting* are then considered, including how these practices may produce inclusive popular control (see Section 3.5.2). Moving to forms of communication that seek to find agreement, there is a discussion of *deliberation and argument*, using the typologies of Saretzki (2009), and Rucht (2012), to inform where inclusive considered judgement may be facilitated or frustrated (see Section 3.5.3). The practice to *pressure or cajole* is argued here to not align

with the production of democratic goods. This section concludes with a discussion of how practices of citizen communication would be present for a standard of democratic municipal government and how the influence of the ILP will be evidenced (see Section 3.5.4).

Table 3.7   The mode of communication and decision-making

Least intense communication	
Observe or Monitor	Being present in some form or accessing summaries of decisions
Express or Seek Preferences	Making statements or seeking explanations
Develop Preferences	Engaging in discussion and justification of preferences
Aggregate and Vote	Elections or summarising consultation responses
Pressure or Cajole	Rely on manipulation or non-communicative force
Deliberate or Argue	Deliberative or otherwise equitably argue towards a decision
Most intense communication	

Three modifications are made from the mode of communication and decision-making dimension developed by Fung (2006), as part of the Democracy Cube (see Figure 3.1). First, in Fung's (2006) definition, this dimension ranges from where a citizen might 'listen as spectator' to where a bureaucrat might 'deploy technique and expertise' to make municipal policy (see Figure 3.1). In this section, a modification introduced by Elstub and Escobar (2019b) is incorporated, orienting the scale around citizen communication, with the practice of bureaucratic decision making being exchanged with the practice of the citizen as a monitor or observer (Elstub and Escobar, 2019b, pp.20-21). This reflects that monitoring of 'the quality of ongoing action and implementation' (Fung, 2003, pp.346-347) produces transparency and enables popular control.

Second, where a citizen may 'express preferences' is defined by Fung as where decision-makers 'commit to no more than receiving the testimony of participants and considering their views in their own subsequent deliberations' (Fung, 2006, p.66). The expression of preferences includes verbal expression as well as petitions and protests. However, the ability of citizens to seek the preferences of decision-makers, and the reasoning underpinning those preferences, is also important for transparency and considered judgement (see Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Lafont, 2020a). This might be through some form of statutory right to challenge, or the public having the right to ask questions of decision-makers. The scale is accordingly amended to the practice where citizens may 'Express or Seek Preferences'.

Third, Fung (2006) conflates bargaining with the aggregation of preferences (typically through voting). This thesis will follow Elstub and Escobar (2019b, p.19; see also Ulbert and Risse, 2005) in treating these forms of communication as distinct. Whilst bargaining typically involves argument (Plotke, 1997, p.33), it is defined as communication about things other than the substance of policy and does not produce or reflect considered judgement about that policy. Bargaining does not necessarily harm inclusive popular control (see Cohen, 1997, p.68; Landwehr and Holzinger, 2010; Warntjen, 2010), but even fair cooperative bargaining might not produce democratic goods (see Beitz, 1989, pp.78-84; Saretzki, 2009), As a result, apart from where bargaining involves unequal pressure (see Section 3.5.3 below), or where it includes discussion about substantive issues (therefore, being a form of argument), it is treated as a neutral practice within the Democracy Mapping and not indicated.

In summary, the modifications set out here reflect a shift to the discontinuous approach and the kinds of communication that will facilitate or frustrate the production of democratic goods. This section now turns to explore these practices of communication in more detail.

3.5.1 Observing, speaking and reflecting

The transparency of decision-making processes is necessary for citizens to be able to make considered judgements with regard to municipal policy (see Parkinson, 2006, p.169; Smith, 2009, pp.12-26) and to be aware of when municipal policy might not align with their own preferences. The minimum of transparency will be taken as a 'transparency in rationale — in procedures, information, reasons, and the facts on which the reasons are based' (Mansbridge, 2009, p.386), such that citizens may see the substance of decisions and of the justification for decisions. A transparency in rationale has been found to produce the same democratic goods compared to 'fishbowl transparency' - where processes are entirely open to public scrutiny (De Fine Licht et al, 2014, p.127; see also Rico Motos et al, 2021, pp.125-127). This form of transparency acknowledges the tension between the nuanced discussion and bargaining that solves problems within closed small group discussions and how these discussions may be (mis)interpreted in the public sphere (Chambers, 2004; see also Niemeyer, 2004; Briggs, 2008; Ayres, 2017). However, whilst acknowledging this tension, this thesis will take the position that transparency in rationale across policy cycles is required to produce the democratic good of transparency, upon which popular control is dependent.

Even if citizens were able to observe and monitor municipal policy decisions, this would not have an impact unless citizens could challenge the basis upon which those decisions were

made. As Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.322) evidence, an issue for those receiving communication at parish and town council scale was that citizens:

> often experienced communication as only being one way, effectively meaning that they register their councillors as telling the public what they were doing and what was going to happen rather than inviting feedback or asking what the community wanted to happen.

The practice of citizens being able to express their own preferences, and being able to seek the reasons for decisions, is taken to align with democratic municipal government when present at some stage across all policy cycles.

The most intense form of non-decision-making practice is where citizens 'Develop Preferences', described by Fung (2006, p.69) as discussions 'organized in ways that allow participants to explore, develop, and perhaps transform their preferences and perspectives'. Escobar (2019, p.186) argues that this form of dialogue:

> stimulates a divergent flow of communication where the conversation can take many directions and conclude with a polyphonic representation of diverse voices, issues and perspectives, without resolution.

Escobar argues this kind of communication has an important role in allowing the exploration of an issue whilst removing an incentive for participants to cajole or pressure to shift a decision towards their position (see also Hendriks, 2009). Therefore, as a practice, the development of preferences is aligned to inclusiveness and considered judgement, and would be expected to contribute to democratic goods if present across at least some policy cycles.

3.5.2 Counting viewpoints

Turning to forms of communication that aim towards reaching a decision or agreement, the first to consider is aggregative forms of decision-making, including voting. Due to the equitable and extensive nature of voting, it is viewed by some as an essential process for citizens to indicate their consent to representation, or legitimise the substance of policy decisions (Saward, 2001; Urbinati, 2014; see Section 3.3.2). With every citizen's vote counting equally, regardless of their rhetorical ability or social standing, this enables inclusiveness, with citizens being able to equitably contest who should be in administration (Urbinati, 2006, pp26-28); however, voting does not address the strength of minority preferences or the kinds of inequalities not related to equality within the procedure itself (Dahl, 1989; Beitz, 1996, pp.7-9), placing limits on this inclusiveness. Elections and referenda are extensive participatory events that can provide a stimulus for citizens to reflect

on, and express, opinions, and consider the political opinions of other citizens and representatives Budge, 1996; Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Rummens, 2012; Gerring et al, 2015; Willett and Cruxon, 2019), so aiding considered judgement. Elections also confer legitimacy onto councillors, through whom citizens exercise a level of popular control (see Section 2.3). Therefore, the participatory practice of voting is particularly impactful with regard to democratic goods, partly because of the kind of practice it is, and partly because it typically involves extensive participation (see Section 3.2).

The aggregation of viewpoints may be used in other processes, such as where the main themes from consultations are aggregated into recommendations. Here, equality within the process is less assured, but such practice enables preferences to be taken into account in forming decisions, where they would otherwise not be included. As Mansbridge (1999, p.226), notes, equitable discussions aiming for agreement 'may legitimately conclude correctly that the interests of the participants are fundamentally in conflict' such that a decision-making process may reasonably conclude in 'voting, subject to some form of majority rule' (see also Cohen, 1989, p.33). Forms of intensive communication would be a preferred practice with regard to considered judgement, but aggregation would enable a level of inclusive popular control where a decision was needed. Voting and other aggregative practices are not necessarily present across all policy cycles, but their distinct contribution to democratic goods means that they should be present in at least some policy cycles.

3.5.3   Argument, conflict and cooperation

This section considers the most intense forms of communication in this dimension (see Table 3.7 above), being around forms of dialog that seek to find a common position, enabling agreement or at least a decision to be made. The practice of deliberation will be considered first, before broadening the discussion to other forms of equitable and respectful argument found to align with democratic municipal government. Finally, this section will turn to forms of dialogue that frustrate the production of democratic goods.

Deliberation is a practice of equitable and cooperative argument that seeks to come to mutual agreement, though there is considerable disagreement about the place of reason, consensus, and formality in this practice (see Cohen, 1986; Young, 2000; Florida, 2017; Kuyper, 2017; Bachtiger and Parkinson, 2019). Deliberation is closely connected to the outcome of considered judgement, but may also be argued to be necessary for inclusive popular control, if alignment between citizens and the policies they are subject to requires 'that citizens take part in a process aimed at producing laws that are mutually justifiable to all citizens' (Thompson, 2008, p.504; see also Cohen, 1989; Kuyper, 2018; Lafont, 2020a,

p.162). Fung (2006, p.69) defines the practice of deliberation as an approach of 'negotiation and consensus building' where participants aim toward 'the emergence of principled agreement, the clarification of persisting disagreements, and the discovery of new options that better advance what participants value'. Such an ideal relies on expectations of equitable behaviour and a context encouraging respectful political talk, which may need to be facilitated, enabling participants to take a 'deliberative stance' towards each other (Owen and Smith, 2015, p.228; see also Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003; Ryfe, 2005; Mutz, 2006, pp.137-150; Bachtiger and Hangartner, 2010). Deliberation is widely argued to be strongly associated with the production of democratic goods, but given the breadth of conceptions about this practice, it will be placed here in a wider context.

Widening out from the practice of deliberation, the typology of Saretzki (2009, p.163) is useful in exploring two more adversarial kinds of equitable communication: 'competitive', being a debate where participants give reasons in favour of existing positions but are not open to new options; and 'confrontational', being a dispute where participants assert their position and give reasons for it but are not open to changing position. In a study of parish councils, Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.319) found councillors and lay-stakeholders self-censored in their communications, believing that to present an alternative view would create 'feelings of hostility and animosity, which are not conducive to harmonious community relations' (see also Anckar, 1999; Ulbig and Funk, 1999; Moore and Recker, 2015). The risk of such conflict avoidance is an apparent consensus seemingly suited to cooperative deliberation but that is a product of self-censorship and community pressure (see Section 2.5). Here, more adversarial forms might better express community difference and lead to more inclusive considered judgement (Karpowitz and Mansbridge, 2005; Hendriks, 2009; Lowndes and Paxton, 2018). The kind of argument appropriate to different situations would be shaped by context; however, given the close connection with a range of democratic goods, the Democracy Mapping places respectful equitable argument involving citizens (whether deliberative, competitive, or confrontational) as a practice that should be present across most, if not all, policy cycles.

This section now turns to forms of communication that, if they were present, would appear to actively frustrate the production of democratic goods. Dieter Rucht (2012, p.123) developed a typology of communication based upon political equality and whether those communicating use force of reason or another form of power. Two forms of communication are of interest here. The first is where a participant uses self-interested rhetoric and manipulation to gain

the agreement of others, which can be described as to "cajole".[9] The second is "pressure", where a participant in a process uses their power over others to force them to agree or submit. Inequalities in the ability to persuade and the use of power appear inescapable (see Beitz, 1989, p.14; Hendriks, 2009), so of interest to the Democracy Mapping analysis is where these practices refer to the intentional use of cajoling and pressure. Although this kind of practice would harm inclusiveness and considered judgement, the democratic goods produced by a practice such as cajoling could be viewed as dependent 'on the relation of an individual act to the larger context in which it takes place' (Mansbridge et al, 2012, p.18). Following this argument, Holdo (2020, p.112) argues acts that 'do not meet the basic norm of mutual respect' nonetheless force issues onto the agenda in a way that may enable democratic goods in the long term - a 'countervailing deviation' (Estlund, 2002, p.11; also Hendriks, 2009). For Fung (2005, p.416), even where systemic change was required to enable greater political equality, movements and processes would ideally 'maintain in thought and action the commitment to higher political ideals despite the widespread violation of those norms', carrying a culture of equality and respect (see also Mendonca and Ercan, 2015; Owen and Smith, 2015). The Democracy Mapping analysis will follow this latter argument, with the intention to 'pressure or cajole' being a practice not aligned with democratic municipal government, regardless of circumstance.

3.5.4   Linking and evidencing communication

In Table 3.8 below, a Democracy Mapping is used to show the extent to which modes of communication would be ideally instituted across policy cycles (in at least one stage of a policy cycle) to produce democratic goods, aligning with a standard of democratic municipal government. As discussed in Section 3.5.1, the least intensive forms of communication remain necessary across policy cycles to produce democratic goods. Observation is the counterpart to the democratic good of transparency and enables citizens to reflect upon policy formation and implementation, as well as to challenge policy they do not agree with. Where an ILP influenced the transparency of processes, and in particular the transparency in rationale, across policy cycles, this would align with democratic municipal government. The institution by an ILP of participatory instruments or practices that enabled citizens to

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[9] Rucht (2012) uses the term 'agitory persuasion' with reference to the German term 'überreden', where one person convinces another of a course of action through pressure without the other person being aware of this pressure. However, 'agitory persuasion' is a relatively obscure term and its use may be unclear if not contrasted with more equitable forms of persuasion, such as 'authentic persuasion' (Saretzki, 2009, p.28). For clarity an alternate translation of 'überreden', "cajole", is used in this thesis.

express preferences, or seek the preferences of councillors and council staff, would enable inclusive popular control, and would be present across policy cycles to align with the institution of democratic municipal government.

Table 3.8   The mode of communication and decision-making and DMG

Less intense		Citizens and Communication			More intense
Observe or monitor	**Express / seek preferences**	Develop preferences	Aggregate preferences	**Pressure or Cajole**	**Deliberate or Argue**

Key	A practice in some policy cycles	A practice in most / all policy cycles	Practices that do not align with democratic outcomes

The development of preferences without reaching agreement, and the practice of aggregation (including voting), are not necessarily present across policy cycles, but can contribute to the production of democratic goods (see Section 3.5.2). Where these practices were instituted by an ILP across relevant policy cycles, such as to provide an extensive ratification of a small group discussion (see Section 3.3.3), then this would align with the institution of democratic municipal government.

Cooperative deliberation between participants is distinct from practices of adversarial confrontation, but each has a role in producing inclusive popular control and transparent considered judgement (see Section 3.5.3). Where there is evidence that an ILP has instituted practices enabling equitable and respectful argument, such as through facilitated discussions, then this would align with the institution of democratic municipal government. Conversely, if there were indications that the ILP engaged in, or encouraged, practices of inequitable pressure and cajoling, then this would be taken to actively frustrate the institution of democratic municipal government.

3.6 Democracy Mapping the municipality

Table 3.9 below collates the Democracy Mapping for the four dimensions into one Democracy Mapping for democratic municipal government. This sets out to what extent participatory practices should be in place across all policy cycles in a municipal authority to align with the production of the minimal democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, transparency, and considered judgement (see Section 3.1.2). The previous four sections have set out a range of evidence and discussion from the literature. Whilst this thesis does not agree with Bishop and Davis (2002) that democratic goods are wholly attached to the particular context of a process, the discussion of literature has evidenced that, first, links between participatory practices and democratic goods depend upon the relationship with other participatory practices and are influenced by context, and second, there are considerable differences within the literature as to the link between participatory practices and democratic goods.

Table 3.9   A Democracy Mapping for democratic municipal government

Less inclusive		Participant Selection				More inclusive
Council staff	Elected councillors	Professional stakeholders	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of citizen participation:		*100% of citizens participate in some way*				
Less influence		Citizen Authority				More influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise or consult		Co-governance	Direct authority
Less control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				More control
Review and evaluate	Implementation	Indicate solution	Define solutions	Set the agenda	Define problems	Design process
Less intense		Citizens and Communication				More intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate preferences	Pressure or Cajole		Deliberate or Argue

Key	A practice in one / some policy cycles	A practice in most / all policy cycles	Practices that do not align with democratic outcomes	

Similar to the use of the Democracy Cube (see Section 3.1.1), the Democracy Mapping enables a relatively simple visual map of citizen participation, but also aims to structure the process of analysis, exploring how different practices are used. To an extent, the Democracy Mapping illustrates that the more participatory practices instituted, and the more diverse those participatory practices, the more democratic the locality. Such a position aligns with scholars in the agonistic tradition arguing 'the larger the number of these public spaces, the

greater the 'democratic resourcefulness' of liberal society' (Cini and Felicetti, 2018, p.164; see also Lowndes and Paxton, 2018). However, nuance is required in interpreting how participatory practices, participatory instruments, and municipal processes combine across municipal government. The Democracy Mapping presented above is based upon the extent to which participatory practices would produce the democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control and transparency and considered judgement – simply adding more participatory practices does not necessarily produce more goods. A system of municipal government that instituted participatory practices aligned, at a minimum, with the Democracy Mapping set out in Table 3.9 above would be expected to be more democratic than one that did not, but the holistic analysis with regard to production of democratic goods would necessarily consider how these practices combined and were placed in relation to each other.

As discussed in Section 3.1.3, a system of municipal government does not neatly align individual policy cycles with participatory instruments, nor do participatory instruments align with the broad processes of the municipal administration. In order to establish whether a system of municipal government aligns with the standard of democratic municipal government set out if this thesis, a Democracy Mapping of each municipal process within a system of municipal government will need to be carried out. These will then be collated and a broad view taken, across all policy cycles, with regard to the extent to which ILPs instituted and sustained participatory practices that aligned with this standard of democratic municipal government.

3.7   Conclusion

This chapter began with a question of how to evaluate the impact of localist ILPs upon municipal government, and what standard of municipal government would guide such an evaluation. Taking Archon Fung's Democracy Cube as an appropriate starting point, the Democracy Cube was shown to involve several distinct stages of analysis: the linking of practices to democratic goods, the mapping of policy processes, and a comparative analysis with regard to democratic goods. The review of literature around the Democracy Cube noted a number of adaptations and critiques that were taken forward, the first of these being a shift in the democratic goods being used as the basis for a normative analysis. The democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, transparency and considered judgement, proposed by Graham Smith, are well aligned to the dimensions of participant selection, authority and the mode of communication, with a new dimension added of citizen influence over the policy cycle. A shift to a more nuanced discontinuous approach, along with an orientation towards citizen participation, resulted in the Democracy Mapping set out here. This approach allows for the evaluation of citizen participation across municipal government, including the comparison of different cases, and exploring the impact of ILPs with regard to a minimum democratic standard. The Democracy Mapping is an innovation that will enable this thesis to evidence the main research question.

This chapter has worked through the dimensions of the Democracy Mapping to explore the links between participatory practices and democratic goods. A range of participatory practices align with these goods, from across the Mapping, highlighting that participatory practices are necessarily broad and diverse to meet a democratic standard. The benefits of some participatory practices are evident regardless of policy cycle and context, such as the targeted involvement of underrepresented citizens to produce a more inclusive municipal democracy. The benefits of other practices are more conditional, such as giving a small group of citizens direct authority over a stage of the policy cycle, which would produce considered judgement but imply that a practice enabling popular control was in place at another stage. These considerations are taken into account in the analytical process of the Democracy Mapping, which forms an important part of the methodological approach of this thesis, the subject of the next Chapter.

Chapter 4.   Research Methodology

So what are you hearing? What's behind your questions, are you forming a perspective? (Independents for Frome Councillor).

This chapter sets out the approach to the research undertaken as part of this thesis.

Evidence gathered from two case studies will enable answers to the main research question:

Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?

The previous two chapters have set out answers to the first three research sub-questions with a discussion of theory and existing empirical evidence within the literature:

1. What constitutes an ILP in the context of English municipal government?

2. What is an appropriate standard of *democratic* municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?

3. How can the impact of an ILP be evaluated across a system of municipal government?

The empirical research undertaken in this thesis will need to directly inform the population of the Democracy Mapping, so answering the fourth research sub-question:

4. Do ILPs institute or sustain practices aligned with democratic municipal government

The research also needs to evidence the fifth research sub-question, an exploratory but important question for the research to address:

5. How do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government?

This chapter starts by discussing the exploratory nature of the research programme set out in this thesis, which was necessarily iterative given the sparse nature of prior evidence and literature in this area. The use of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) methodology of realistic evaluation is set out in Section 4.1, which provides a broad theoretical framework within which this thesis rests. After noting how the Democracy Mapping approach implies a case study method, the selection of case studies is then discussed in Section 4.2. Selecting for localist ILPs in administration that were founded relatively recently, and for municipal authorities that were broadly comparable, led to the selection of the administration of Frome Town Council by Independents for Frome, and the administration of Saffron Walden Town Council by Residents for Uttlesford. These are two localist ILPs that have a distinct history and aims, but with similar levels of resources at their disposal.

The different kinds of evidence used within the research programme is set out in Section 4.3, with desk-based research being the primary evidence base for the Democracy Mapping, interviews with councillors and council staff the primary evidence base with regard to the role

of ILP and councillors in shaping the nature of processes (see Section 4.4), and observations of council and public meetings contributed to the understanding of these specific processes alongside broader insight into the case studies gained through research visits (see Section 4.5). An overview of the evidence used for the mapping of participatory practices present in municipal processes, and evidence for the broader analysis, is then summarised in Section 4.6.

4.1   Messy interventions and realist evaluation

The research programme set out in this thesis was developed within the overarching framework of Pawson and Tilley's (1997, p.19) 'realist evaluation', which, 'seeks to discover what it is about programmes that works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and why'. For this research programme, this thesis takes a localist ILP to be an organisation that may change practices in municipal government to produce different outcomes (see Elder-Vass, 2007). In the language of realist evaluation, it is conceived of as an intervention where the outcomes are evaluated against a standard of democratic municipal government, understanding that even if a localist ILP administration tended to make municipal government more democratic, whether this occurs would depend upon context and individual difference. This research approach was primarily chosen for its appreciation of social complexity, whilst asserting that the impact of interventions may be generalised beyond context.

This thesis aims to explore the role of ILPs in initiating and instituting processes of citizen participation (which are typically innovations in the context of parish and town councils); however, rival explanations exist for what might produce a situation of democratic municipal government (Newman, 2014; Stoker, 2018). From Pawson and Tilley (1997; see also Yin, 2003, p.113), mechanisms that would influence the institution of democratic municipal government include:

- the impact of individual characteristics and beliefs around participation, interpersonal relationships, institutional context, and wider social context (see also Bakker et al, 2012; Heinelt, 2013);

- how individual members of the localist ILP engage with, and understand, the role of the localist ILP (see also Angenendt, 2018);

- the interactions between the localist ILP, members, town staff, and wider networks, including the process of change itself.

These factors may influence changes in a system of municipal government, with multiple mechanisms shaping the outcomes of the interaction between localist ILP and municipal government with regard to the institution of participatory practices (see Talpin, 2019).

The research programme set out in this thesis is an exploratory case study (Yin, 2003; Pawson and Tilley, 1997, pp.86-88) that aims to progress knowledge within an area where very little evidence is present in the literature. Case studies have formed a bedrock of innovative shifts in democratic theory and the understanding of municipal government (for example, Dahl 2005, Polsby 1963), with evidence particularly useful at the scale of local government (for example, Hampton 1970, Copus 2003). Due to the limited number of ILPs within England, particularly where they are actually in administration, case studies are the main body of evidence within the literature (for example, Grant, 1977; Berry, 2008; Burnett and Nunes, 2021). Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach is an iterative one based upon multiple case-studies, shifting between theory and empirical evidence to understand the mechanisms and context present, revisiting case-studies to better test hypothesised generalisations. Such an approach aligns with that argued for by Ryan (2019, p.563) with regard to the evaluation of democratic innovations, where comparative studies covering multiple cases have the 'potential to eliminate potential causal factors and remove redundant determinants in our explanations'. The research programme presented in this thesis is only an exploratory starting point towards such a generalisation.

The movement between theory and empirical evidence occurred around and subsequent to the research visits, with this process broadly set out in Table 4.1 below. This thesis was initially oriented around the specific model of Empowered Participatory Governance (Fung and Wright, 2003a), exploring whether councillors could be considered as participants and facilitators, before gradually shifting to the framework of the Democracy Cube (Fung, 2006) as a more appropriate framework for understanding the activity of ILPs in municipal government and their potential contribution to democratic goods.

Table 4.1   Broad outline of the research programme

Stage of research cycle	Period of research programme
Theory and hypothesis development	2014 – 2017
Observations and interviews (first case study visit)	Spring 2018
Evaluation of fit between hypothesis and observation	Summer - Autumn 2018
Revision of theory and hypotheses	Autumn 2018 - Spring 2019
Observations and interviews (second case study visit)	Spring 2019
Evaluation of fit between hypothesis and observation	Summer 2019 – 2021
Revision of theory and hypotheses	2022 – 2023

This thesis aims to answer whether ILPs institute democratic municipal government at the scale of parish and town councils. The broader theoretical framework of realist evaluation places boundaries on what might be claimed from the research undertaken in this thesis. This thesis will not establish whether all ILPs would institute democratic municipal government in all parish and town councils, nor all the factors that would enable this to occur. However, it will better define the boundaries of what may be wholly subject to 'local circumstances' (Grant, 1971, p.37) and what may be more generally known about the impact of these parties.

4.2 Selection of Case Studies

Both case studies in this research comprise the localist ILP and municipal authority together, with a focus upon the institution of participatory practices by municipal processes. The role of the ILP, and the influence of individual ILP councillors and council staff, with regard to the institution of participatory practices is the central area of interest. Whilst a localist ILP could influence democratic processes from the point at which it stands candidates (see Section 2.2), this research will concentrate on cases where localist ILPs were in administration.

With national level statistics for parish and town council elections not available, ILPs in administration in parish and town councils were identified through an internet search of 'independent', 'party', 'parish council' and 'town council'; where those that had broad aims with regard to municipal policy and claimed to represent the whole locality identified as localist ILPs (see Section 2.2). This process generated a long-list of eleven localist ILPs in administration. Four of these cases were excluded due to those localist ILPs only gaining power in 2017 and the period of study not covering a whole administrative cycle, with a remaining case excluded as it was not clear to what extent it was an ILP as opposed to unaffiliated independents. The remaining six cases are set out in Table 4.2 below alongside how they vary by key characteristics. As the identification of these cases relied upon an internet search, this is likely to be a sub-section of all possible cases in England that would have met the broad criteria for study.

Table 4.2   Short-list of potential case-study sites

ILP	Standing	Founded	Elected	Background	Precept*
Independents for Frome	Single	2011	2011	Localist ILP	1,268,273
Alderly Edge First	Single	2015	2015	Localist ILP	185,400
Buckfastleigh Independent Group	Single	2015	2015	Protest group	136,194
Loughton Residents Association	Multiple	1980	2004	Interest group	665,000
Devizes Guardians	Multiple	2002	2013	Protest group	889,834
Residents for Uttlesford	Multiple	2014	2015	Protest group	1,050,643

*amount of household tax in 2019/20 going to the council; parish and town councils gain some additional income from other sources, though a minor proportion of the council budget.

The first decision made was to select those ILPs that had been founded within the last two electoral cycles. This was a pragmatic choice, as choosing an ILP that was relatively recently founded increased the likelihood of being able to evidence the development of the ILP. Loughton Residents Association had been active as an ILP for over thirty years and in administration for well over a decade; Devizes Guardians had been active as an ILP for over

twenty years, though it was only in its second cycle of administration. Their presence over a long time-frame would have introduced considerable uncertainty about the origin of participatory practices. Although the longevity of a localist ILP has been evidenced to strongly impact upon the character of an ILP (see Grant, 1971, pp.76-77; Boogers and Voerman, 2010), within this research programme it was decided not to explore this factor.

The research on parish and town councils evidenced that the budget of a council had a critical impact upon the activities that council could undertake (see Section 2.3), which inevitably has implications for the extent to which participatory practices could be initiated and sustained (see Section 2.4). The extent to which a localist ILP administration of a smaller local council such as Alderly Edge and Buckfastleigh could institute participatory practices is an interesting question. However, were participatory practices not to be found as instituted in either case, it would not be clear if this were simply a question of resources, or related to the ILP itself. Given the potential for greater observable changes to be carried out with a larger budget, the choice was made to select the ILP administration of Frome Town Council and Saffron Walden Town Council. These were two cases that were, therefore, similar with regard to longevity and budget.

Selecting the case of Frome presents a potential challenge in that this appears to be an exceptional case. The case of 'Independents for Frome' (IfF) and Frome Town Council has been publicised through national media (for example, Harris, 2015) and through the work of a founding member, Peter Macfadyen (2014). Macfadyen (2014, p.3) argues IfF is 'attempting to create a new, inclusive democracy, starting from the grassroots up', advocating ILPs being a vehicle of transformation to create a municipal government. Yet, the exceptionality of this case also presents an opportunity, given that should this research programme find that IfF had not, in fact, made municipal government more democratic, in a reasonable definition of that term, this would be a present a stronger case against the hypothesis that ILPs institute a democratic form of municipal government. The main problem with such a case selection is that it reflects an approach within the literature that places undue focus upon exceptional practice in democratic innovations, whilst neglecting the study of cases that would better inform the boundaries of where change might occur (Spada and Ryan, 2017). The case of Residents for Uttlesford (R4U), therefore, presents a good comparison. R4U does not appear to align with the organising model proposed by Macfadyen (2014) and is distinct in having a background as a protest group against local development, and standing candidates to multiple authorities. Both ILPs are exceptional in the sense that they have succeeded in gaining power, where many ILPs fail after a relatively short period (see Section 2.1), but they are two contrasting cases.

Prior to the main research programme, a pilot study at Stocksbridge Town council, selected for convenience, was carried out. This enabled the development of the research methodology alongside of gaining knowledge about the research context. The pilot study involved 3 interviews with councillors, 1 interview with a member of staff, and an observation of a Full Council meeting. An interview with a NALC policy officer supported understanding of the wider policy context and focus of the sector. Prior to the research visits to Saffron Walden and Frome, key founders of each ILP were identified through desk-based research and conversations carried out over Skype. This initial contact facilitated a better understanding of the research context, and the purpose of the research to be communicated and discussed with a leading figure in each ILP. The next sections will set out how evidence was gained in the research programme to complete the Democracy Mapping and analysis presented in the following chapters.

4.3   Desk-based research

Desk-based research provides an important body of evidence for the Democracy Mapping in this thesis and is the foundation for several studies using the Democracy Cube (for example: Rondinella, Segre and Zola, 2017; van Maasakkers, Oh and Knox, 2020). Municipal policy making processes are required to be open to public scrutiny, with public records of these processes being contemporary with processes and largely reliable. As Thies (2002) notes, the availability of documentation depends upon: the ability of the researcher to obtain them; the motivations of those creating and storing documents; and, the happenstance of what is preserved and what is not. The kind and extent of documentary evidence varied across the two cases (see Table 4.3 below). The most important records were minutes and reports held by the two town councils. The transparency of council decision-making is a priority of sector bodies and Government legislation, with guidance stating that for parish and town councils there should be a written record that includes:

- The decision taken and the date the decision was taken;
- the reason/s for the decision;
- any alternative options considered and rejected;
- and any other background documents.
  (DCLG, 2014; see also NALC, 2017, pp25-27)

The information around decisions is held in minutes, along with reports submitted for the consideration of councillors on matters to be discussed. Minutes were contemporary to the events of interest and intended (although some editorialising is to be expected) to be an

objective and public account. However, the detail of meetings that was recorded in minutes varied, changing depending upon the recording Clerk, and what points were put on record.

The website of Frome Town Council held a near complete record of agenda items, minutes and reports presented to council for all public meetings subsequent to November 2012, providing an excellent written record of the processes of the council. Staff at Frome Town Council kindly supplied minutes of Full-Council meetings for the period from 2009 to November 2012, enabling analysis of the period prior to and through ILP administration. The website of Saffron Walden Town Council did not have such an extensive archive of documentary materials, holding minutes of council meetings online from 2016 and relatively few reports. However, available online were audio recordings of public Saffron Walden Town Council meetings from August 2016 through to 2020, which provided a rich source of evidence around the formal council meetings and case context. Staff kindly supplied minutes of the Full Council meetings for 2014 and 2015, enabling the analysis of the period prior to and into the R4U administration. Minutes and recordings (where available) were used for analysis of levels of public participation in council meetings. Minutes and reports were used to gain information on processes of citizen participation, along with gaining a range of contextual information to enable understanding of the case studies. Public attendance was recorded for Frome Town Council in the minutes, but not typically for Saffron Walden Town Council meetings; the audio recordings allowed for an evaluation of active public participation at the Saffron Walden Town Council meetings before and through the period of the first R4U administration and into the start of the second R4U administration.

Table 4.3   Documentary evidence available*

Source	Location
Frome Town Council Full Council minutes September 2009 to September 2012. All meeting minutes and attached Council reports September 2012 to December 2019	Town council website
Saffron Walden Town Council Full Council minutes January 2014 to December 2015. All meeting minutes January 2016 to December 2019. Audio recordings of meetings from August 2016 to December 2019.	Town council website
Archives of Town council, ILP websites, ILP social media posts, from 2014 to December 2019	Archive.org, Facebook
Archives of local newspapers: 'Frome Times' from 2010; 'Frome and Somerset Standard' from 2010; 'Saffron Walden Reporter' from 2014	Lexis Nexis, Pagesuite
External reports and other publications, for example, consultant reports, independent authors	Various

*This material was consulted depending on the relevance to the research questions, focussing particularly upon processes of citizen participation

Both town council websites held details of staff employed by the town council. Searches of each website on Archive.org enabled the tracking of staffing levels and roles prior to and through the period of ILP administration. This was combined with the use of minutes and recruitment materials, where available, to clarify changes in staffing and roles. Both Town council websites held records and news items that related to participatory practices. Online searches were carried out to identify evidence relating to participatory practices relating to the ILP or town council, located on several websites, including social media and news sites, and the websites of the district councils that had an oversight role of planning processes and elections. The websites of Mendip District Council and Uttlesford District Council held materials relating to the council elections for Frome Town Council and Saffron Walden Town Council, respectively. Staff at Mendip District Council also kindly supplied historical records for parish and town council elections where these were not available on the website.

Local newspapers provided a good deal of contextual information, and some information directly related to processes of citizen participation, particularly around the council elections. As Thies (2002, p. 357) notes, 'newspapers allow the construction of a chronology of events that are unfiltered through later interpretations', also providing important context and records of public statements. A search online with Google and via Lexis Nexis found the main papers carrying articles about the ILPs and councils were the 'Frome Times' and the 'Saffron Walden Reporter', both of which had a relatively comprehensive archive on their respective websites. The Frome Times archive was searchable, with searches carried out for 'Independents for Frome', 'IfF' and 'Town council', finding relevant articles from 2010. A combination of search engine and manual searches from the period 2014 was used for finding articles about 'Residents for Uttlesford', 'R4U' and 'Town council' in the Saffron Walden Reporter. Search engines and LexisNexis also found relevant news articles in other publications, using the same search terms. To explore the reasons for a significant increase in public attendance in council meetings, a search for articles including 'Frome Town Council' in the Somerset Standard and Guardian was carried out using LexisNexis search of 2007-2017 (the full years available through the tool). This was used to gauge the level of local publicity about Frome Town Council.

The case of Independent for Frome was particular in that two books had been written by one of the ILP councillors, Peter Macfadyen (2014, 2019), giving a history of the ILP along with descriptions of the operation of the group. A local author, Jean Lowe (2014), had also written an extensive book on the history and operation of Frome Town Council. Both of these sources were written from a particular viewpoint, but provided useful contextual material. Further context was available through the websites for Independents for Frome, which had an extensive archive of comment by councillors, along with a Facebook page. Residents for

Uttlesford had an extensive website that contained the Residents Manifesto, press-releases, publicity and other materials, along with a regularly updated Facebook page. Content from the ILP websites was also stored on Archive.org, enabling access to historical posts tracing the history and evolution of both case-study parties.

Apart from understanding formal processes of citizen participation there were other aspects of the case studies that needed to be evidenced. In particular, routes of influence for citizens that were not instituted within formal processes, and the orientation of councillors and staff towards citizen participation. For the latter question, content analysis (Burnham et al, 2004, pp.236-241) was carried out upon candidate statements and ILP communications exploring how the role of citizen participation within municipal government was perceived. The study of participatory instruments usually experiences obstacles as 'official data is rarely collected on participatory processes in any systematic sense' (Smith, 2019, p.575). In these cases, sufficient documentary evidence was available for most of the participatory instruments in the case studies to fulfil the research questions. However, why the ILP came to institute participatory instruments and the perceptions of ILP councillors and staff of participatory practices was not evidenced in the records. For that, the research had to turn to evidence from interviews with ILP members and town council staff.

4.4   Talking with the town elites

Interviews are a common method of gaining evidence around the operation of local government (for example, Leach and Wilson, 2000; Copus, 2004; Giovannini et al, 2023), and, along with desk-based research, interviews are a key form of evidence in the mapping of processes using the Democracy Cube approach (for example, Prosser et al, 2017; Ardaya, Evers and Ribbe, 2019). For the Democracy Mapping, the desk-based research provided only limited evidence on: the role of ILP councillors in the initiation and sustaining of processes of citizen participation; the attitude of ILP councillors towards citizen participation; and, the role of the ILP as a body in shaping those attitudes. The interviews with councillors and staff were, therefore, largely directed to the broader context around citizen participation and the impact of the ILP.

The recruitment of interviewees was facilitated by the identity of ILP town councillors and town council staff being publically available. For the case of the IfF administration of Frome Town Council (FTC), IfF town councillors had biographies on the council website that allowed an intentionally diverse selection of councillors to be identified for the first round of interviewing. In the case of the R4U administration of Saffron Walden Town Council (SWTC), all R4U councillors were contacted over the two rounds of interviewing. Following

the initial contact and conversation with a founder of each ILP, interviews with ILP councillors were requested via email. Interviews with town council staff were also requested via email. Follow-up contact via email included an information sheet about the interview (see Appendix A). Prior to the interview, interviewees were given a form that explicitly gained consent for participation, audio recording, and the retention and use of responses (see Appendix B). Verbal consent was also obtained on the audio recording as a final check that the interviewee was happy to proceed, and assurance given that the interview could be stopped at any point. Emails or phone calls were made to establish a suitable time and place for an interview.

From the first round of interviews it became evident that particular interviewees were important due to their centrality to the localist ILPs, these being those defined above as "core" to the parties. The first round of interviews in Frome also led to potential interviewees being identified for the second round of interviewing. Sampling was purposive, such that where a person within the case study was referenced at key points in an interview, that person would be prioritised for recruiting to a future interview (Lynch, 2013, pp.41-42). In late 2018, a four-page summary of the research was sent to interviewees with comments invited, with 2 responses from R4U and 5 from IfF. These contributed to the process of reflection, understanding and theorising. As the theory and hypotheses developed, a greater focus on participatory practices was incorporated within the interview schedule for the 2019 round of interviews. The second round of interviews proved to usefully illuminate particular contextual issues and elements relevant to the understanding of democratic change, where particular interviewees were followed up, with two of the interviewees in Saffron Walden and six of the interviewees in Frome being interviewed twice.

The number of interviews was limited by the small size of the localist ILPs, or at least that part in administration, and also by non-response or inability to arrange some interviews within the research visits. This was particularly an issue for R4U and after interviews could not be secured with 3 R4U councillors from the first SWTC administration, interviews were secured with 2 R4U councillors in the second SWTC administration who had been previously active in different roles (one as a SWTC councillor for another party, one as a R4U district councillor). To inform the wider context and potential alternative explanations for change, selected staff members from the two town councils were also interviewed, including the Town Clerk in each case, and one founding member of R4U who was not a councillor.

Most interviews were in-person, allowing good rapport and depth (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury, 2013), though four were held over the phone (audio only) and two over the internet (audio and video). The mode of interviews did not appear to hinder the depth of

information gained, as interviewees tended to be articulate and engaged with the topic. Table 4.4 below details the requests for interviews (44), interviews achieved (31), the number of interviewees (23), and the length of recorded interview (28h:17m). One interview had written notes only. Also noted are the codes used to identify interviewees in the case studies.

Table 4.4   Interviews carried out as part of the research

Frome	2018				2019			
Role (and interviewee codes)	Requested	Carried out	Recorded	Written notes	Requested	Carried out	Recorded	Written notes
Council staff (FO1, FO2)	2	2	1h:26m		2	0		
IfF "core" (FC1 - FC3)	3	3	2h:35m		3	3	2h:51m	
IfF councillors (FM1 - FM7)	4	4	4h:4m		9	6	5h:58m	
Total interviews 2018/19	*18*							
Total interviewees 2018/19	*12*							

Saffron Walden	2018				2019			
Role (and codes)	Requested	Carried out	Recorded	Written notes	Requested	Carried out	Recorded	Written notes
Council staff (SO1 - SO3)	1	0			3	3	1h:41m	
R4U "core" (SC1, SC2)	2	2	3h:13m		2	1	1h:24m	
R4U councillors (SM1 - SM6)	5	3	2h:10m	1	8	4	2h:55m	
Total interviews 2018/19	*13*							
Total interviewees 2018/19	*11*							

As Leech (2002, p.205) notes, unlike interviews with ordinary members of the public, 'elite interviewing is characterised by a situation in which the balance is usually in favour of the respondent'. This balance was further emphasised with regard to location and format of the interview. To facilitate rapport, interviews were carried at a location chosen by the interviewee. The format of interviews was semi-structured, with a list of key questions and prompts developed prior to the research visit. Whilst broadly covering the same topics, questions were different depending on whether the interviewee was a councillor, party member, or a member of council staff (for example, see Appendix C). The questions and prompts were not necessarily asked in order, and not asked if the interviewee covered the topic unprompted. Some prompts were developed during the research visit, or within the interview itself, to gain greater depth. The flow of the interview was designed to be temporal, going from past experience through to a positive articulation of the future.

The focus of the interview questions were themed around: the experience of councillors; citizen participation; the ILP and ILPs more broadly; and, municipal government. Interviewees typically volunteered examples of participatory practice, which were then followed up to gain depth. As noted by Burnham et al (2004, p.213), 'the interviewer must not seek to impose too rigid a framework on the interview [and] must allow the respondent to open up new topics that may lead to areas of inquiry that had not been previously considered.' Interviewees were allowed to talk 'off-topic', and in some cases sections of the interview became a conversation about the research and its findings. This allowed the interviewee to express what they believed was important, meaning the researcher could better understand the interviewee's own viewpoint (Myers and Newman 2007), and also gain evidence to inform the research question.

All but one of the interviews was recorded. There were concerns, in particular where a recording was declined, of the recording being used by political opponents. It was clear that some topics were "off-the-record" for some interviewees, in particular around specific intra-group conflict and personal relationships, though some interviewees spoke about those freely. The level of engagement and kind of involvement of interviewees within their party was particular, such that the view of change and processes for any single interviewee could be very partial. The selection of case-studies ensured that events were at most eight years prior to the research, but in the case of IfF it was evident from interviews that events in the first IfF administration were not recalled as strongly or with as much clarity as in the second IfF administration. Evidence gathered across several interviews could establish a sequence of events and reach saturation, which was largely reached for the IfF administration in Frome with regard to the role of IfF as a party, though the role of individual councillors was sometimes unclear. For R4U, a level of uncertainty remained around the construction of the

Residents Manifesto, which appeared to reflect different kinds of engagement with the manifesto for individual councillors. Though there was sufficient evidence gained to robustly evidence the Democracy Mapping, some of the broader context and detail may have benefited from further interviews with IfF councillors and the wider membership of R4U. Overall, there was a high level of saturation in both cases with regard to the role of the ILP as an organisation that initiated and sustained participatory practices; along with evidencing the attitude of ILP councillors towards citizen participation.

Interview recordings were transcribed, with this being a simple text translation without reference to pauses, though some record of emphasis was made. The use of the online analysis software Dedoose allowed for preliminary analysis of interviews at the same time as transcription, assigning themes to passages in the interview. After transcription, interview recordings were encrypted and, along with the transcriptions, held on a secure cloud platform. Recordings were referred to subsequently where the transcription was ambiguous. The research took the position that interviewees were purposefully articulating statements, with the role of the researcher being to understand these statements as intended, rather than to explore underlying psychological processes. Analysis utilised the consideration of interviewee responses for certain questions, passages with identified themes, keyword-searches, and a consideration of interview passages or as a whole.

The interviews were an essential part of the research programme as, whilst in some ways not as reliable as contemporary accounts, they illuminated non-public processes and personal experiences, provided essential context about processes and interpersonal relationships, and signposted to particular events that would have otherwise been lost amongst the documentation.

4.5   Observation

Alongside the documentary evidence and interviews, it was important to gain an understanding of the actual process of citizen participation where possible. For this purpose, three observations of Frome Town Council meetings and two observations of Saffron Walden Town Council meetings were carried out during research visits. One observation of a campaign public meeting at Frome Town Council was also held. These were not participant observations in the sense of being closely involved 'in the life of the community being studied' (Burnham et al, 2004, p.224), but as a 'participant as observer' or a 'marginal participant' (Robson, 1993, pp197-198). Whilst staff and councillors present at meetings were aware of the position of the researcher, members of the public were not; however, this was not thought to have presented any ethical issue given the public nature of these

meetings. Observations allowed for a fuller understanding of the processes of council meetings for both cases, and of the campaigning public meetings of Frome Town Council. Observation notes supported the process mapping, in conjunction with documentary and interview evidence. More broadly, visiting the case study towns, becoming more aware of the geography and economy of these towns, visiting the town council offices, and interviewing councillors in their own homes or places they would regularly visit, further aided contextualisation and understanding of each case.

4.6　Evidence for the Democracy Mapping

To carry out the Democracy Mapping, desk-based research was combined with interviews and observations, allowing for a level of triangulation to establish the extent to which the interpretation of the case study and the processes within it were correct. In Table 4.5 below, the different processes covered in the study are set out along with the evidence that was used in each municipal process. Processes were not distinct, with some covering multiple participatory instruments and policy cycles, and some policy cycles being influenced by multiple processes. The evidence gained from interviews covers all these processes, but was particularly important in establishing the role of the ILP, and the orientation of ILP councillors towards citizen participation.

Table 4.5   Evidence on processes of policy formation and implementation*

Frome Town Council and IfF	Saffron Walden Town Council and R4U
Town council elections	*Town council elections*
Articles in local newspaper, ILP and other party Facebook pages	Articles in local newspaper, ILP and other party Facebook pages
Typical formal council meetings	*Typical formal council meetings*
Minutes of council meetings, observation, documents and articles on council website, articles in local newspaper, consultation reports	Minutes, audio recordings of council meetings, observation, articles in local newspaper, press releases on R4U website
IfF policy	*R4U policy and Residents Manifesto*
IfF website and Facebook page	R4U website and Facebook page
Participate Frome	
Minutes of council meetings, FTC documents (particularly Frome Town Council, 2013f), Participate Frome Facebook page	
Participatory budgeting process	-
Minutes of council meetings, FTC documents (particularly Hellard, 2017, Griffin, 2018); Purple Elephant (2018) report; review by Public Square (2019a,b)	
Campaign initiatives	-
Documents and articles on council website, articles in local newspaper, observation	
Advisory Panels	-
Minutes of council meetings, FTC documents (particularly the Advisory Panel reports), news articles on council website	
ILP and councillor role	*ILP and councillor role*
Minutes of council meetings, FTC documents, IfF website and Facebook page, articles in local newspaper, candidate statements	Minutes and recordings of council meetings, Residents for Uttlesford website and Facebook page, We Are Residents website, articles in local newspaper, candidate statements

*The mapping of all processes was informed by evidence from interviews

4.7   Conclusion

This thesis seeks to evidence an answer to the following research question:

Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?

Contrasting case studies were selected that enable this research question to be addressed through an exploratory, iterative and innovative programme of research. Frome Town Council and Independents for Frome are a case where some impact upon democratic municipal government would be expected, given a strong narrative of democratic renewal. Saffron Walden Town Council and Residents for Uttlesford are a comparator case that would be expected to have the capacity to institute change, but that has a distinct history and public narrative. Desk-based research is central in evidencing the participatory practices present in each case, along with providing a rich source of information about the context around these practices. However, with regard to the influence of the ILP, and the perceptions of ILP councillors in particular, interviews were also an essential source of evidence, alongside providing further context and triangulation. The research visits and observations, whilst providing little empirical evidence outside of interviews, were invaluable to the understanding the context within which the councillors, ILPs, and town councils worked.

Having set out an approach to analysis and the research methodology that will be used, this thesis now moves to the Democracy Mapping of each case study. Each of the following two chapters begins with by describing the formation of the localist ILP and sets out the context of its administration, before moving through the dimensions of participatory practices. This will prepare the ground for the subsequent analysis to answer whether ILPs do institute democratic municipal government.

Chapter 5.   Frome Town Council and Independents for Frome

I came to a few meetings of the old town council, 7 or 8 years ago and I realised they had no concept of what it might mean to start reacting to the local community ... it was "we do this because we've done it for the last fifty years" and basically we just wiped all of that out (Independents for Frome councillor)

There's always been a can-do attitude in Frome, and the Town Council represents that can-do attitude and has encouraged more of it … they've picked up the ethos of the town and they will run with it and people have been excited about that and have come on-board with it (Frome Town Council staff member)

5.1   Introduction

This first case study explores Frome Town Council and the role of Independents for Frome (IfF), who gained administration of the town council in 2011 and remain in administration at the time of writing. The case study focusses on the role of IfF in initiating and sustaining participatory practices in municipal processes of policy formation and implementation, and the extent to which this aligns with a democratic form of municipal government. This chapter constructs a Democracy Mapping (see Chapter 3) of the presence of participatory practices and the influence of IfF over the institution of these practices. This chapter will also point forward to Chapter 7, where an analysis will be carried out on the alignment of these participatory practices with democratic municipal government, and influence of IfF in this alignment. The evidence within this case study will contribute to answering the research question of whether localist ILPs institute democratic municipal government.

This chapter begins by setting out the context of the case study. There is a brief consideration of the town of Frome in Section 5.2.1, before turning to summarise the formation of IfF in Section 5.2.2, describing how it formed as a localist ILP seeking to challenge the incumbent administration of Frome Town Council. This section also considers the main narratives of IfF, finding a strong theme around democratic change, but considerable diversity on what this might mean with regard to citizen participation. There is then a discussion of the IfF administration, setting out how influence within IfF varied considerably between individual councillors, and how the IfF administration significantly shaped the staffing of Frome Town Council (see Section 5.2.3).

This chapter then turns to the mapping of municipal processes and considers three typical municipal processes not initiated by IfF: elections to the town council; town council meetings;

and, citizen initiated contact. Within these processes, IfF instituted and changed participatory practices (see Section 5.3). This chapter then moves to consider four municipal processes initiated by IfF: Participate Frome; campaigning public meetings; the People's Budget; and, Advisory Panels. Across the municipal processes in this case study, this chapter demonstrates that IfF increased the range and kinds of participatory practice in Frome Town Council. The extent to which this aligned with the institution of democratic municipal government will be considered in Chapter 7.

5.2   Independents in administration

5.2.1 The town of Frome

To understand the context of the case study it is useful to briefly review the broader social and geographical context of the town. Located in the South-West region of England, Frome is a town with a history of manufacturing, serving as a commercial and cultural centre for a largely rural and agricultural area. The most common occupations in the wider district are in education, care work, and retail. Frome had a population of approximately 28,500 in 2021, up from around 24,500 in 2001 (ONS, 2022), an increase of 16%. House prices in Frome have significantly increased over the past few decades, tracking the national average (HM Land Registry, 2020). Frome has an area in the least deprived decile in England and Wales alongside areas of relatively significant deprivation. One area is in the second most deprived decile in England and Wales (see Figure 5.1 below). There is, therefore, a significant and broad level of economic inequality within the town.

With regard to government, Frome lies in the wider parliamentary constituency of Somerton and Frome, which changed from Liberal Democrat to Conservative in the 2015 general election. Frome lies within the municipal districts of Mendip District Council[10] and Somerset County Council; with the town towards the periphery of both councils, being closer to the cities of Bath and Bristol than the administrative centre of Somerset. Mendip District Council had been under Conservative control since 2003, having previously been contested between Liberal Democrats, Labour, and Conservatives; with the District Council moving to no overall control in 2019. The voting in Frome for elections to Mendip District Council has been volatile; support for the Conservatives has been lower than in the wider district, with Labour,

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[10] Mendip District Council was abolished in 2023, becoming part of Somerset Council, but was District Council through the period of this study.

Liberal Democrats and latterly the Green Party gaining the majority of representation from the town**.**

Figure 5.1   Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 map for Frome (CRDC, 2022)
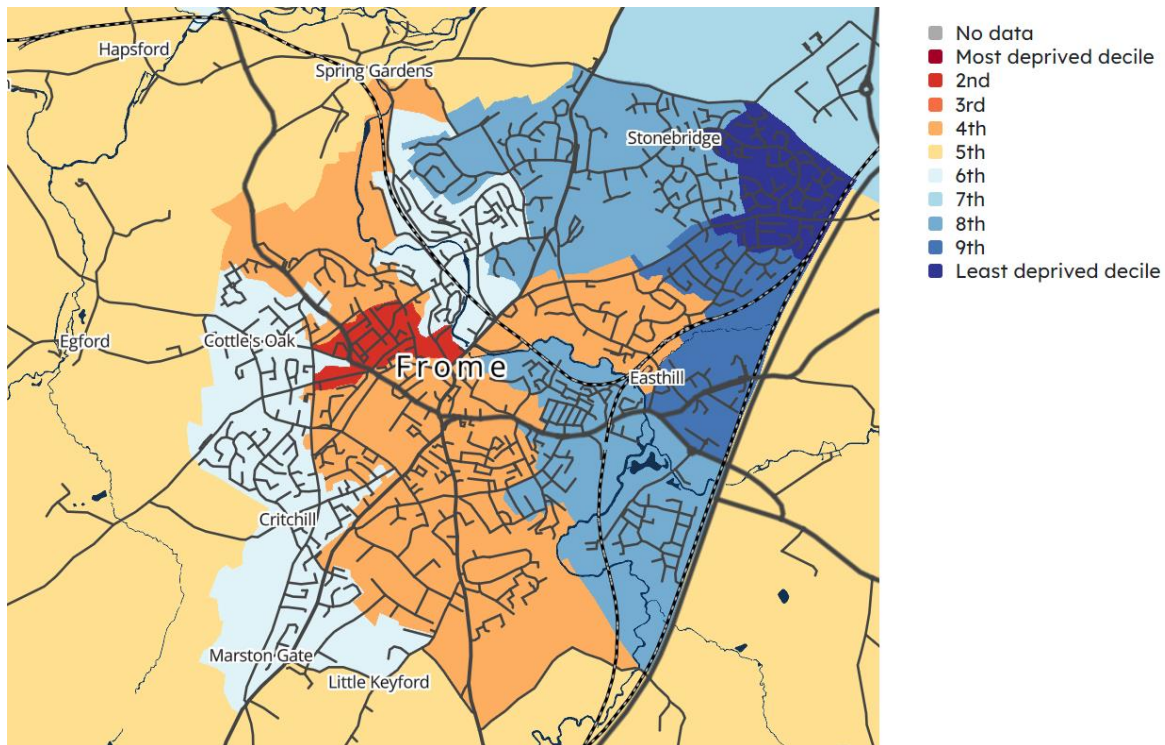
5.2.2 IfF... change happens

The emergence of a localist ILP in Frome was due to a succession of particular issues that galvanised local opposition. There was no evidence that Frome Town Council (FTC) was dysfunctional, with incumbent councillors working across political party lines and maintaining links with a range of local organisations (see, for example, Frome Town Council, 2009a, 2010a; see also Lowe, 2015). However, in late 2010 a decision was made by the town council to take management of a local community venue back in-house, generating significant local opposition (for example, Frome Town Council, 2010b; Frome Times, 2010). A public meeting was called by the town council to explain its reasoning, but this resulted in considerable conflict between councillors and the public, as a founding member of IfF stated, "at the end of that there were fifty, sixty very grumpy people, which was a perfect landing place" (FC1[11]; see also Frome Times, 2011a). The conflict connected with those already

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[11] Interviews are denoted 'FC' for IfF councillors defined within this thesis as core due to their influential role in IfF, 'FM' for other IfF councillors, and 'FO' for staff at Frome Town Council

wanting to see a change in the town council administration and subsequent discussions led to the formation of an ILP.

In January 2011 seven people called a public meeting and put out a statement in the press for people to stand as candidates to the town council under the banner "Independents for Frome" (IfF). Around eighty-five people attended the public meeting called by the founders and thirty people from that meeting volunteered to stand as candidates to the town council. From these potential candidates, another set of volunteers selected the candidates who would contest all 17 Town council seats across the six Town council wards (FM1, see Section 5.3.1 below). Whilst the meeting was open, it was evident that particular networks oriented around local campaign and civic organisations were involved. Similarly, several of those joining the second IfF administration "knew a couple of the people that were already involved" (FM5), either through social connections or through contact with IfF members as councillors (FM3, FM4, FM6, FM7).

This section will now turn to the narratives of IfF with regard to municipal democracy, drawing on the public statements of IfF and national party candidates, along with evidence from interviews. These narratives are important in understanding the orientation of IfF towards citizen participation, and the motivations of those within the party to institute participatory practices. In 2011, IfF stood on 'five principles', a set of simple short statements that were developed initially by the founders, and then adapted by supporters and candidates within meetings (Frome Times, 2011b; Macfadyen, 2014, p.46). These principles were:

- Independence of thought;
- Integrity, transparency and openness;
- Respect for local democracy;
- A society run by all;
- A cleaner and greener Frome.

Four of these statements connect to democratic commitments, and particularly to the democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control and transparency. This initial focus was largely preserved by subsequent IfF administrations, though with more detailed policies within these broad themes being developed by IfF candidates and councillors (FC1, FC2, FM3, FM6).

The democratic commitments of IfF were also evident in candidate statements across 2011 to 2019, presented in Figure 5.2 below. A third (33%) of IfF candidates referred to

democratic change in their statements. Some of these statements implied directly participatory practices, for example 'making local government and its meetings more user-friendly so everyone can take part' or being 'a place where residents feel that they are listened to, where they have the opportunity to be active and involved'. Other statements implied broader democratic commitments, for example being 'where individuals and community groups are even more able to decide their own futures' or 'getting more decisions made in Frome by those living here' (Independents for Frome, 2015, 2019a).

Figure 5.2   Thematic analysis of candidate statements, 2011 to 2019[12]
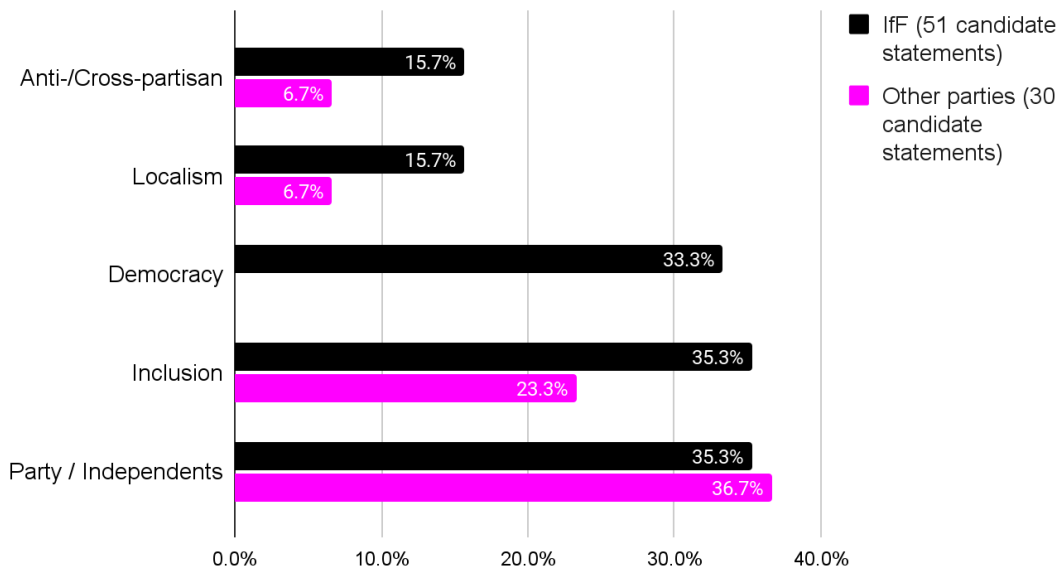
Figure 5.3   IfF logo (Independents for Frome, 2011b)

A commitment to responsiveness or enabling citizen participation was reiterated in the IfF 2011 party strapline, 'Make **Your** Voice **Heard**' (see Figure 5.3 above). The theme of

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[12] Thematic content analysis of individual candidate statements from the Independents for Frome (2011a, 2015, 2019a) website, see Chapter 4. Candidate statements for IfF were written in the first person and were varied in content, suggesting they were not strongly edited.

democracy was not present in the statements of national party candidates. Therefore, IfF candidates were distinct in expressing both direct and representative oriented conceptions of citizen participation, and more broadly focussing on democratic renewal.

All the IfF councillors interviewed were positive about the value of citizen participation; though there was considerable variation across IfF councillors in their views of the purpose and boundaries of this participation. Some IfF councillors argued that participatory discussion would result in "better decisions … it's the value of the crowd" (FC2) with a "collaborative process and ideas from a much bigger group of people" (FM6), that would "hear a diversity of views and to really understand the issues" (FM3). Such a view suggested both inclusiveness and considered judgement being produced from citizen participation. Another narrative was that participation produced personal and civic benefits, improving social cohesion (FC1), providing opportunities for participation "so that people feel that they've got some kind of agency" (FM4). Aligning with this second narrative, an ambition was that participation would provide:

> people with an opportunity to see how democracy can be and what that involves and the advantage of living in a democracy and why it's important and why you'd want to hold onto it and the impact you can have (FC3).

Both these narratives related to the direct participation of citizens, rather than citizen participation being oriented towards representatives. Views on the purpose of citizen participation were necessarily aligned with views on how citizens should participate. However, most of the same interviewees also argued that direct participation had limits. Where participants did not have sufficient knowledge or interest, decisions were best made by councillors (FC2, FC3, FM1), though interviewees had different views of how to define these boundaries. One councillor commented on this difference:

> we all believe in participation and (being inclusive) of the town … some people believe that if you get enough people in the room ... that clarity will emerge ... other people believe, 'we've got a good vision here, let's test it on the people' ... sometimes people think 'well nobody will get this but I know this is best for the town so let's just push ahead' (FM3)

One of the founding aspirations of IfF was that it would be coherent with regard to attitudes towards councillor behaviour and democratic processes, but allow diversity with regard to the substance of policy (FC1, FC3). However, several IfF councillors reflected upon how IfF appeared to have a political norm:

> despite being ... non-party-political, the nature of [IfF] is more appealing to independently minded, possibly slightly left-wing ... people than it is to others ... I think the centre of gravity of the group is slightly left-of-centre, slightly environmentally

> conscious, and that's fine, and ... we do have outliers within that, but I think the core group is a little more homogenous than we might like it to be (FM5; also FC3, FM1)

There was a broad political mainstream within IfF that those in a persistent minority could find difficult to challenge. The 'left-of-centre, slightly environmentally conscious' political norm aligns with parties that tend to advocate direct citizen participation (see Pascalo, 2020; Section 2.5). The presence of comments about inclusiveness in over a third (35%) of IfF candidate statements, alongside this being part of the IfF founding statements, was a further indication of a political norm tending towards the left-wing. However, it was notable that whilst broadly sympathetic to the views of the first administration, several of those joining the second administration wanted to bring 'a different perspective' (FM4; also FM7; FM6) with regard to who they were or their viewpoint on council policy. The broad political tendency of IfF did not exclude there being a diversity of points of view on preferences (FC1, FM6).

Interviews with councillors evidenced that their motivations towards joining IfF were diverse. There was interest in getting involved in 'a new politics' (FM3) that 'felt different' from national political parties (FC3), where those who were politically involved but who did not wish to affiliate to a national party could act to get 'more people involved' and get 'issues onto the agenda' (FC1). This political non-national-party engagement is summarised well by one councillor who had joined IfF at the initial public meeting:

> I've always been a ... good armchair politician, I used to complain like hell about things that did or didn't happen within the town … my partner said I ought to maybe throw my hat in the ring. Not having to affiliate myself to any political party as such, but be involved in local politics, I thought yeah, that's a good idea, I'll give it a go (FM1).

The narratives of democratic renewal were directly related to those rejecting the role of national political parties. However, very few IfF candidate statements articulated anti-national-party sentiment or referenced localism (see Figure 5.2 above), despite anti-party sentiment and the centre-periphery cleavage being typical orienting narratives for localist independent parties (see Section 2.2). Candidates were likely to mention IfF or independent representation (35.3% of IfF candidates), similar to national party candidates who made reference to their party (36.7% of national party candidates, see Figure 5.2 above). The shift to IfF was portrayed as a positive move towards a party that was superior through attributes such as 'energy' and 'independence' (Independents for Frome, 2015, 2019a). Whilst IfF may have been a protest vote for many voters (see Otjes, 2018), candidates tended to portray the party as having a positive agenda.

5.2.3   The administration of IfF

In 2011, IfF gained a three seat majority on Frome Town Council, meaning that the party could form an administration and implement its preferred policies. In the 2015 and 2019 municipal elections, IfF won every seat, with no political opposition to the IfF administration within Frome Town Council. The performance and impact of IfF in municipal elections is detailed in Section 5.3.1 below. This section will set out the timeline of the IfF administration, including the institution of citizen participation in municipal processes. There will then be a brief discussion of two important pieces of context: first, the role of staff with regard to change in municipal policy; and, second, hierarchy and the influence of individuals within IfF.

Citizens participated through a number of different municipal processes, set out in Table 5.1 below. Three processes are mapped here that were not initiated by IfF, being: the elections to Frome Town Council; town council meetings; and, citizen-initiated contact. Four processes are mapped here that were initiated and sustained by IfF, being: Participate Frome; campaign initiatives; the People's Budget; and, Advisory Panels. Analysis of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process was carried out, but for reasons of space is not included here[13].

Table 5.1   Municipal processes in the IfF administration of FTC

Process	Initiated and sustained by:	Section
Elections to Town council	Government / Principal authority (also political parties and candidates)	5.3.1
Town council meetings	Town council (also IfF / councillors)	5.3.2
Citizen-initiated contact	Citizens (also council staff / councillors)	5.3.3
Participate Frome	IfF / council staff	5.4.1
Campaign initiation and support	IfF / council staff	5.4.2
The People's Budget	IfF / council staff	5.4.3
Advisory Panels	IfF / council staff	5.4.4

A timeline of the IfF administration, with municipal processes alongside selected other activities and events, is set out in Figure 5.4 below. The timeline evidences that changes in

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[13] This process was implemented under the IfF administration but the presence of participatory practices could not be evidenced as directly due to IfF (Bourne, 2012; The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations, 2012; Frome Town Council, 2016c). This analysis indicated a role for national government in enabling the institution of participatory practices, but the findings were not relevant to the research question in this thesis.

municipal processes and associated participatory instruments did not occur at once, but were the result of initiatives evolving over time, with multiple revisions and development. The evolution of the 'Participatory Grant Vote' in 2012 into the 'People's Budget' in 2018 is an example of this (see Section 5.4.3). Whilst municipal processes and participatory instruments initiated by IfF dominate the table, it should be noted that typical municipal processes, such as public town council meetings, were ongoing. The municipal processes initiated by IfF tended to be one-off or annual events, with the notable exception of the People's Budget. These processes are the focus of mapping and analysis in the following sections. The remainder of this section will consider the broad characteristics of the IfF administration, and some internal characteristics of IfF.

Figure 5.4   Timeline of the IfF administration of Frome Town Council

Initial conversations are held about forming an independent party	**2011**	Frome Town Council (FTC) hold public meetings about the Cheese & Grain arts venue
Independents for Frome hold public meeting and recruit candidates		Independents for Frome (IfF) win majority on Frome Town Council
FTC five year strategy published Cheese & Grain supported by FTC	**2012**	FTC decides on significant precept increase
Participatory Grant Vote on 10k community group funding		Public consultation on town centre remodelling, including the Boyles Cross redevelopment
Frome Neighbourhood Plan discussion panels and public consultation	**2013**	IfF places third in FTC by-election
'The People's Grant' PB process fails		Community projects officer hired
FTC carries out youth services review alongside Frome Youth Council		
"Participate Frome" including …	**2014**	FTC holds two public meetings and takes over major recreation ground
…Neighbourhood Plan consultation		Fair Frome charity launched by FTC
Sustainability officer hired		FTC decides to acquire Town Hall
Outside services team reconfigured		
Public meeting on the new town hall, including consultation on the name	**2015**	Recruitment for 2015 candidates
		2015 candidates announced

Figure 5.4   Timeline of the IfF administration of Frome Town Council (continued)

Five Advisory Panels take the place of main council committees		Independents for Frome win every seat on Frome Town Council
Recommendations of Advisory Panels are integrated into the Frome Town Council work programme	2016	Communications team hired
		Frome Town Council "Make it Happen" youth conference initiated
Performing Arts Advisory Panel set up, Health & Wellbeing and Sports Advisory Panels continue as networking and monitoring forums		Neighbourhood Plan referendum
Revised participatory budgeting launch	2017	FTC win planning ruling over District for Boyles Cross development, reducing free car parking spaces
"Crowdfund Frome" launched		
FTC jointly funds Fair Housing for Frome, which launches with a public meeting on housing and homelessness		FTC Advisory Group instituted
		Trinity community project begins
"People's Budget" 2018 launched	2018	Council commits to being 'plastic free'
Plastic Free Frome meeting		IfF win FTC by-election
"Talking Rubbish" series of meetings and litter picks to 'work together to keep Frome clean'		FTC hosts 'Breaking the Mould' conference with other local councils
"People's Budget" 2019 Events and Town Vote, and vote on play equipment and workers for a local park	2019	Recruitment for 2019 candidates
		2019 candidates announced
		Independents for Frome win every seat on Frome Town Council

Key:

Municipal processes initiated by others		Municipal election
Municipal processes initiated by IfF		Internal IfF and FTC processes

A wide ranging consultation on a 'community plan' coordinated by Vision For Frome (2008a, 2008b) provided the basis the strategy of the first IfF administration (Frome Town Council, 2011a; FC2, FC3). In this way, the first IfF administration was influenced by citizens through a participatory instrument, albeit filtered and prioritised by IfF councillors. The strategy focused on economic success, the public realm, the role of the town council, and 'creating a participatory community' with a commitment to:

> support and encourage communities and empower them to look after their own neighbourhoods and interests because they know what needs to be done and they will do it best (Frome Town Council, 2011a, p.10).

Aligned with this strategy, the IfF administration initiated and supported a number of local organisations, for example the Fair Frome poverty campaign and food bank launched in 2014 and the Trinity community project launched in 2017 (see Figure 5.4 above). The town council borrowed to fund projects such as: installing solar power on the Cheese & Grain community venue; the purchase of a new Town Hall that included space for local charitable ventures including a local community radio station; and, the acquisition of a local recreation ground to preserve for community use. Alongside the direct funding for community groups, a typical role for a town council, the IfF administration also initiated support for community groups to bid for external funding in 2012, bringing in additional funding to the town.

With the exception of the elections to Frome Town Council, municipal processes could be changed by both IfF councillors and council staff. In considering the key question of whether IfF instituted democratic municipal government in Frome Town Council it is important to consider whether participatory practices were instituted due to the initiative of council staff rather than on the initiative of IfF councillors. The evidence from the case study is that IfF were pivotal in shaping and facilitating a shift in staffing within Frome Town Council towards supporting participatory practices. As Figure 5.5 illustrates below, staffing under the IfF administration experienced considerable fluctuation and change. In the period prior to 2011/12 there had been relatively minor changes in staffing. Interviews with IfF councillors and council staff, along with council documents, indicated that roles and remits across every role within the council, including the Town Clerk, were changed significantly by IfF councillors through the first and second administrations (FC1, FC2, FO1, FO2). Just 5 members of staff remained at the start of the second IfF administration from the 17 members of staff that the first IfF administration had inherited; around a third of roles at the end of the second IfF administration were in wholly new areas of activity. This process was directed to 'bringing the right people in' who were 'enthusiasts in their areas' (FM1) and wanted 'to achieve stuff and have a relationship with the town already' (FC3).

Figure 5.5   Map of areas of activity at Frome Town Council, 2009 to 2019
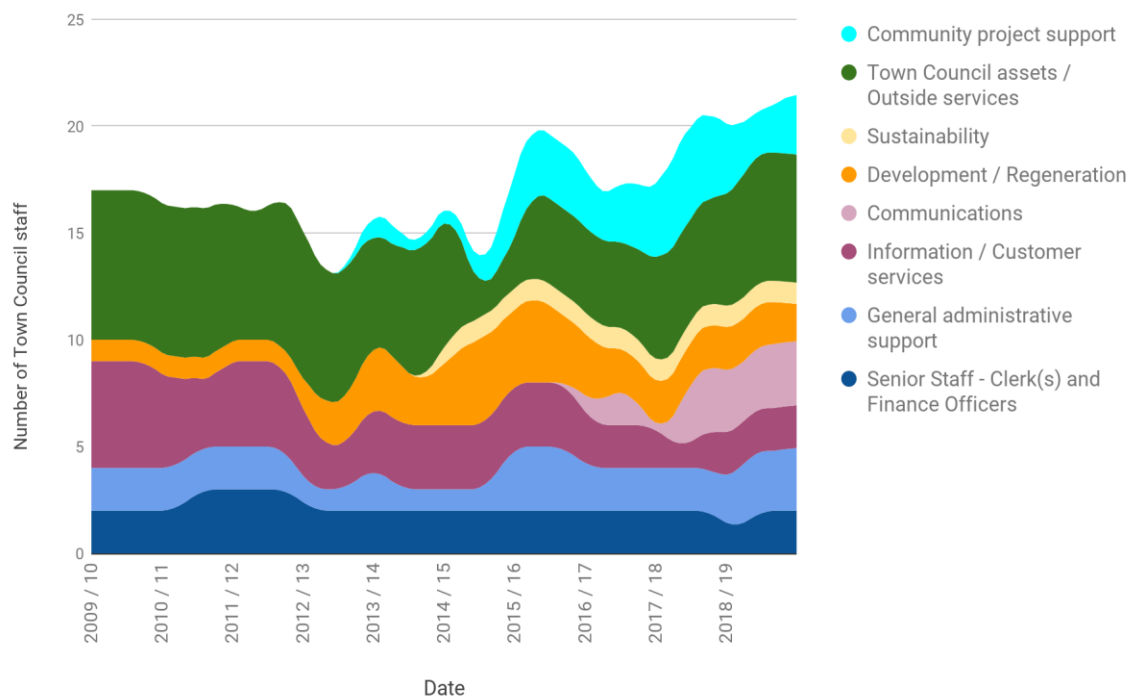
Note: activity is based on smoothed headcount within a broad area of activity and does not reflect spend. IfF were elected in the 2011/12 administration, with the second term beginning 2015/16

Activity was prioritised in areas that aligned with the ambitions and strategy of IfF. The community project support role was initiated by IfF to support civic associations and participatory activity (see also Section 5.4.1). The 'customer service' information centre roles partly gave way to a communication function that sought to engage the public (see also Section 5.4.2; FC2). Existing roles were changed such that they incorporated duties of "talking to members of the public", including the team looking after Town council assets and wider spaces within the town (FC2; also FC1) who were asked in a job application 'why do you think it is important to engage with the local community?' (Frome Town Council, 2015a). The shift in activity led to officers having an increasing role in initiating, shaping and instituting municipal policy, including around processes of citizen participation. This reflected the strategic priorities of the IfF administration that had instituted these changes (FO2, FC2, FM3, FM6). Therefore, where a member of staff was primarily responsible for initiating and sustaining a process of participation, given that was within a role defined by IfF, it remains a change that was ultimately due to the intervention of IfF.

Interviews with IfF councillors evidenced individual councillors having very different levels of influence over policy and strategic direction. These differences were partly based upon: prior

experience (within the council and professionally); confidence within the role; and, pressures of paid work and caring responsibilities. A difference was also evidenced between the influence carried by those involved in the founding and defining of IfF as a party, and those who subsequently came to IfF when the party had established norms, relationships, and ambitions. It took councillors time to 'know how to be with the councillors and the staff' (FM3), developing through 'informal sharing of knowledge, sharing of experience and general gossip' (FM5) and 'watching other people' (FC3). However, for those who wished to move into particular roles, there was a frustration that 'key councillors are being perceived as within the tent' (FM3), making it 'more difficult for others to step through' (FC3). Three councillors retained significant roles from the first IfF administration through to the penultimate year of the second IfF administration, being effectively the core of the group, see Table 5.2 below. There was little in terms of formal structure within IfF; however, a hierarchy of influence over policy and strategies was created due to the differences in individual resources, how individuals were perceived by others, and longevity within IfF.

Table 5.2   Leadership roles held by IfF members, 2011 to 2019

Lead roles / Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Mayor	F	F	F	C	S	C	S	S
Leader	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	S
Town Matters Chair	C	C	C	C		C	C	S
Council Matters Chair	F	C	C	F		S	C	S
Planning Chair	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	S
Panel Chair (2015/16)	C	C	S	S	S			

Key:

C	Core three IfF councillors
F	IfF councillors first elected 2011
S	IfF councillors first elected 2015

There were tensions and challenges to this hierarchy, but also a general (though not universal) acceptance that inequalities in time, capabilities, motivations and confidence, inevitably shaped which councillors had most influence. As one councillor stated, 'some people (have) got more time than others, some people have more ambition than others to do

different things' (FM2). Over half of IfF candidates from 2011 to 2019 were in, or had been in, managerial or professional occupations; this included a number of councillors, including the core three, with considerable professional experience within municipal government or civic campaigning[14]. It was evident from across interviews with IfF councillors that they brought the motivations, experience and knowledge that had shaped and grown through their previous employment into the councillor role, and this influenced the direction of IfF. The capacity and motivations individuals brought to IfF was evidently important (see also Sections 5.4.3 and 5.4.4) alongside the broad democratic commitments of the party.

A notable feature of IfF, particularly given its aim to be a platform for independents, was the activities that sought to cohere it as a group. This included: monthly internal IfF meetings discussing policy; away-days; informal discussions and relationships; and, written guidance on preferred 'ways of working' that aimed to facilitate 'working in a group in a common direction' (FC1). These activities were partly enabled by the use of external facilitation in group meetings, though the use of this external facilitation declined in the second administration (FC1, FM3). The extent to which these activities actually impacted upon cohesion was not clear, given IfF was also described more as 'a series of individuals' and small groups (FM6; also FC3) who 'slotted into different things depending on … what skills we can bring' (FM7). The increase in size of the group in the second administration making this more individual way of working more prevalent (FC1, FC3). Over time, good working relationships and trust had developed across active IfF councillors, which was believed essential for the success of the party (FM2, FM3, FM6).

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[14] Using available biographies and candidate statements (n=42) through Independents for Frome, Frome Town Council, and Frome Times websites. 'Managerial or professional occupations' defined as occupations classified as major groups 1 or 2 using the Standard Occupational Classification 2020 (ONS 2021).

5.3   Processes not initiated by IfF

This chapter now turns to the Democracy Mapping of municipal processes, setting out what participatory practices were present within these processes, and the role of IfF in influencing the institution of these participatory practices. The municipal processes of policy formation and implementation considered in this section were not initiated by IfF, but IfF councillors and Frome Town Council staff could influence elements within them, introducing or shaping participatory practices. This stage of the Democracy Mapping only considers whether practices are present and does not consider the alignment with the standard of democratic municipal government set out in this thesis, this being a task for Chapter 7.

The section will begin by considering the elections to town council, a process that allowed for the extensive participation of Frome citizens. The Frome Town Council elections were outside the control of IfF in terms of rules and regulations, but this was a process where the presence of IfF had a considerable impact (see Section 5.3.1). This section then moves to discussing and mapping formal town council meetings (see Section 5.3.2) and the often informal citizen-initiated contact between citizens and councillors (see Section 5.3.3).

5.3.1   Electing the town council

The formal process of elections to the town council is regulated by national legislation (see The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules, 2006 s.2(15)), and administered by the District Council. If the election is contested, then there is a first-past-the-post election of councillors to seats on the town council. In the terms of the Democracy Mapping this is an open and aggregative process that allows participants to indicate their preferred 'solution' (see Table 5.4 below).

At the elections to Frome Town Council in 2007, only 3 of the 6 wards for the town council were contested, with Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors winning the elections in those wards. The remaining councillors were elected unopposed (typical for Local Councils, see Section 2.1.2), with citizens having no opportunity to vote. The elections led to a Liberal Democrat administration holding 10 of the 17 seats (see Table 5.3 below). In 2011, after having selected its 17 candidates (see Section 5.3.1 above), IfF stood for all the seats across the 6 wards. The other parties stood a combined total of 26 candidates, up from 21 in 2007, though no party other than IfF contested all town council seats. As Table 5.3 below indicates, IfF won 10 seats with 45% of the 9,943 votes cast. The Liberal Democrats won four seats and the Conservatives three. IfF appeared to particularly impact the vote share of

the Liberal Democrats, which fell by 38 percentage points in Frome Town Council, whilst the Conservative vote only fell by 12 percentage points. National political context may have contributed to the large fall in the Liberal Democrat vote (see Cutts and Russell, 2015).

Table 5.3   FTC vote share, seats and candidates, by party, 2007 – 2019*

Frome Town Council	Vote share and *total vote*				Seats					Candidates			
Party	2007	2011	2015	2019	2007	2011	2015	2019		2007	2011	2015	2019
Con	31%	19%	15%	4%	5	3				7	12	9	2
Lab	9%	5%	4%	12%	1					3	3	4	14
Lib Dem	60%	22%	19%		10	4				10	10	12	
Other		2%	5%	4%	1					1	1	6	3
IfF		45%	55%	79%		10	17	17			17	17	17
Total	*3943*	*9943*	*14823*	*7419*	*17*	*17*	*17*	*17*		*21*	*43*	*48*	*36*

* The number of candidates for 2007 includes those elected in uncontested wards.

Outreach by existing councillors and supporters, alongside a wide advertising process led to 30 potential IfF candidates for the 2015 election, to again fill the 17 seats (FM3, FC1, FM4). Five of these candidates were existing IfF councillors. IfF used crowdfunding to cover the costs of the election and stood against 31 candidates from other parties, IfF won all 17 seats in the 2015 town council election (see Table 5.3 above). A by-election in 2018 was mainly notable for accusations that the Liberal Democrat candidate had imitated IfF, delivering a leaflet with no party branding, and stating 'when you cast your vote please remember, I'm not a politician, I'm just a local person who wants to make a difference' (Wood, 2018). The IfF candidate was elected with 325 votes, more than Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats combined (with 125, 89, and 75 votes respectively).

In 2019, candidate recruitment by IfF was again carried out through a mix of public invitation and private outreach, bringing in 26 potential candidates (FC3, FC1), out of which 17 were selected. The Liberal Democrats decided not to challenge IfF in 2019, though two former Liberal Democrat councillors stood as independents; the Conservatives stood just 2 candidates. Only a challenge by Labour, who stood 14 candidates, ensured that wards would be contested. In 2019, IfF gained eight out of ten votes cast in the town council elections and won every seat (see Table 5.3 above). In only one ward did an opposition candidate, a longstanding Conservative District Councillor, gain over half the votes of an IfF candidate. The strong success for IfF may have partly reflected wider trends that saw

independents and smaller parties generally perform well against established parties in the 2019 local elections (Sulman and Bunn, 2019; Tighe and Bounds, 2019).

Table 5.4   Democracy mapping of the elections to Frome Town Council

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		15% - 46% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF	

Participant Selection

This section now turns to the Democracy Mapping of the elections to town council, set out in Table 5.4 above. Participation in the elections was open to all adult citizens, and gained the most extensive participation of any process within the case-studies, with 15% to 46% of Frome citizens taking part, the highest participation in elections being where municipal elections were held alongside elections to the national parliament[15]. The extent of engagement and the stimulation of debate within the press and through campaign activities also meant the elections incorporated activity in the wider public sphere. For example, the pre-election edition of a weekly local newspaper in 2011 reserved its letters page for the 'Independents for Frome debate', with letters from candidates (both from IfF and other parties), supporters and opponents (Frome and Somerset Standard, 2011; see also Frome

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[15] As a proportion of all Frome citizens aged 14 or over in 2019, being 23,146 citizens (ONS, 2022). The turnout in the town council elections, as measured as the proportion of all registered adult citizens who could vote in areas that had elections, was 32% to 64%.

Times, 2011b, 2011c). Other activities included communication from IfF candidates online, activities in public spaces, leafleting and holding stalls (FC1, FC2, FM3, FM6).

Citizen Authority

The process of municipal elections was a particular kind of citizen participation in relation to municipal government, defining the next administration of Frome Town Council. The point of election was one of the few processes within this case study where citizens had direct authority and unquestionable influence (see Table 5.4 above), regardless of the attitude of decision-makers to citizen participation. Citizens also had communicative influence in the wider debate around the municipal elections, primarily through conversations with candidates as IfF and other parties campaigned. Due to the contestation of IfF, the opportunity citizens had to exercise direct authority increased considerably, though this was also dependent upon the presence of other parties.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

In terms of the Democracy Mapping, the election process was an indication of a solution, being the selection of an administration from those candidates who stood for election. For IfF, the election process was an opportunity to set out a political programme, based around the five principles (see Section 5.2.2), and criticise the incumbent administration. The content of the IfF programme in 2011 was to a large extent oriented around procedural change, raising the question of *how* the town council should be run rather than *what* it should be doing. This is a discussion about process design, though about processes other than the elections to the town council, and is explored further in Section 7.4.1. The criticism of the incumbent administration was a call for accountability that in terms of the Democracy Mapping is the participatory practice of review, see Table 5.4 above. In municipal elections it would be expected for citizens to be able to raise issues with parties at election time and hold them to account at the ballot box, so this is not indicated as having being influenced by IfF.

Citizens and Communication

In one sense, the election process was simply an aggregated vote, with participation limited to this simple means of communication. As a public process in terms of the campaign and results, the elections were open to monitoring, though the actual point of participation around voting was private. As discussed in Section 3.5.2, elections also stimulate public discussion, with political parties and public seeking to influence their outcome. IfF councillors were present in public spaces, through stalls or other campaign activities, with the purpose of talking with citizens, stating on social media:

> Our candidates will be out and about all weekend, leafletting and meeting people around Frome. Please do come over and say hello, they'd love to talk to you about any issues or concerns, or ideas you have for the future. (Independents for Frome, 2019b)

IfF had a minimal presence in any communication channels outside of the election period. For the 2019 elections, the IfF Facebook page (www.facebook.com/IndependentsforFrome) became active as a platform for recruiting potential candidates from November 2018, with no posts for several months prior to that point. From February and beyond, the IfF Facebook page: promoted IfF; provided information about candidates; hosted an online hustings; and, reported on the IfF campaign. Shortly after elections, activity once again stopped for several months, which was reflected in similar inactivity across other channels.

The process of campaigning enabled citizens to express preferences to councillors, potentially having influence over candidate and party priorities, alongside reviewing the actions of parties and individual candidates in making their selection. The extent to which this occurred was influenced by IfF, not necessarily due to their greater activity than any other party, but because their activity cumulatively added to the political activity of parties in the public sphere.

The role of IfF

The elections to the town council were one of the few municipal processes within the case study to allow citizens direct authority. What choice citizens had authority over depended upon the parties contesting the election. By raising how municipal democracy should be organised, IfF facilitated process design being part of this choice. Whether ILPs tend to facilitate this kind of 'meta-deliberative' debate (see Landwehr, 2015) is a wider question taken up in Chapters 7 and 8. However, citizens could only participate in the elections if they were contested.

One demonstrable impact of IfF on the town council elections was the increased level of challenge between the 2007 and 2011 elections. In 2007, just three of the six wards were contested, leaving voters in three wards with no opportunity to indicate a preference. In the contested wards, there were two or three seats available, so voters had multiple votes to cast, but only used 67.1% of the maximum possible votes (if voters used all possible votes available to them), indicating that 1 in 3 votes went unused. In 2011, IfF stood candidates for every seat in all 6 wards, meaning they were all contested, and more opposition candidates also stood. With all wards being competed for, and more candidates to vote for within each ward, citizens had more opportunity to participate, and more choice in who to select. Reflecting the increased number of candidates, voters cast 81.7% of the maximum possible

votes they could cast, with just 1 in 5 votes unused. As an IfF councillor commented at the time, 'If nothing else IfF have given the voters of Frome a proper choice' (Frome Times, 2011c). However, contestation did not just depend upon the activity of IfF, but also of the other parties. As the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats withdrew, it was only the challenge of Labour in 2019 that ensured contestation across all wards and a level of choice in candidates. Therefore, although the activity of IfF had an impact in extending participation in municipal elections, this was dependent upon the activity of other parties.

5.3.2   The meetings of Frome Town Council

The typical route of citizen participation in a parish and town council is through attendance at town council meetings. Four main kinds of decision-making meetings of Frome Town Council were present within the first and second IfF administrations: Full Council, internal affairs ('Council matters'), external affairs ('Town matters'), and a planning advisory committee (a sub-committee of the external affairs committee). Committees and subcommittees were attended by a selection of councillors. All councillors were expected to attend Full Council meetings, which considered strategic matters, including the organisation of committees, and major financial decisions and borrowing, including setting the town council budget. Given that most contested items were brought to Full Council, these meetings received the greatest level of public participation and, as a result, Full Council meetings are the main meeting considered in this analysis.

Table 5.5   Democracy mapping of Frome Town Council meetings

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**					More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere		Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		<1% of all Frome citizens					
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**					Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult		Direct authority		
				Co-governance			
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**					Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem		Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**					Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue		
Key	Practiced across some policies at one stage	Practiced across most or all policies at one stage	Practiced across some policies at one stage – influenced by IfF		Practiced across a most or all policies at one stage – influenced by IfF		

The Democracy Mapping indicates that the public meetings of Frome Town Council were an open forum of participation, ranging from just listening to engaging in discussion and raising issues, across a range of stages in the policy cycle, and involving a relatively broad range of participants (see Table 5.5 above). IfF made significant changes to the format of these meetings that instituted or changed a number of participatory practices.

Participant Selection

Exploring what kind of participant attending the Full Council meetings, every formal public meeting of the town council had councillors leading the meeting, along with council staff. Councillors from the larger principal authorities usually attended as external professionals. Over half of Full Council meetings under the IfF administration received presentations from external groups, including charitable and civic groups, and from statutory authorities or prominent local bodies (for example, the police, the health authority, schools). Minutes of the town council from before the IfF administration indicated that presentations from external groups were only occasionally given, with the inclusion of professional and lay-stakeholders to such an extent being a change in participatory practice influenced by IfF (see Table 5.5 above). In line with legislation, Full Council meetings were open to the public, aside from matters confidential to town councillors and staff, such as on commercial matters or internal staffing (NALC, 2020). These meetings are indicated as an open process on the Democracy Mapping.

An innovation with regard to participant selection to this process was undertaken in the 2013/14 administration, where a youth mayor and deputy youth mayor elected from the Frome Youth Council had speaking rights in council meetings alongside IfF councillors, and attended matters the public were excluded from, though did not have voting rights (Frome Town Council, 2013a; 2013b; 2014a). This is indicated as a form of targeted involvement on the Democracy Mapping (see Table 5.5 above). Meeting minutes indicate that the youth councillors regularly raised the issue of youth involvement and provision, clarifying whether this was present in policy proposals being discussed (for example, Frome Town Council, 2014b), with contributions altering recommendations to specifically include reference to youth provision (for example, Frome Town Council, 2013c), though contributions did not always lead to actions (for example, Frome Town Council, 2013d). The involvement of youth mayors ceased with the end of the first IfF administration, with concerns raised from all sides that Frome Town Council and the Frome Youth Council did not have sufficient staffing or volunteers to effectively sustain and support this form of targeted involvement (Frome Town Council, 2015b). The strategy of the second IfF administration included a commitment to 'provide opportunities for young people to play a role and be included in the town's decision

making' (Frome Town Council, 2015d, p.9), with targeted involvement continuing in different fora (see Sections 5.4.1, 5.4.3).

Turning to the extent of public participation, public attendance at Full Council meetings rose significantly in the 2011/12 council, when IfF were first elected, from a median attendance of seven prior to the IfF administration to 27.5 in the first year of the new IfF administration (see Figure 5.6 below). However, this engagement gradually fell away, with no increase associated with the second IfF administration in 2015/16, and attendance continuing to fall to a median of 18. After a steady decline in attendance to a low of 10 in 2017/18, in there was a modest increase to the start of the third IfF administration, up to 16 members of the public attending on average in 2019/20. Taking a broader view, even the most well attended meetings, where up to 150 members of the public had attended, involved participation of less than 1% of the town's citizens.

Figure 5.6   Recorded median public attendance at FTC Full Council[16]

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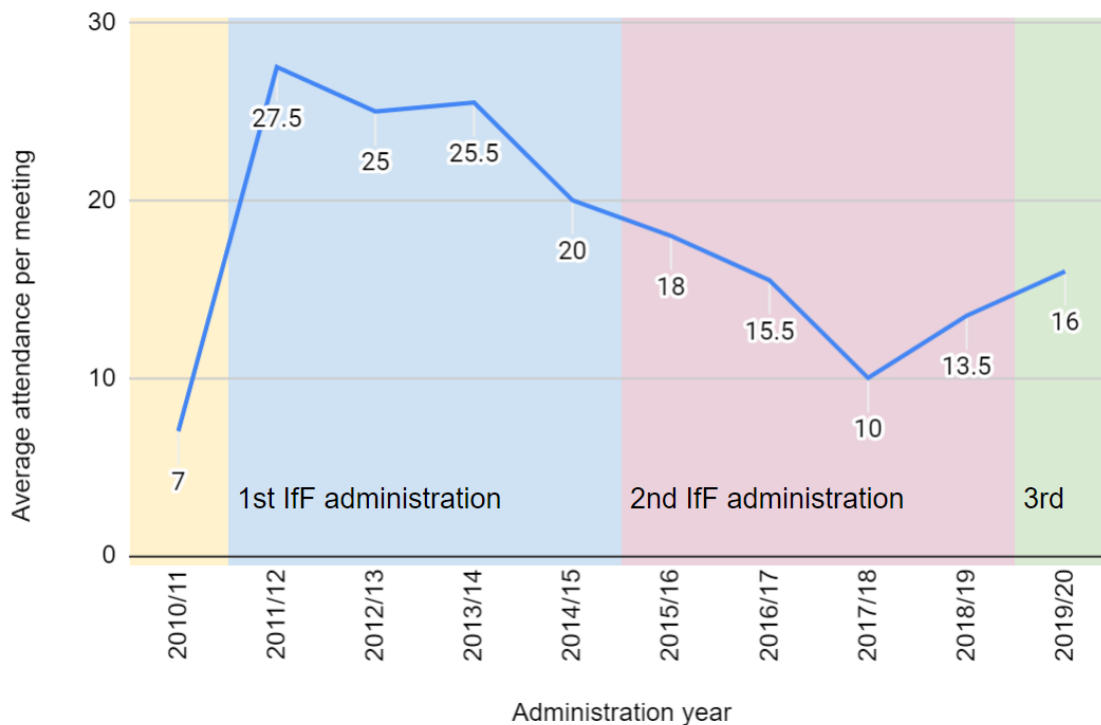
[16] Median is used in the calculation of meeting attendance as there was a wide range in attendance, with particular issues generating relatively high levels of public attendance. The highest public attendance at an ordinary council meeting in this period was 150 people, in the 2013/14 administration, discussing the Saxonvale town centre development (Frome Town Council, 2013c).

The reasons for this pattern of public attendance is not clear. The increase in attendance occurred before any significant changes had been implemented by IfF to the format of Full Council meetings (see below). Citizen participation was not, therefore, driven by changes in participatory practice. Frome Town Council experienced an increase in publicity with the election of the IfF administration, but the town council had been relatively well covered in the press prior to the IfF administration, suggesting that media coverage alone was not driving attendance[17] . Turning to the initial movement and public interest that motivated the formation and election of IfF, this was an active movement interested in changing the town council administration, and one that naturally coincided with the start of the IfF administration. The pattern of attendance at Full Council meetings, therefore, seems most likely to be reflecting the attendance of citizens who were part of, or influenced by, this movement, or triggered by the same factors that motivated it.

The pattern of broad attendance was accompanied by a similar trend with regard to active citizen participation. Town council minutes indicate that the year before the first IfF administration, an average of 1 public question was asked in each meeting, and this rose to 4 public questions per meeting around the middle of the first IfF administration, falling back to an average of 2 public questions in the second IfF administration. Minutes and interviewees indicated that it was often the same citizens that asked questions, as this IfF councillor stated:

> people will come and have their say, but the problem is that it's sometimes the same people that come and have their say. It's not like the whole of the town is going, "ooh what shall I do on a Wednesday night, I think I'll go to a council meeting" (FM3).

Citizen Authority

With regard to authority, analysis of meeting minutes and observations indicated that within the public participation section, members of the public challenged municipal policy decisions, and voiced complaints about the town council and other levels of municipal government (FM3, FM4). Typically, a response from the town council would be for an officer to follow-up on a query or for a councillor to respond to a point. The Full Council meetings often had district and/or county councillors in attendance, who would also respond to public queries, if relevant. The town council, therefore, provided a venue for citizens to exert a level of influence towards different kinds of municipal authority. The table discussions instituted by

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[17] Articles on 'Frome Town Council' in the Somerset Standard and Guardian: 167, 118, and 150 articles for 2008/09 to 2010/11 respectively, prior to the IfF administration. In the first IfF administration the number of articles was 172, 185, 207, and 199 (from 2011/12 to 2014/15). In the second IfF administration the number of articles was 161 and 131 (from 2015/16 to 2016/17).

IfF extended this influence by consulting citizens who attended the meeting on future policy decisions or options, and facilitating discussion between citizens and decision-makers (FC1, FM4, FM6). Minutes indicate round-table discussions involving citizens on, for example, alternatives to the weed killer glyphosate for controlling weeds in public spaces (Frome Town Council 2016a) and whether the town council should develop a piece of land in the town centre that it owned (Frome Town Council, 2017a). One IfF councillor noted how discussion, and those present, could sway opinion on the subsequent decision:

> we had a discussion on glyphosate … I happened to be on the table with the guy from [another town] who had done it, changed their methods, 'well let's do that then', whereas somebody else was on a table with some old ladies who thought it was a terrible idea because their paths would get covered in weeds (SM4).

The table discussions engaged all the citizens attending and was a process of advice and consultation beyond simple communicative influence. However, as participation declined (see Figure 5.6 above) the options for such discussion declined. As noted in Section 5.2.2 above, several councillors viewed participatory activities as important to personal and civic development, with the town council meetings mentioned explicitly in relation to this (FM4). The development of personal and civic benefits is, therefore, indicated on the Democracy Mapping as a practice present here (see Table 5.5 above).

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

Turning to process, within the forum of public questions the citizen could define problems to be considered and act to set the agenda of discussion. The forum of public questions performed a distinctive role, in that the rest of the public meeting had an agenda determined by councillors and council staff. Minutes indicated that citizens raised issues related to actions of the town council in 66% of the 175 public questions asked, 18% of public questions related to the actions of other municipal authorities, and 15% were questions or statements on wider matters[18]. This analysis evidences that citizens were not constrained by the agenda, but could raise any issue. External presentations were given covering topics including poverty, education, and public health, suggesting a potentially broad agenda (FC1; for example, Frome Town Council, 2012a, 2015a). There were round-table discussions on how to 'get the public to engage more' with environmental issues (Frome Town Council, 2018a), and about 'residents' concerns over the rollout of 5G technology across the UK' (Frome Town Council, 2019a). Here, citizens could discuss possible solutions along with

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[18] Questions asked during Full Council meetings, May 2011 to December 2019, see Chapter 4 for more details.

indicating a preference. With regard to the decision-making occurring within the meeting, citizens could indicate their preferences, though the point of decision-making itself was restricted to councillors.

The reports of officers to IfF councillors within public meetings allowed for a level of public monitoring on the implementation of council policy, alongside reflection from IfF councillors on ongoing projects. There were regular updates of ongoing projects publicised on the council website and through social media (for example, Frome Town Council, 2017b). A work programme was brought to council meetings, where staff reflected on the progress and implementation of different policy initiatives (for example, Frome Town Council, 2018b), a process that had been implemented by IfF (FC2, FM3). These documents, and discussion of them, could be observed by citizens through the formal meeting process. There was some review of how policy implementation had gone, though this review was 'not a formal process' (FO1). Reflection on projects also occurred within the IfF group, when it was felt particular initiatives had not worked (FC2, FM6), but this was not a process observable by the public.

Citizens and Communication

With regard to more passive modes of communication, access to council documents improved over the course of the IfF administration, with only minutes available online prior to 2012, compared to agendas and full reports subsequent to 2012. However, the transparency of parish and town council processes was a significant focus of government and sector body guidance (placed into statute in 2015 by The Local Government (Transparency Requirements) (England) Regulations), and this change cannot be attributed solely to IfF.

With regard to the ability of citizens to observe and monitor the processes in Council, councillors emphasised that discussion within decision-making meetings was open, seeking to find agreement through discussion within the council meeting rather than through pre-arranged partisan voting (FC1, FM3, FM5, FM6). However, discussion in public council meetings was often brief, and decisions often unanimous (for example, Frome Town Council, 2016a, 2017a, 2018a). This councillor discussed why:

> You'll see us pass things ... generally unanimously, and that can seem like we're just shoving stuff through, but actually what it is, is, I would argue, is the result of careful planning beforehand, so actually the stuff that goes to in terms of recommendations, we're likely to be behind because it's been well worked through, it's not someone's hare-brained scheme going off (FC3).

This 'careful planning' did not refer to discussion of how to vote. Rather, it was a discussion on policy proposals with 'early discussions and involving staff, as experts apart from

anything else … just going backwards and forwards' (FM3; also FC1, FC2, FM6). A combination of: close working relationships; trust that proposals had been worked through; informality in meetings; and, trust in the most active and senior councillors particularly, led to occasional lack of scrutiny (FC1, FC3, FM4, FM6), which in turn would have led to a lack of public justification for decisions being taken. A partisan opposition would have made such a lack of scrutiny less likely (see Leach and Wilson, 2000; Rummens, 2012).

Citizens could express preferences, through consultations that would be brought to council meetings, round table discussions in council meetings, and by raising points or asking questions. As discussed in the section above, citizens expressed preferences and asked questions about the town council and other levels of municipal government, along with issues outside of this (also FC1, FC2, FM3, FM4). The IfF institution of round table discussions created a practice conducive to preference development and argument, with both of these indicated on the Democracy Mapping (see Table 5.5 above). The group discussion activity also typically presented aggregated feedback from discussions to the wider meeting (Frome Town Council, 2018a). Discussions were typically facilitated by council staff, with councillors and citizens having equal speaking rights. From interviews, there was no indication that councillors were acting as a teacher or salesperson (see Button and Mattson, 1999), nor otherwise using pressure or cajoling, and such a stance would contradict the central claims of IfF (see Section 5.2.2). For meetings where there would be public discussions, more informal seating arrangements were put into place, where councillors sat 'round a table with five or six people to talk to' (FC1), so that councillors sat alongside citizens. This is shown in Figure 5.7 below, with council officers and the Chair at the front, whilst councillors and public sit together.

Figure 5.7   Frome 'Town Matters' meeting, June 2019 (Frome Town Council, 2019d)

The role of IfF

With regard to the impact of IfF, the extent of participation in town council meetings changed, with more participation from citizens generally, and more participation from both external professionals and lay-stakeholders through the intervention of IfF. The increase in citizen participation appeared largely due to that stimulated by the election campaign of IfF, which would ultimately be limited in sustainability and transferability, an issue considered in Section 7.2.2. For a limited period, the targeted involvement of councillors from Frome Youth Council was an explicit mechanism to increase inclusiveness, though required more resources within and without the council, with the dependence of targeted involvement on networks and resources external to the council discussed further in Section 7.2.3.

It is common practice to have a set time for public participation at the start of Full Council meetings, allowing public attendees to ask a question, or make a statement, on any topic (Giovannini et al, 2023, pp.17-18). In 2011, the IfF and opposition councillors unanimously agreed with a recommendation that chairs could allow public participation at any point (Frome Town Council, 2011b). In a further alteration, in line with the strategy of the second IfF administration (see Frome Town Council, 2015d), the Standing Orders were changed in 2016 to direct chairs of Full Council and committees to 'manage Council meetings in a way that encourages engagement of the public as well as Cllrs' (Frome Town Council, 2016b, p.6). A senior councillor described this:

> it's actually what people from other councils are most surprised by when they come ... every discussion is an open discussion in the room, people are allowed to express a view, they're not shut up and the conversation is a conversation in the town rather than in the council (FC3).

The impact of the round-table discussions was a shift towards consultation rather than citizens simply communicating preferences, though it also allowed citizens more opportunity to do that. The facilitation of discussion and argument was a particular benefit, and one that was tied to personal and civic benefits. Whilst round table discussions did not happen at every meeting, and were dependent upon citizens wishing to attend, they were a participatory instrument that strongly aligned with democratic municipal government. This is taken up further in Section 7.5.3.

5.3.3   Informal and citizen-initiated contact

Whilst a very typical process, informal and citizen-initiated contact was valued by interviewees, being a process where citizens could talk about issues relevant to them. A distinctive aspect for IfF was activity in areas where citizens are typically underrepresented in participatory processes, this practice coordinated by Frome Town Council and instituting an element of targeted involvement (see Table 5.6 below).

Table 5.6   Democracy mapping of citizen-initiated contact

Less inclusive		Participant Selection				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		<1% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		Citizen Authority				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		Citizens and Communication				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF	

Participant Selection

As noted in Table 5.6 above, informal contact was an open process that was distinctive in being located in the public sphere, as part of ordinary and unstructured interactions. Citizens were able to communicate in everyday spaces familiar to them. Interactions with staff were less public, taking place within the Town Hall or via social media, such that this might be termed semi-formal contact in that these were 'invited' spaces rather than wholly in the public sphere (Cornwall, 2008). Another kind of contact occurred through a councillor being on a steering group or board of local third-sector organisations, which occurred both through formal nomination from the council and through councillors often being active in other local roles (FC1, FM1, FM3, FM6). This was a route of contact with lay and external professionals that was relatively informal compared to interactions within formal town council meetings or consultation processes.

Frome Town Council ran several community initiatives, including a long-term community building project that aimed to address multiple challenges faced by area with relatively high levels of deprivation. Activities such as litter-picks in the area drew the community together, but also enabled informal communication between councillors and residents (FM4, FM6). This was an area that had citizens who were typically underrepresented in municipal processes. A councillor discussed an activity of literacy also sought to engage people who wouldn't usually be engaged:

> what we ended up doing was running little events in the places where you would least expect to find them and going to different parts of the community and having a presence there so that you can chat to people about other things the council does, but there is something that they want to do, that interests them, that's where they are (FM4).

This was a form of targeted involvement, connecting citizens with councillors through non-political participatory activities, opening up the possibility of political communication and ties being formed.

Citizen Authority

Informal and citizen initiated contact allowed citizens communicative influence. There was evidence that these contacts and informal networks impacted upon the policy of the council, such as in this example of lay-stakeholder influence:

> I'm coming and saying ... "[this group] wants to do this", I'm not saying "I've been lobbied by [this group] and ... having thought about it I think we should do this" (FC1; also FM6)

Here, the councillor acts as a 'boundary spanner' (see Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks, 2019, p.220), advocating for the group in a way that transmits the wishes of the group. This connection goes both ways, with the councillor "knowing what opportunities there might be and being able to point people in the right direction" (SM4). There was no requirement that councillors or council staff had to respond to expressions of preferences, but these forms of informal contact evidently had some influence over the actions of councillors and staff.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

A particularly distinctive aspect of informal contact was that citizens had control over the content of what they wished to raise. Citizens could define a problem, set the agenda, suggest a solution to an existing priority issue, or indicate their preferred solution from those being raised. Citizens could also, to an extent, define the nature of the process, being able to initiate conversation within a place that might be familiar to them, or initiate contact via email or social media at the time of their choosing. Some IfF councillors spoke about the benefits of informal conversations with constituents, such as when shopping or on community activities. For example, being with "people litter picking you're hearing what their concerns are" (FM3; also FC1, FM6). Engaging people whilst doing other activities was an opportunity to talk to those who would not engage with the town council in formal processes. In this sense, the design of the 'process' (the informal contact with the councillor) was also partly controlled by the citizen, and much more than where the time and place of participation was defined by the council administration.

Citizens and Communication

Interviewees related that communication was typically around the expression of preferences, (FC1, FM3, FM7); however, as noted above, councillors acted as intermediaries between lay-stakeholders and the council in ways that could act to develop preferences. IfF did not have a presence between elections as a political party and did not act as a channel or platform for communication, in contrast to most political parties (see Bale, Webb and Poletti, 2019). Instead, informal contact was facilitated through the activities of Frome Town Council and to IfF councillors as individuals (FC1, FM2, FM3, FM6).

The role of IfF

Casework, which is typically produced by citizen-initiated contact between councillors and constituents, was argued by some within IfF not to be part of a councillor role. As one councillor put it, the IfF conception of the role of councillors was:

not go out to try and find stuff that people have got problems with, actually be a
signpost to others … involve a member of staff because they are paid and they can
actually make things happen (FC2; also FC3, FM4).

However, some councillors did act as advocates for constituent issues, finding "having the
title of councillor all of a sudden makes things actually happen for people" (FM7). For some
within IfF there was a need to avoid becoming 'elected social workers' (FC3); however,
informal and citizen-initiated links provided the opportunity to represent citizens who might
be more likely to encounter a social worker than a representative. The extent to which the
ILP in particular facilitated this contact is unclear, but such narratives aligned with
commitments to be responsive.

5.4 Processes initiated by IfF

This section will consider four different kinds of municipal processes that were essentially
defined by IfF, or by Frome Town Council staff operating within frameworks and strategies
set by IfF (see Section 5.2.3). For each of these processes, there is a Democracy Mapping
of the participatory practices present, to enable further analysis on how IfF has instituted
participatory practices in Chapter 7.

5.4.1 Participate Frome

Prior to the IfF administration, a development agency funded community consultation, the
Vision For Frome (2008b) 'Community Plan', set out 85 objectives to improve Frome. IfF
decided to make this the basis of their policy in their first administration, prioritising
objectives in the plan that it could deliver (Frome Town Council, 2011a, p.10). IfF noted the
lack of its own resources to address many of the issues raised in the Frome Community Plan
and stated that the town council would 'support and encourage communities and empower
them to look after their own neighbourhoods and interests'. An initiative was proposed, as 'a
series of lively and engaging participatory events across the town in the same week under
the banner of 'Participation Week'' (Frome Town Council, 2013e). A council staff member
coordinating this work stated it was to 'enable people to come together to change the things
that they really can change and to have some positive effects on the things that they can't'
(FO2). The town council was here placing itself as an actor that could facilitate local people
being able to address issues within the Community Plan outside of the powers of Frome
Town Council to address. The Participate Frome initiative was designed as a week of
consultation and events to occur in November 2013, coordinated by Frome Town Council
but with the involvement of a range of other organisations. Participate Frome incorporated a

range of activities in public spaces, and primarily directed citizens to consider activity outside of municipal policy, meaning this process had particularly distinctive connections with the public sphere (see the Democracy Mapping in Table 5.7 below; also Frome Town Council, 2013f).

Table 5.7   Democracy mapping of Participate Frome

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		<1% - 8% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF	

Participant Selection

Participate Frome involved a range of different participatory instruments, most of which were open to all and took place in public spaces. This included on-line publicity and information, in-person activities within a town centre pop-up-shop, on-street activities facilitated by external professionals, and a public meeting. Participate Frome connected strongly with the public sphere, being in everyday public spaces. Both staff and councillors were involved, though the extent of this participation varied, with councillors not necessarily present within some strands of the initiative. Some events were closed, such as a launch of the Fair Frome poverty initiative, directed towards lay-stakeholders and professionals. A 'Young People's Question Time', coordinated by an active local youth organisation, was an element of targeted involvement. In terms of the extent of participation, the initiative engaged up to 2000 people and 50 organisations, with around 8% of Frome citizens participating in some way (Frome Town Council, 2013e, 2013f).

Citizen Authority

An important aim of Participate Frome was to influence debate in the public sphere, and the development of those involved with regard to civic activity, therefore aiming to benefit citizens through personal and civic development. As a staff member involved stated, "we asked 'What do you like about Frome?', 'What would you change about Frome?', but the really significant thing was 'How would you change it?'" (FO2). Presentations and discussion on the draft Neighbourhood Plan (Frome Town Council 2016c), an element of statutory consultation, and a consultation event on the future of a local green space (Edventure, 2014), were elements of consultation. As some councillors were present in these activities, and feedback was collated by staff, there was also potential for citizens to have communicative influence.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

The participation of citizens in different stages of the policy cycle was diverse, though partial, reflecting the different kinds of participatory instruments incorporated in the initiative. Activities such as an on-street 'Soap-Box' where citizens were invited to state 'What is your favourite thing in Frome and Why? What one thing would you change and HOW?' (Participate Frome, 2013a) invited citizens to define problems, set the agenda, and suggest solutions. The role and format of participation in the town was also discussed, with citizens feeding back that they 'had provided their views in the past but felt that they were not acted upon' (Frome Town Council, 2013f, p.12; see also Figure 5.8 below). This feedback shaped future activities, with a number of recommendations around improved communication on the outcomes of participation, thus giving citizens an element of influence over process design (see the Democracy Mapping in Table 5.7 above).

Figure 5.8   Participate Frome 'mural' (Participate Frome, 2013b)

Citizens and Communication

With regard to the mode of communication, participants could passively read presentations and displays about projects, along with the feedback of other citizens. Citizens were encouraged to express and develop preferences through several activities, with elements of discussion with town council staff and councillors, in consultative strands, and at the concluding public meeting. More intensive discussion and deliberation was involved in a seminar asking external professionals 'to look at how to increase participation in Frome's statutory and non-statutory services' (Frome Town Council, 2013f, p.4). Feedback from public events was summarised in terms of 'prominent themes' (Frome Town Council, 2013f, p.1), indicating that where communication had influence over further processes it was the aggregation of multiple individual preferences, indicated as such on the Democracy Mapping.

The role of IfF

The approach of Participate Frome was partly, and significantly, shaped by the approach of the council staff involved in coordinating the work. The strategy of public participation, the recruitment to the staff role that would coordinate the initiative, and the proposal for the week of activity, came from IfF councillors (Frome Town Council, 2013e; also SO2, FC2). The initiative itself was largely led by Council staff, though councillors were strongly involved in elements of the week. Participate Frome was a distinctively broad process that was, in practice, multiple different participatory instruments. The sum of all these participatory

practices was an initiative that gained extensive participation compared to other processes, distinctive for its engagement with the informal public sphere, discussed further in Section 7.3.1. However, feedback indicated that the week-long series of Participate Frome events had caused a level of fatigue, stretching citizens who wished to attend multiple events and being challenging for those facilitating the initiative. Frome Town Council moved to a more focussed model of participatory events after this, though remaining under the 'Participate Frome' label. This was a form of process design, where participants were invited to discuss the nature of participation, discussed further in Section 7.4.1.

5.4.2 Campaign initiatives

The approach of 'Participate Frome' was to direct citizens towards action outside the council, on the understanding that the resources of the Frome Town Council were not sufficient to address citizen priorities. Aligning with this approach, the IfF administration initiated and supported public campaigns that stimulated activity in the public sphere and also acted to influence public opinion. Public meetings are a typical kind of participatory event for town councils to hold, but such meetings are usually in relation to areas of work where the town council has direct authority (for example, Frome Town Council, 2015g), or joint authority (for example, Landscape Projects, 2012). Campaign initiatives were directed towards issues that were under the authority of larger municipal authorities and national government, though not necessarily connected with specific policies. The orientation of authority towards the public sphere, rather than the municipal policy of the town council, is shown on Authority dimension of the Democracy Mapping for campaign initiatives (see Table 5.8 below). Several campaigns had been initiated or supported by the town council under the IfF administration, including on food poverty, litter, literacy, and fair housing. The campaign initiatives will be discussed further with reference to a particular example, an event on 'Plastic Free Frome' that occurred within the research visit. The characteristics of these initiatives varied depending upon the extent to which the process was only initiated by the town council or was facilitated, or funded at arms-length. The initiative for a plastic free Frome was facilitated by a member of council staff recruited by IfF to a sustainability role, driven by the priorities of IfF councillors. However, the initiative was also part of a 'zeitgeist moment' (FC1) of public opinion around plastic use, where council staff and councillors were 'kick-starting or cohering things that are going on' (FM3) [19].

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[19] Prompted by the BBC television series 'Blue Planet', see the discussion of the 'wider impacts' of the series in Dunn, Mills, and Veríssimo (2020)

Table 5.8   Democracy mapping of Plastic Free Frome

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		0.3% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				**Most influence**
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF	Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF		

Participant Selection

With regard to participant selection, discussions within the meeting were facilitated by council staff, in particular: community support officers; the communications team; and, the sustainability officer. Councillors and lay-stakeholders also facilitated discussions and activity. The event, therefore, relied upon the 'democratic professionalism' of council staff and others (Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks, 2019, p.220). Observation evidenced that council staff had active and political engagement within the meeting, both as facilitators and participants, and contributed to an energised space that was very distinct from formal council meetings (this distinctive nature of the campaigns initiative will be discussed further in Section 7.3.1). The event was broadly publicised and open to all citizens, as indicated on the Democracy Mapping (see Table 5.8 above), though lay-stakeholders and other interested citizens were specifically invited, and there were 'small circles of people who know each other' (Observation, Plastic Free Frome meeting). Turning to the extent of participation, the event drew in 60 people from the town, representing 0.25% of Frome citizens. Given the intensive role of participants, and relatively small number of citizens engaged, and that some were evidently engaged from the same networks, the process could be characterised as exclusive.

Citizen Authority

Regarding influence, this was not directed towards municipal policy, but towards actions in the public sphere. The intention was to gather citizens together to discuss actions that they could do themselves, as one member of council staff stated:

> it's just saying to people, "ok, great ... everyone here wants Frome to reduce its use of plastics, so how do we help schools and community groups, how do we help businesses, how do we help", and again it will be, what are the actions that you can take away from today and do yourself (FO2).

This view was echoed by an IfF councillor reflecting on the Plastic Free Frome meeting:

> some of the people in the meeting have decided that they are going to Sainsbury's on a particular date and take back all the plastic wrapping. Now we're not even organising it but, we had the meeting of Plastic Free Frome meeting and then … the community goes, 'well we can do this' (FM3).

With councillors and staff present, citizens had the opportunity for communicative influence around the broader topic. However, the meeting was primarily oriented on activity in the public sphere, both in encouraging citizens to initiate activity, and in directly supporting a campaign to influence the wider public debate (see Figure 5.9 below). The facilitation of this activity was underpinned by a wish to build up community capacity, developing citizen civic and personal skills.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

The issues and agenda for the meeting was set by the council and IfF, such that the meeting was oriented around solutions to an already defined problem (see the Democracy Mapping in Table 5.8 above). The selection of ongoing activities was influenced by citizens, though council staff and councillors had influence in how the project was progressed. A defining difference between this process and others in this case study is that citizen influence over implementation was very significant, in the sense that this was related to activity in the public sphere where citizens had authority and were the main actors. This included a social media page that allowed interested citizens to communicate and ask questions related to the campaign. The construction of resources and facilitation of the ongoing process was within the remit of council staff, though the connection to the public sphere is interpreted as allowing citizen influence across the process of implementation.

Figure 5.9   Leaflet and FTC website promoting plastic free Frome campaign

Citizens and Communication

Communication was through a combination of attendees expressing individual preferences, developing preferences in response to discussion, and an aspiration towards achieving agreement through this process. Outcomes from the meeting included individual ideas, though thematically aggregated, with an element of deliberation aiding agreement. Some documentation on feedback from the meeting and broader process was available on the town council website, such that the process could be monitored. In this sense, there was a broad range of communication involved. One exception was that passive participation within the meeting would have conflicted with the expectations placed upon attendees. The event was facilitated and voluntary, with pressure or cajoling not evident.

The role of IfF

The Plastic Free Frome meeting was initiated by councillors and council staff after the town council had committed to stop using single-use plastics, in response to a national debate. The issue of sustainability had been prioritised by a core IfF councillor, which included initiating the recruitment of a sustainability officer who coordinated the campaign (FM3, FM4, FM6, FO1; also Section 5.2.3). IfF was evidently central to the institution of this initiative.

The campaign initiatives were distinctive because of their orientation to the public sphere, and the extent to which citizens had authority over the implementation of the process. This potentially enabled the inclusion of citizens who would not typically engage with processes within municipal government, blurring the lines between the 'invited' spaces of municipal government and the 'public' spaces of civil campaigns (see Cornwall, 2002b). The aim of these campaigns to stimulate wider public discussion and debate aligns with broader deliberative processes and popular control (for example, Lafont, 2020a; see Section 7.5.3) and they are discussed further in Section 7.3.1.

5.4.3   The People's Budget

Frome Town Council allocated a proportion of its budget to community grants, which local voluntary groups could apply for. This is typical practice for parish and town councils and was standard practice before the first IfF administration (Lowe, 2015). In 2012 and 2013, a £10,000 "Participatory Grant Vote" was held, which gave the public a vote over a portion of the community grant to local associations who had applied for it. Whilst broadly a success in 2012, the process was felt to be too onerous for local voluntary groups, and was abandoned after a lack of interest in 2013 (Hellard, 2017). In 2017 a similar annual process was launched, but this time termed 'Participatory Budgeting' with more resources. There were also one-off processes that committed council spend in response to public voting on funding for specific projects, such as on the how money was spent on local parks (FC1, FO2; Frome Town Council, 2018c). The participatory budgeting process was reviewed each year, through informal and formal councillor and officer feedback (FC1, FC3, FM3, FM6; Hellard, 2017; Griffin, 2018). By 2019 the process was called the 'People's Budget' and a third-sector action research project, 'Public Square' (2019a) undertook a review to introduce citizen participation earlier in the policy cycle. The focus of this section will be on the participatory budgeting process as it was in 2019. Following the review by Public Square, several participatory practices were introduced, such as participation across more stages of the policy cycle than in 2018 (Public Square, 2019b). However, as this was part of a process that had been instituted by, and remained under the control of, the IfF administration, the participatory practices within this process are considered as all influenced by IfF (see Table 5.9 below).

Table 5.9   Democracy mapping of the People's Budget

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		0.1% to 4% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF	

Participant Selection

The 'People's Budget', was composed of two distinct processes: an 'Events' strand and a 'Town Vote' strand. The 'Events' strand began with a call for civic groups who would propose 'events which reflected the towns strategic aims of supporting Prosperity, Wellbeing and Environment' (Frome Town Council, 2019b). After councillors selected a shortlist of seven events, the successful civic groups produced short video presentations to share online, with this process supported by council staff. Voting was held online, with an open public vote attracting 250 votes from members of the public. There was also a targeted involvement of young people, with a "Make it happen" school-based activity including discussion and voting on the events by 250 local school students, weighted to 30% of the final vote. This strand, therefore, included participation from lay-stakeholders making proposals to councillors who had authority over short listing to a vote open to unaffiliated citizens and the targeted involvement of young people. The extent of participation for this strand was around 2% of Frome citizens.

The 'Town Vote' process began with an online and in-person open consultation that asked: 'how would you spend £10,000 to improve the lives of the people of Frome?'. Council staff developed the proposals made by citizens, which were put on an online platform where members of the public could add their own ideas, comment, and justify their preferences (see Figure 5.10 below). A group of 12 local people selected from different areas of Frome,

drawn from those who had responded to the initial consultation, attended a shortlisting day alongside two councillors and two members of staff, with facilitation by two external professionals. The shortlisting process was a form of closed targeted involvement, recruiting citizens from different postcode areas 'to reach new parts of the community' and 'help achieve a greater geographical spread across the town' (Public Square, 2019b). Through relatively intense discussions, participants then selected the final 5 proposals from the eligible ideas on the website. The final 5 proposals were voted on by the public, with 575 citizens taking part, around 2.5% of Frome citizens.

Figure 5.10   Frome People's Budget discussion (Your Priorities, 2019)
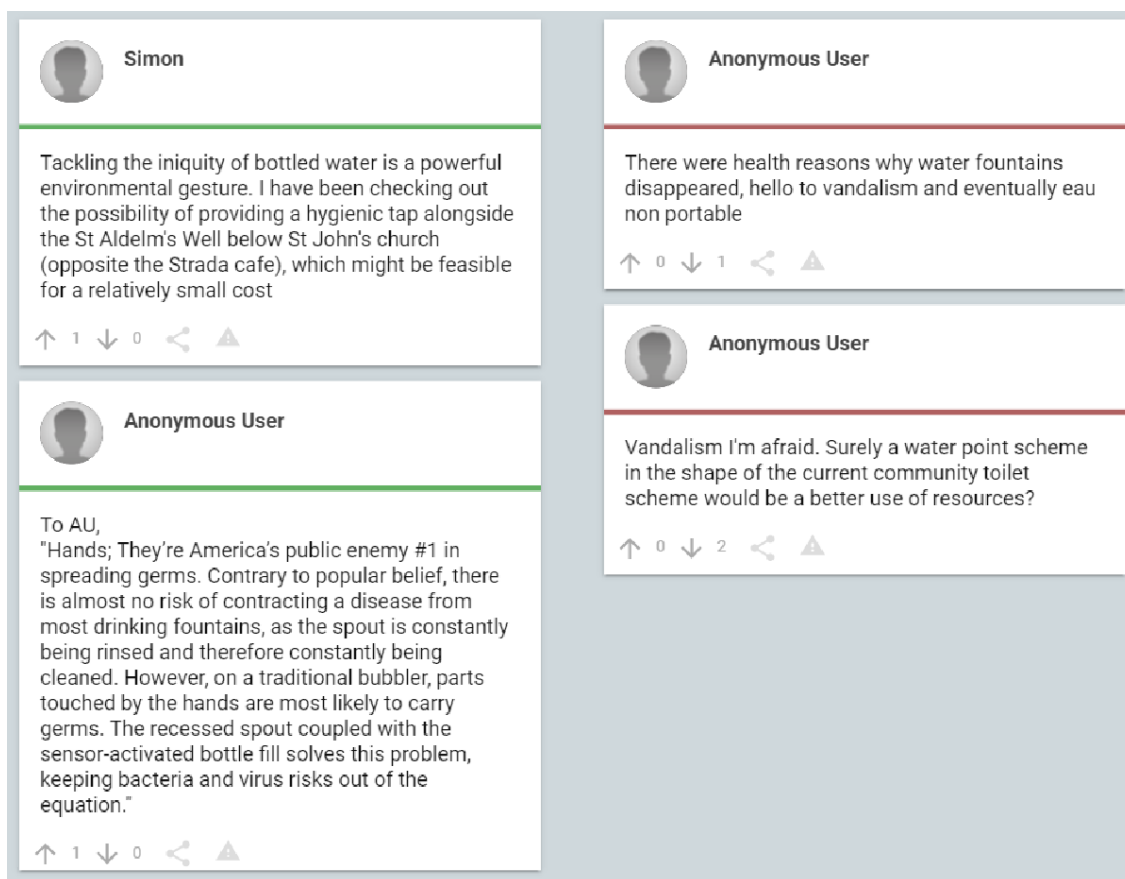
In both strands of the People's Budget, council staff and councillors shaped and promoted particular ideas whilst also supporting and facilitating the process, with Public Square (2019b, p.24), arguing that rather than have 'the risk of staff having to play multiple roles … it would be important to think more about how to separate out these roles'. This tension, with council staff and councillors in the role of a facilitators and enablers, but also elite experts and decision-makers, was present in other processes, but particularly in evidence here.

Citizen Authority

The 'Town Vote' strand included elements where citizens generated ideas, commented on developed ideas, and selected the final five proposals. Citizens, staff and councillors were in a process of co-governance, having different levels of authority in different stages, but broadly comparable influence (Public Square, 2019b, pp.15-28). In the 'Events' strand, lay-stakeholders made proposals, which were then reduced to a shortlist by councillors, assessing the fit of proposed events such that "the decision we ask [the public] to make is one that we would be happy to ratify in advance … all the events are appropriate and can fit into our strategy" (FC3, also FC2). In this way, councillors retained more authority over the events proposals. However, councillor views differed on the prioritisation of the People's Budget events, with influential councillors sceptical about the value of choices that were nonetheless shortlisted and voted for (FC1, FM4, FM6). Both strands concluded with a vote, which gave citizens direct authority over the outcome. Part of the motivation for participatory budgeting more broadly was to involve citizens within democratic processes and, accordingly, the development of civic and personal skills is indicated as a practice within the process.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

Citizens were involved in different ways across the two strands. In the Events strand, lay stakeholders defined problems and solutions, proposing events. Some solutions were filtered out by councillors drawing up a shortlist before the wider citizenry was given authority to indicate which events would be selected through the online vote. Previously, unaffiliated citizens attended a one-off event to select events; however, concerns had grown that the selection process was a 'beauty pageant', where presentation skills were favoured over impact (FM6; also FC1, FC3, FM3), and those who attended didn't 'necessarily provide a representative cross section of the community' (Griffin, 2018, p.2). In 2019 the 'Town Vote' strand extended citizen influence to defining problems and setting the agenda, previously controlled by councillors. The process had an open call for suggestions to form proposals and involved citizens in the process of refining these into final options for the town-wide vote. At the end of the process, the review process was carried out in the meetings of Town council, though with an explicit feedback gathering exercise carried out in the youth strand (Purple Elephant, 2018), allowing citizen influence of future process design.

Citizens and Communication

This difference in citizen involvement across the process was reflected in the mode of communication, with the 'Events' strand only involving unaffiliated citizens in the final

aggregative vote. The 'Town Vote' strand included communication across a range of intensities: the expression of preferences with regard to issues or solutions; the development of preferences between citizens and council staff to create more informed ideas (Public Square, 2019b, p.19), and between citizens with regard to proposals (for example, see Figure 5.10 above); the aggregative final vote; and, deliberation or argument within the shortlisting group, with aggregation of themes where agreement could not be reached. The 'Town Vote' strand was particularly open to observation through the online forums for presenting and discussing ideas, and both processes were fairly well documented in review documents taken to public council meetings.

The role of IfF

The revised participatory budgeting initiative launched in 2017 was primarily 'driven through by … the mayor at the time, so it was definitely a one of those "I want to do this, I want to try this, let's just give it a go", and that was fine' (FM6; also FM4, FC2; see Section 5.2.3 above). This process developed previous IfF initiatives whilst also reflecting the strategic aims of IfF around citizen involvement; however, ultimately this was an initiative that rested upon the interests and influence of a single IfF councillor.

The People's budget was notable for including two elements of targeted involvement. Being of the engagement of young people (see also Section 5.4.1 above), which aligned with IfF strategy. This is discussed further in Section 7.2.3, alongside the targeted involvement of citizens from across a range of areas in Frome into the shortlisting group, which was a small but distinctive process that aimed to mirror the geographical diversity of the town.

5.4.4   Advisory panels and forums

In 2015/16, at the beginning of the second IfF administration, the IfF councillors agreed to institute Advisory Panels. The Advisory Panels were "about taking a particular issue, getting expertise and opinion from the town and building up some solutions" (FC3). The Advisory Panels were viewed very positively by IfF councillors, though they also spoke of heavy demands on participants, councillors and staff in running the panels and implementing their recommendations (FC1, FC2, FC3, FM2, FM6, FM7). There were four Advisory Panels open to public participation, each to be chaired by a councillor with an interest in that area: Sport and Leisure, Wellbeing, 'Keep Frome Clean', and Town Centre Regeneration. With these broad themes, the involvement of citizens and stakeholders was primarily around defining and indicating solutions, but also extended to defining problems within these themes (see

the dimension of 'control' in Table 5.10 below). The bi-monthly Full Council meeting was shifted to a monthly meeting to handle ongoing formal Town council business, with the two main committee meetings suspended. Subsequent to the Advisory Panels putting forward their final recommendations, three continued as forums, monitoring the implementation of recommendations and continuing networks developed during the process.

Participant Selection

Around 4 to 8 town councillors and 1 or 2 council officers were in attendance on each panel, with councillors typically taking a leading role in facilitation (Barclay and Hellard, 2015; Collinson and Hellard, 2015; Usher and Wheelhouse, 2015; Barclay et al, 2016; also FM4). The Advisory Panels were open to all citizens but had strong engagement with lay-stakeholders to 'bring in expertise' (FC3, also FM4; Barclay et al, 2016; Collinson and Hellard, 2015). Stakeholders ranged from heads of local business groups, to the people who ran sports-clubs on a voluntary basis, to members of local associations. The final reports of the Advisory Panels indicated that some had significant participation from ordinary members of the public, with up to 20 unaffiliated citizens present alongside up to 30 lay-stakeholders and sometimes external professionals in the roles of participants and advisors. The Advisory Panels were to some extent exclusive, with regard to primarily engaging stakeholders and having a relatively limited extent of participation; however, there was some targeted outreach, including of young people to the town-centre panel (Usher and Wheelhouse, 2015) and of lay-stakeholders associated with a diverse range of local interests to the wellbeing panel (Barclay and Hellard, 2015).

Table 5.10   Democracy mapping of Advisory Panels

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		~1% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by IfF		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by IfF	

Citizen Authority

The Advisory Panels were not given direct authority to make decisions; as their advisory status gave the most flexibility over their membership under government legislation (see NALC, 2020). However, they operated on the understanding that recommendations were binding, and recommendations from each Advisory Panel were unanimously voted through at the Full Council meeting, after the panels concluded. The Advisory Panels had a significant impact upon the work programme for the remainder of the second IfF administration (FTC, 2015d; FC3, FO1). The Advisory Panels might, therefore, be described not just as advisory, but in effect as a process of 'co-governance', where municipal policy was decided by both citizens and councillors. The involvement of councillors within the process meant that aside from formal recommendations, citizens also had the opportunity of communicative influence within small group discussions. Whilst most recommendations were directed towards the town council, civic organisations and groups involved in the Advisory Panels committed to actions resulting from them (for example, Barclay and Hellard, 2015; Collinson and Hellard, 2015). The Advisory Panels evidently had direct influence over broader discussions in the public sphere, primarily through lay-stakeholders taking recommendations away to other bodies in the town.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

The Advisory Panels each had a broad theme, with the extent to which participants defined problems and set the agenda shaped by the councillors chairing the Advisory Panel as well as the broader context. For some panels it was evident that the definition of problems and agenda was largely guided by previous consultations and strategic demands (for example, Usher, 2015), whilst others worked from a more open set of requirements and gradually developed an agenda and solutions within the theme (for example, Barclay and Hellard, 2015). Citizens were involved across the Advisory Panels such that they had a level of control over the defining and indication of solutions. The town council facilitated the continuation of three Advisory Panels as the 'Frome Health & Wellbeing Forum', 'Frome Sports Forum', and the 'Frome Arts Forum'. These forums acted as a route for citizens to have oversight of the implementation of the Advisory Panel recommendations within and without the council, whilst also facilitating networking and broader discussion (FO1, FC2, FM4). Many policy recommendations were also part of the town council's work plan, with reviews of progress available as part of formal town council meetings (see Section 5.3.2 above).

Citizens and Communication

In terms of communication, Advisory Panels typically held round table discussions aiming towards some form of agreement and, therefore, facilitated argument and deliberation over the course of meetings (see Figure 5.11 below). A Frome Town Council officer described the process in two of the Advisory Panels as:

> very much about, let's all get in the room, we'll do a world cafe style approach to delivering this panel, so it's not a set of experts, if you like. And the actions that were agreed were ... agreed through consensus approach (FO1).

The goal of the Advisory Panels was forming recommendations to be taken forward by the town council and partner organisations, which implied deliberation or argument; as stated in the introduction to one meeting, 'panels will own their findings and therefore members must be given the opportunity to discuss, engage and contribute throughout the process' (Frome Town Council, 2015e). Available reports indicated that whilst discussion aimed towards agreement, preferences would be aggregated with a 'prioritisation' of proposals depending on the extent of individual support (for example, Barclay and Hellard, 2015, pp.2-3). Whilst the Advisory Panels were not minuted to the same level of detail as decision-making council committees, there were public records and reports to the council that enabled monitoring and observation.

Figure 5.11   Frome Wellbeing panel meeting (Frome Town Council, 2015f)

The role of IfF

The idea for Advisory Panels originated from the "core" councillors and was drawn from the example of 'Podemos in Spain'[20] (FC1, also FC3, FM3, Section 5.2.3), then being developed in an internal IfF meeting, where the themes for the panels were discussed (FC1, FC2, FM7). This was a process of citizen participation instituted by IfF that had no clear precedent within parish and town councils in England.

Whilst the Advisory Panels operated within boundaries defined by councillors and Town council staff, they engaged far more citizens than the committees they replaced. Comparing the Democracy Mapping for Advisory Panels (see Table 5.10) and formal Town council meetings (Table 5.5), in the Advisory Panels citizens had more authority and deliberation and argument was more common than in formal council meetings. As discussed in Section 7.3.3, whilst there were no extensive processes that ratified the recommendations from the Advisory Panels, the involvement of councillors and iterative development of recommendations reduced the risk that these recommendations would not align with the preferences of the broader citizenry.

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[20] The Advisory Panels appear most closely related to the local participatory assemblies of the 15-M movement, the precursor and 'community wing' of Podemos, see Mena, Sánchez and Collado, 2018.

5.5   Conclusion

Independents for Frome changed some of the typical processes of citizen participation related to Frome Town Council, sometimes very significantly. Innovations such as the table discussions within formal Town council meetings, set out in Section 5.3.1, were small in scale but important in changing the nature of these meetings to include a broader range of participatory practice. The suspension of normal town council committees in favour of participatory Advisory Panels, which operated as situations of co-governance (though with variable levels of control given to citizens), were a significant shift from typical practice. Citizen participation was increased through the presence of IfF in the town council elections, and also through activities such as the People's Budget. The engagement of stakeholders and the public-facing nature of some innovative processes were notable changes and introduced new participatory practices into the municipal government of Frome Town Council.

This chapter has demonstrated that Independents for Frome brought change to citizen participation in Frome Town Council, with the institution of participatory practices across several processes. However, as set out in Chapter 3, simply having more citizen participation does not imply a more democratic municipal government. The Democracy Mapping analysis in Chapter 7 will gauge the extent to which the influence of IfF aligned with producing desirable democratic goods. This analysis will set the case study of Independents for Frome alongside that presented in the next chapter, on Residents for Uttlesford.

Chapter 6.   Saffron Walden Town Council and Residents for Uttlesford

Our goal is to give people a local voice, a stronger local voice, the way you do that is to insert the resident into the council, the way you insert the resident into the council is to have control of the council (Residents for Uttlesford founder)

You put in a new play area, you put in new water fountains. The result, is the buzz. When the member of the public comes back and says, thank you for doing that, that's brilliant. … the buzz, do you understand? The buzz of that, is why I do it (Saffron Walden Town Council staff member)

6.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the second case study of a localist ILP, that of Residents for Uttlesford (R4U). The role of this chapter is to establish how citizens participated in the municipal processes of Saffron Walden Town Council, and the role of R4U in initiating or sustaining participatory practices. This chapter maps the participatory practices present within these processes and the influence of R4U over the institution of these practice. This mapping looks forward to the second stage of Democracy Mapping analysis, assessing the alignment of participatory practices instituted by R4U to a standard of democratic municipal government (see Chapter 7).

This chapter begins by setting the context of these processes, with a brief consideration of the town of Saffron Walden in Section 6.2.1. This chapter then turns to the formation of R4U, tracing how R4U was founded in response to a dispute over a municipal development plan proposed by the district council (see Section 6.2.2). This section includes a discussion on the narratives of R4U, and the focus upon listening to residents in particular. There is then a consideration of the R4U administration, discussing how a few key members were core to the activities of R4U, along with considering the key activities and staffing changes through the R4U administration (see Section 6.2.3).

This chapter then turns to the mapping of municipal processes against the Democracy Mapping (see Chapter 3). Considering three typical municipal processes - elections to the town council, town council meetings, and informal / citizen-initiated contact - the analysis finds R4U changing and initiating some participatory practices (see Section 6.3). The chapter then moves to consider the R4U Residents' Manifesto, an innovative participatory instrument that invited citizens to express their preferences on municipal policy, but also one

that was not transparent, and strongly mediated by councillors and senior R4U members (see Section 6.4).

6.2 Residents in administration

6.2.1 The town of Saffron Walden

The broad context of R4U and Saffron Walden Town Council is the town of Saffron Walden. Saffron Walden is to the north of Uttlesford District, a largely rural district but with a significant number of commuters to, and migration from, London. The most common occupations within the wider district are in business, finance, and marketing. Saffron Walden has a population of approximately 16,500 in 2021, up from around 14,500 in 2001, an increase of 14%. Several areas in Saffron Walden are amongst the least deprived in England and the town is relatively affluent, though also contains one of only two areas in Uttlesford below median on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (CRDC, 2019; see Figure 6.1 below). House prices in the area are well above the national average (HM Land Registry, 2020).

Figure 6.1   Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 map for Saffron Walden (CRDC, 2022)
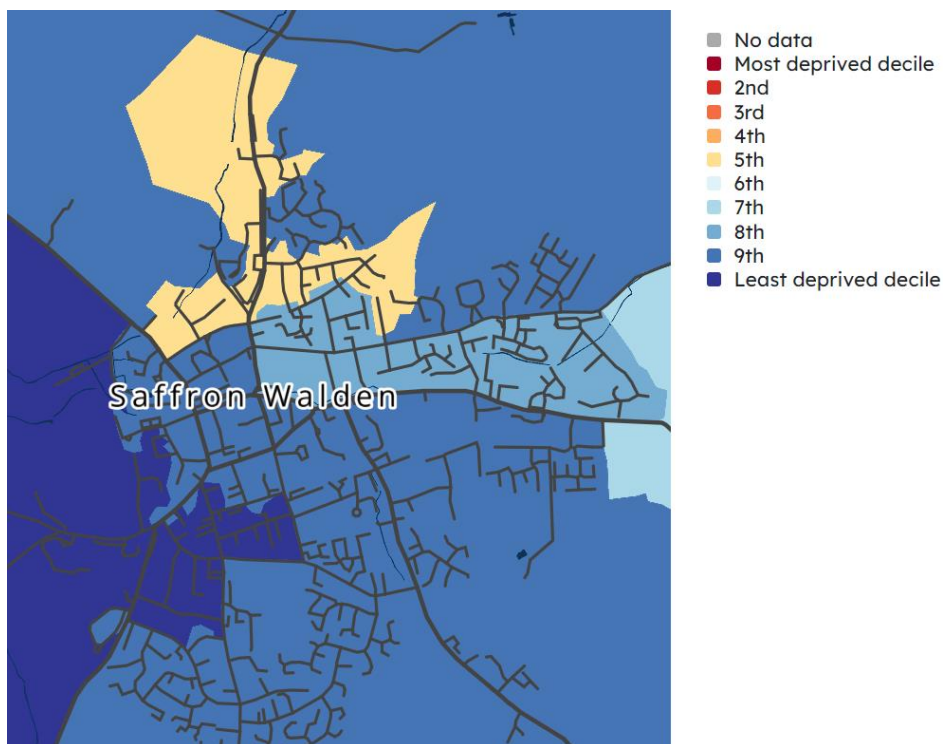
The parliamentary constituency of Saffron Walden, which primarily covers the district of Uttlesford along with some neighbouring municipal wards, has been represented by a Conservative MP since 1929. There is some credence to Saffron Walden being characterised as a 'a rock solid Tory seat' (Hardman, 2019). However, it could be argued that the district would be better characterised as being dominated by Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, with the presence of other parties marginal since the turn of the millennium. The town lies within the municipal districts of Uttlesford District Council and Essex County Council. Since the 1990s the district council has shifted between Liberal Democrat and Conservative administrations, with Saffron Walden similarly shifting in electing Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors to the district council.

6.2.2   Declaring WAR - the formation of R4U

In 2011 a community group named 'We Are Residents' (WAR) formed in Saffron Walden, contesting a relatively minor planning issue that galvanised significant local opposition and press coverage (see Tonkin, 2012). This agenda rapidly broadened, as a founding member of We Are Residents stated, "our campaign group was from, 'don't build [these] traffic lights here and these houses over here' to, 'actually, what is the right solution for the district?'" (SC1). In 2012, Uttlesford District Council (UDC), the planning authority for Uttlesford, proposed the expansion of Saffron Walden and other towns to meet national house building targets. This focussed the activity of We Are Residents, who took a leading role in opposition to the plan, arguing that it lacked evidence and proper consultation. We Are Residents campaigned alongside other groups, town and parish councils, including Saffron Walden Town Council (Saffron Walden Reporter, 2012; We Are Residents, 2013a; SC1). Lobbying failed to change the position of Uttlesford District Council, as one R4U founder stated, "we realised that protesting was actually no use at all, and the only thing that would make a difference was being in power" (SC2).

We Are Residents and a sister campaign group stood two candidates to the 2013 municipal elections under the name 'Independents for Residents'. The main focus for this ILP was the proposed housing development (see Figure 6.2 below), with the election argued to be a 'referendum on local housing' (We Are Residents, 2013b), indicating the kind of single-issue narratives expected of a protest ILP (see Section 2.2). However, there were also commitments to a 'localism agenda' that would 'ensure that party politics does not get in the way of doing the right thing' (We Are Residents, 2013c), with wider policy commitments that spoke more to the platform of a localist ILP. After an active campaign involving street stalls, social media, and leafleting households, both 'Independents for Residents' candidates were

elected, one to Uttlesford District Council, in a seat vacated by the Liberal Democrats, and one to Essex County Council, defeating an incumbent Conservative councillor.

Figure 6.2   Campaign event by We Are Residents (2013d)

Leading activists strategically researched political campaigning and visited other ILPs, including Independents for Frome. The conclusion of this process was the decision to form a party to fully contest the 2015 municipal elections across Uttlesford, at both district and town level. The name 'Residents for Uttlesford' (R4U) was settled upon. As a founder of R4U stated:

> "Residents for Uttlesford" says, "we are of Residents, for Residents, to represent Residents here", and any other politician is not for Residents. They are for the Tories or for Labour ... So the naming of brand was very important (SC1)

In July 2014, We Are Residents put out a press release 'asking residents from across the district to step forward and join its team of independent candidates for its 2015 district election bid' to create 'effective accountability' and a 'Council that will work competently and responsibly for the residents of Uttlesford' (We Are Residents 2014). In practice, new candidates were mainly recruited through personal outreach to existing councillors, community activists, and those active in the campaign groups that had formed the embryonic party (SC1, SC2, SM2). The connection with local campaigns against development persisted, as one interviewee relates of later recruitment:

> a number of people from the action groups against Stansted Airport expansion joined us, became councillors, and also there's a huge garden community proposed of ten thousand houses at an area of ... national historic significance and again there's an action group there fighting against that so they joined because of that (SM5; also SM1, SM4).

In the 2015 local elections, R4U stood for over 40 seats to district, parish and town councils and became the main opposition partly in Uttlesford District Council, with 9 councillors to the 23 of the Conservative group, who lost 7 councillors to R4U. R4U also stood a candidate to the parliamentary elections on a localist manifesto, though only gained 2.9% of the vote share, compared to 25.3% of the vote share in the municipal elections. The election results for Saffron Walden Town Council are discussed in detail in Section 6.3.1 below.

This section will now turn to the narratives of R4U with regard to municipal democracy, drawing on the public statements of R4U candidates, along with evidence from interviews. These narratives are important in understanding the orientation of R4U towards citizen participation, and the motivations of those within the party to institute participatory practices. The clearest statement of the R4U platform was the 'Residents' Manifesto', a set of policy commitments that were crowdsourced from citizens and then shaped by R4U members and councillors (see Section 6.4.1). For the 2015 election the party set out 5 overarching principles:

- Listen to residents and make objective decisions that are right for local communities.
- Plan strategically for the long term and focus on sustainable development.
- Deliver excellent services and fiscal responsibility.
- Develop ideas and policies that are progressive and independent from national party politics.
- Make the councils we control more transparent and accountable.
  (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019a)

Three of these statements connect directly to democratic goods. To 'listen to residents', make councils accountable, and to be 'independent from national party politics', is essentially a claim to produce popular control, R4U asserting that it would align municipal policy with the preferences of citizens to a greater extent than national parties could (see Section 3.1.2). The democratic good of transparency also explicitly stated. This manifesto was subsequently altered by further feedback from residents and campaign groups, along with the views of councillors (SM1, SM2, SM4; see also Section 6.4.1).

The democratic commitments of R4U were also evident in candidate statements[21]. A fifth (21%) of R4U candidates mentioned issues such as 'grass roots democracy' and being

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[21] R4U candidate statements were only available for 2019, and those for opposition parties either less accessible or simply not produced. These statements were evidently edited, being written in the third person and following a set format that ensured coverage of certain topics, though there was considerable variation across the themes discussed here.

'keen to hear, understand and represent the views of local residents' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). Statements focussed upon representation 'on behalf of residents', or being 'in touch with local values and needs' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). These statements appeared to express a view of citizen participation as being through councillors. This was a view of representation and a responsive municipal authority that was oriented around "listening to residents", echoing the principles set out above. The primary route for citizen participation was one where citizens could "get involved" (SC1) and become councillors, but that also acted to implement the 'policies of the people' (see Figure 6.3 below). Councillors were identified as residents, such that their preferences might be asserted to be identical to citizens in the locality (see Section 2.5); however, there was an acknowledgement of pluralism in viewpoints towards municipal policy, and also an acknowledgement of differences between unaffiliated citizens and councillors who were thought to inevitably 'go native' within the council (SC1; also SC2, SM1, SM3). This conception of the role of councillors implied the need for forms of citizen participation.

Figure 6.3   Front page of R4U website, August 2018

Residents FOR UTTLESFORD	residents get to decide	Residents' Councillors
Our Only LOCAL Party	A Residents' Agenda	Residents' Councillors
Formed because we care about the towns and villages of Uttlesford.	Policies of the people, by the people, for the people.	From every background; town and village.

With regard to affiliation with national parties and political ideology, an R4U councillor made a comment that summed up the views of a number of interviewees:

> "There is ... no right or left dichotomy ... and no ideology that guides, apart from listening to residents, which seems to be the sensible way we should be, anyway" (SM5).

However, whilst a political norm was not strongly evident in R4U, the party manifesto commitments to both low taxation and investment in public services, indicated a broadly centrist position. As noted in Section 2.2, parties taking a centrist position typically emphasise competence and responsiveness. A narrative of responsiveness alongside competent, evidence-based, decision-making was articulated both by R4U and interviewees.

One prominent narrative articulated a managerialist conception of local democracy (Haus and Sweeting, 2006); explicitly set out on the R4U website after their 2019 electoral success:

> 'Residents are our 'customers'. That means it all starts and ends with them … we use best practices that have been proven to drive delivery in the private sector ... Our party officers and advisers work with our councillors and senior council officers at each council to build our policies into that council's plans … Our operating model allows us to directly align, manage and track what residents desire and have voted for with what we will do and have done' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2020).

Decision-making would be based on 'proper evidence or logic' with a 'proper transparent process' (SC2), ensuring that policy is 'evidence-based' (SM1), with the 'right, correct, information' (SM2) so that the party would 'make objective decisions' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). For interviewees the 'evidence-base' referred to both technical expertise and the preferences of constituents, 'understanding the issues they care about' (SC1). This was again about responsiveness to the preferences of citizens (SM3, SM4). In another sense, this narrative connects with one of local issues being a matter of technical problem solving, or councillors sometimes taking decisions because they 'just seemed like a sensible thing to do' (SC2, also SM4). Therefore, there were different viewpoints on the role of participation, partly depending on the issue at hand, though in any case participation was conceived of as being oriented towards the representative rather than direct.

Party affiliation was mentioned by well over a third (36.8%) of R4U candidates in their campaign statements, referring to being a 'Residents-for-Uttlesford councillor' or making partisan statements such as 'I have seen what a great job Residents for Uttlesford have done at the town council' and that 'I will continue to vote for Labour on national issues, but am standing for R4U to deliver local things for local residents' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). R4U candidates included their previous, and even current, affiliations to national political parties within candidate statements. Partly this was a tactic of evidencing cross-partisan support (SC2), but also appeared to be an acceptance of the role of political parties at a national scale whilst rejecting them at a local scale, which aligns with the position of ILP members found by Angenendt (2022, p.412). As noted in Section 2.2, members of ILPs typically reject the role of national parties within the locality, with R4U councillors also arguing 'national party politics don't work locally', and that 'mainstream parties hand down policies that fail to meet or even understand locals' needs' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). Localism was a strong theme in candidate statements, with well over a third (37%) of candidates making statements such as 'it is time for residents to take back control of what happens where they live' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019b). The articulation of a localist and anti-national-party agenda reflected, according to an R4U founder, a strategic goal to promote "our localism message and be able to differentiate" from other parties (SC1). As

would be expected of a localist party, this was a differentiation along the centre-periphery cleavage.

Citizens joining R4U as members or candidates were not joining a neutral body, but a localist ILP that had a broad but definable approach to local policy, representing local people without being bound by a national party. Interviewees spoke about how R4U was 'representing my own gut feelings, an opportunity to move across the floor was a very welcome one' (SM2); and stated '[I] was certainly very comfortable with their views … I fitted in very well with them' (SM1). The advocacy of 'a localist or bottom-up agenda' (SM4) was a key motivation for at least one R4U councillor to align with the party, for another it was the orientation of the party to local activity and citizen participation:

> [I had] been a long-standing member of [a national party] but then got fed up with the fact that nobody ever did anything, just turned out at election, campaigned, I … came across the residents group … We Are Residents … there was a Town Hall survey, so everybody was invited, about six hundred people came and said what they wanted to see out of their town and district [council], which is very good ... grassroots policy development, (so that was) fantastic, so I ended (up) joining, getting involved (SM6).

The interviewee was here referring to the founding process of the R4U Residents Manifesto (see Section 6.4.1) and being motivated by the institution of this participatory instrument. Whilst the routes toward membership and candidacy are contingent upon individual motivations and particular triggers (see Power and Dommett, 2020), the narratives of We Are Residents and R4U, including those around responsiveness and participation, influenced who became active in the party.

6.2.3   The administration of R4U

Minutes from early 2015 indicate a 'formal agreement between Saffron Walden Town Council and We Are Residents' (Saffron Walden Town Council, 2015a) around an objection to a developer's planning appeal. In the May elections of that year R4U aimed to take control of the District Council, wanting to change that administration. The gaining of Saffron Walden Town Council was an "afterthought" (SC1, SC2) that subsequently became a key part of R4U's electoral strategy, demonstrating their competence in administration. After the 2015 election R4U had the same number of councillors elected to Saffron Walden Town Council as the opposing parties. With the agreement of the sole Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors, R4U was able to nominate the mayor, who had the casting vote, enabling R4U to implement its preferred policies. For most of the period under study, R4U had a slim hold on power and significant political opposition. In the 2019 election, R4U gained all but one seat on the town council. The impact of R4U on the elections to Saffron Walden Town

Council will be discussed in Section 6.3.1 below. This section will set out an overview of municipal processes in Saffron Walden Town Council and the timeline of the R4U administration. It will then turn to a brief discussion of two important pieces of context: first, the role of staff with regard to change in municipal policy; and second, the aims of R4U with regard to municipal government.

Citizens participated through a number of different municipal processes, set out in Table 6.1 below. Three processes are mapped here that were not initiated by R4U, being: the elections to Saffron Walden Town Council; town council meetings; and, informal or citizen-initiated contact. One process is mapped here that was initiated and sustained by R4U, being the Residents Manifesto. Analysis of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process, a large consultation running through the period of this study, was carried out but for reasons of space is not included here[22].

Table 6.1   Municipal processes in the R4U administration of SWTC

Process	Initiated and sustained by:	Section
Elections to town council	Government / Principal authority (also political parties and candidates)	6.3.1
Town council meetings	Council staff / councillors	6.3.2
Informal or citizen-initiated contact	Citizens / councillors / R4U	6.3.3
The Residents' Manifesto	R4U / councillors	6.4.1

A timeline of the R4U administration with citizen participation initiatives alongside selected other activities is set out in Figure 6.4 below. The timeline shows how the shift of We Are Residents to a coalition of groups that formed the protest ILP of Independents for Residents, and then to the localist ILP of Residents for Uttlesford, occurs over one electoral cycle. Also evident is how consultations initiated by R4U about SWTC policy decisions are often delivered by R4U, rather than through SWTC. This includes the large consultation on the town plan, prior to the election of R4U, and then several subsequent smaller consultations. These initiatives will be discussed in the following sections. The remainder of this section will consider the broad characteristics of the R4U administration, and some internal characteristics of R4U.

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[22] The initiation of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process was stimulated by We Are Residents, prior to R4U taking control of the town council. The plan was largely implemented under the R4U administration; however, the presence of participatory practices were not evidenced as due to R4U (see The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations, 2012; Saffron Walden Town Council, 2014b; Uttlesford District Council, 2022).

Figure 6.4   Timeline of the administration of Residents for Uttlesford

		Year	
Uttlesford District Council (UDC) publishes Local Plan favouring new town for housing		2011	
May 2011 local government elections result in Conservatives winning all seats on SWTC			'We Are Residents' (WAR) campaign group founded in Saffron Walden
	2012		
UDC Local Plan consultation now favours expansion of existing towns			Residents groups come together to campaign jointly across district against the new Local Plan
		2013	
SWTC considers referendum to consult on funding Town Hall restoration, decides to make a national lottery bid			Independents for Residents win County Council seat and UDC by-election
	2014		
We Are Residents hold Saffron Walden Town Plan consultation			Residents for Uttlesford officially launch campaign and recruit candidates
National lottery bid for Town Hall unsuccessful			
R4U manifesto launched		2015	WAR and SWTC jointly fight Kier planning development appeal
Residents for Uttlesford become main opposition on UDC			Residents for Uttlesford gain majority on Saffron Walden Town Council

Figure 6.4   Timeline of the administration of Residents for Uttlesford (continued)

	2016		SWTC makes precept rise of 19% to mend the Town Hall
Town council petition to UDC on parking			
R4U run consultation about alcohol sales in Saffron Walden market (run by SWTC)			Saffron Walden neighbourhood plan consultation
		2017	
Saffron Walden neighbourhood plan consultation			SWTC applies for a local pub to be an Asset of Community Value
R4U win no County Council seats			Saffron Walden Town Hall renovation completed
	2018		
Consultation events for a new playground, 1 hosted by SWTC and 1 hosted by R4U			SWTC installs drinking fountains in a bid to reduce plastic use
R4U policy platform and manifesto revised through consultation			Town council commits to hiring community police officers
		2019	
Informal consultation on playground benches			New playground opens on common
R4U win majority on UDC			R4U win all but one seat on Saffron Walden Town Council

Key:

Municipal processes initiated by others		Municipal elections
Municipal processes initiated by R4U		Internal WAR / R4U / SWTC process

The first significant decision made by the new R4U administration was in restoring Saffron Walden Town Hall through increasing the precept (tax on households) by 19% (SC2, SM1). This additional investment, along with the change in political and administrative leadership, combined to produce a range of public goods. The restoration of the Town Hall and re-launch of a local community centre provided subsidised venues for civic groups to use (SC2, SO3). There was increased access to the town common and new playground equipment in it, installed in 2019. Several initiatives were advocated by R4U councillors with an interest in environmental sustainability: drinking fountains were installed in the town in 2018, aiming to reduce plastic use; the town council switched to electric vehicles for grounds maintenance; changes to mowing practices were introduced to increase biodiversity; and, increased tree planting aimed to tackle climate change (SC2, SM1, SM3, SM5). Saffron Walden Town Council also acted to support local campaigns, for example, applying for a local pub to be an

Asset of Community Value, in a bid to save it from development, in 2017. Under the administration of R4U, Saffron Walden Town Council gained several awards for its activity (for example, Essex Association of Local Councils, 2019).

Within the town council there were a number of changes under the new R4U administration in how the council operated financially and organisationally, how the council worked with community groups, and how officers and members worked together (SC1, SC2, SO1, SO3, SM1, SM2). These changes came about due to both the actions of a new Town Clerk and the new R4U administration, with experienced R4U councillors facilitating the process (SO1, SM2). Changes to council staffing during the first R4U administration were relatively minor, as shown in Figure 6.5 below.

Figure 6.5   Map of areas of activity at Saffron Walden Town Council, 2012 to 2019[23]
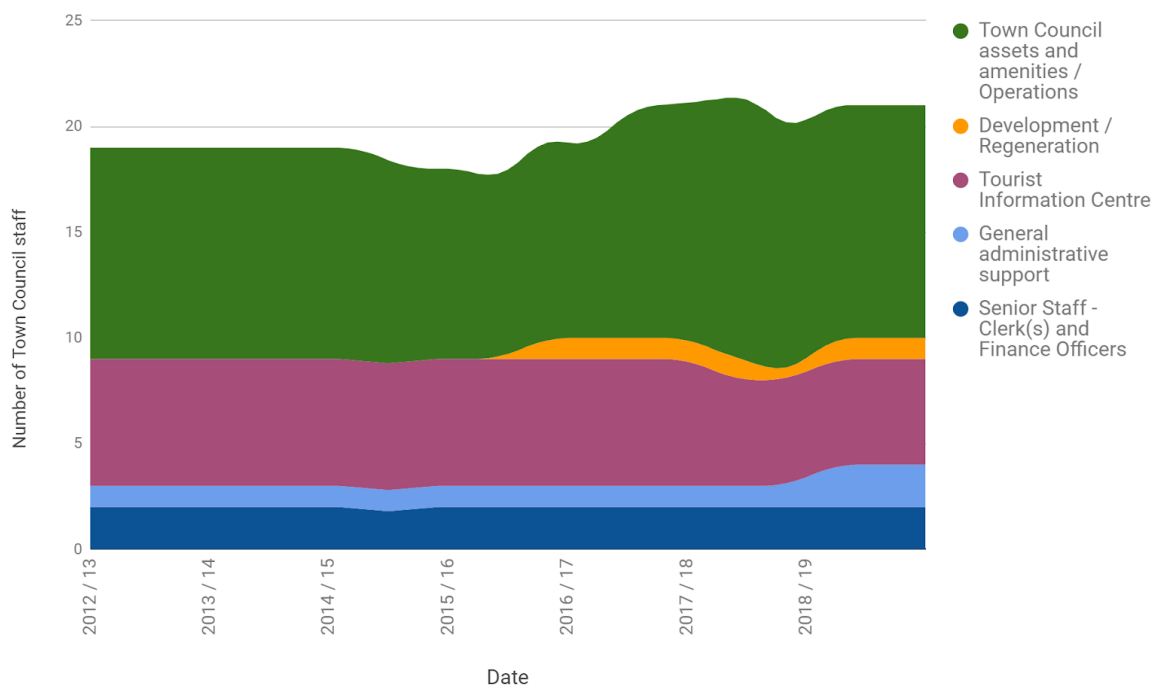
The change in culture that occurred with the new administration, political and administrative, appeared to develop capacity that was already present:

> we've always taken on assets which in reality are liabilities. But we run them a whole lot better. it's interesting to see the dynamic that the town council employees seem to

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[23] activity is based on an adjusted (several roles within Tourist Information Centre were Saturdays only) and smoothed headcount within broad area of activity and does not reflect spend.

> take genuine pride in the job and actually because they're looking over, most of them live in the town, there's much more ownership of what they do (SC2, also SM2)

It is not possible to state with confidence that any particular change within staffing at Town council was solely initiated by R4U, such that the practices implemented by those staff could then be said to rest on the influence of R4U. The taking on of assets refers to the transfer of assets from the district council, with the town cemetery and public toilets two notable examples expanding the responsibilities of the town council.

The small size of the R4U councillor group within Saffron Walden Town Council means it is difficult to assess to what extent key people were influential in particular roles. Some indication is given in that five of the eight R4U councillors held chairing and mayoral roles in SWTC across the first administration, with no opposition party councillor holding these roles. Elections to chair were generally unopposed, with one exception resulting in the R4U mayor casting their vote in favour of the R4U candidate (Saffron Walden Town Council, 2017a). With regard to the activity of R4U as a party, four people who held key roles at the founding of R4U in 2014 continued to hold key leadership and administrative roles within the party in 2019 (see Table 6.2 below). Though not a formal body, this 'core group' appeared to be a consistent influence on the party with regard to strategy, values, and recruitment (SC1, SM1, SM3). This group maintained positions through being elected or nominated to roles.

Table 6.2   Key role holders in R4U, 2014 to 2020

	2014 launch	pre-2015 election	post-2015 election	pre-2019 election	post 2019 election	2020 to date
Chair	C	C	C	C	C	C
Secretary	C	C	C	C	C	C
Treasurer	C	C	C	C	C	C
District lead	C	F	C	C	C	S
Town Lead	C	C	C	C	C	C

Key:		
	C	The 4 core R4U role holders
	F	R4U candidates / councillors in 2015
	S	R4U candidates / councillors in 2019

The governance of R4U was formally handled by a 'Management Committee'. One member of the Management Committee described it as 'the executive board, if you like, and it sits there and it looks at fundraising, policy development, and positions that need to be taken as

a party and looking at next elections and looking at the long range stuff' (SC1, also SC2). Though the composition of the Management Committee changed over time, it always included the core group members. The hierarchy of R4U was explicit, and evidently shaped the activities of the party, including processes such as the 'Residents Manifesto' and the wider approach to citizens. The party was coherent in its agenda of 'listening to people' (see Section 6.2.2), yet this coherence was to some extent shaped by the ambitions and motivations of individuals.

Just over three-quarters (76%) of R4U candidates to Saffron Walden Town Council and R4U Management Team members from 2015 to 2019 were in, or had been in, managerial or professional occupations[24]. The characterisation by one reporter of R4U being 'a collection of lawyers, business people, doctors and engineers' was a reasonable reflection, particularly of those most influential in the party (Hardman, 2019). It was evident from across interviews with R4U councillors and members that they brought the motivations, experience and knowledge that had shaped and grown through their previous employment into the councillor role, and this influenced the direction of R4U.

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[24] Using available biographies and candidate statements of R4U councillors and Management Team members (n=34) through Residents for Uttlesford, Uttlesford District Council, Saffron Walden Town Council, and Saffron Walden Reporter websites. 'Managerial or professional occupations' defined as occupations classified as major groups 1 or 2 using the Standard Occupational Classification 2020 (ONS 2021).

6.3 Processes not initiated by R4U

This chapter will now turn to map municipal processes of policy formation and implementation. This Democracy Mapping will evidence the practices within these processes, and the role of R4U in influencing changes to which practices were present. Whilst the municipal processes within this section were instituted by others, changes could be made to elements within these processes that shifted towards, or away from, democratic municipal government. The section will begin by considering the elections to town council, an extensive participatory process that was wholly outside the control of Saffron Walden Town Council and R4U in terms of its rules and regulations, but one where the presence of R4U had an impact (see Section 6.3.1). This section then moves to discussing and mapping typical processes of citizen participation: within formal decision-making meetings (see Section 6.3.2); and through informal or unstructured contact between citizens and councillors (see Section 6.3.4).

6.3.1 Electing the town council

In the terms of the Democracy Mapping, the elections to the town council is an open and aggregative process that allows citizens to indicate their preferred 'solution' with direct authority over the outcome (see Table 6.4 below). Before considering the Democracy Mapping in detail, this section will briefly discuss the results of the elections to Saffron Walden Town Council. In 2011 the Conservatives gained 15 seats on Saffron Walden Town Council, with 47% of the 6,151 votes cast (see Table 6.3 below). One Liberal Democrat councillor was elected in a by-election to Saffron Walden Town Council in October 2011. Whilst the town council had a Conservative administration, this was not a unified administration and the Conservative led town council had campaigned alongside We Are Residents against the decisions of the Conservative led district council.

At the 2015 elections R4U stood eight candidates for Saffron Walden Town Council across three of the four Saffron Walden wards. Five of the R4U candidates were not affiliated to a political party, two were former Conservative councillors, and one was a former Liberal Democrat councillor. The Conservatives were the main opposition, fielding nine candidates. Every R4U candidate won their seat by a significant margin compared to the national parties and R4U won nearly a third (32%) of the 13,476 votes cast (see Table 6.3 below).

For the 2019 elections, R4U again undertook a process of recruiting candidates, utilising personal networks, contacts with campaign groups, family connections and happenstance conversations, alongside general calls for people to stand (SM1, SM4, SM5). R4U stood 16

candidates across all four wards for Saffron Walden Town Council, but an administrative error meant one R4U candidate did not have "Residents for Uttlesford" against their name, with the Green Party gaining that seat (SM1). R4U had the 15 declared R4U candidates elected, gaining 39% of the 8,199 votes cast (see Table 6.3 below). The Lib Dems vote share only marginally increased from 18% to 19%, despite doubling their candidates.

Table 6.3   SWTC, seats and candidates by party, 2007-2019

Saffron Walden Town Council	Vote share and *total vote*				Seats				Candidates			
Party	2007	2011	2015	2019	2007	2011	2015	2019	2007	2011	2015	2019
Con	49%	47%	22%	14%	12	16	6		14	16	9	6
Lab	4%	22%	14%	9%			1		1	7	4	3
Lib Dem	41%	30%	18%	19%	3		1		15	14	4	8
R4U			32%	39%			8	15			8	16
Green			7%	11%				1				1
Other	6%		7%	8%					2		2	2
Total	*5,069*	*6,151*	*13,476*	*8,199*	*15*	*16*	*16*	*16*	*32*	*37*	*25*	*37*

Table 6.4   Democracy mapping of the elections to Saffron Walden Town Council

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		*36% - 53% of all citizens aged 14+*				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by R4U		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by R4U	

Participant Selection

Elections to Saffron Walden Town Council were open to all adult citizens of the locality. This was the most extensive participatory instrument within the case-study, with 36% to 53% of Saffron Walden citizens taking part[25]. The public nature of campaigning, taking place through canvassing, media, stalls in public spaces, meant that discussion around the election was projected into the public sphere. As R4U contested both town and district elections the impact of R4U activity specifically in relation to the town council was difficult to evidence; however, there was some additional public comment in the press from R4U related to the town council (for example, Morris et al, 2015). The public nature of elections to the town council will be discussed further in Chapter 7, with particular reference to the stimulation of debate in the public sphere.

Citizen Authority

The elections to town council was one of the few processes within this case study where citizens had direct authority and unquestionable influence, regardless of the attitude of decision-makers to citizen participation. Outside of the direct authority of casting the ballot, citizens had communicative influence in the wider process of elections, through conversations with candidates and other channels of communication used by R4U, such as social media (see Table 6.4 above).

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

In the terms of the Democracy Mapping, the election process was an indication of a solution, electing a candidate to council. The process was also one of review, and in particular in 2019 where R4U ran a campaign in Saffron Walden referencing the R4U administration (see Figure 6.6 below) and emphasising competence. As discussed in Section 6.2.2 above, themes around listening to residents were also prominent in candidate statements and in the R4U manifesto (see Section 6.4.1). Broadly, these claims to competence and responsiveness were about *how* the council decided on policy, rather than *what* policy the council would implement. In terms of listening and responsiveness specifically, this was interpreted as an opportunity for citizens to influence the design of municipal processes (see Section 7.4.1). It would be expected for citizens to be able to raise issues with parties during

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[25] As a proportion of those 14 years or older in Saffron Walden in 2019, being 14,186 citizens (ONS, 2022). The turnout rate for the town council elections, as a proportion of registered adult citizens, was 44% to 65%.

municipal elections and hold parties to account at the ballot box, so these practices are not indicated as having being influenced by R4U.

Figure 6.6   2019 R4U Saffron Walden Town Council campaign leaflet

Citizens and Communication

The municipal elections were an aggregated vote and in this sense limited participation to a simple means of communication. As a public process, the election campaigns and results were open to monitoring, though the actual point of participation around voting was private. Communication around the election period was far more extensive that the single point of voting, with parties and public debate stimulated by the opportunity to select a new municipal administration. Citizens could express their preferences through a range of means, including via R4U campaign stalls, when canvassed, through online communications, and so on (SC1, SM1). This gave citizens the opportunity to express their preferences on any problem or issue to councillors, and also allowed for the development of preferences as discussion focussed on particular issues (see Table 6.4 above).

The role of R4U

The elections to Saffron Walden Town Council had been strongly contested between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in 2007 and 2011. The presence of R4U was disruptive, recruiting two sitting Conservative councillors and a former Liberal Democrat

candidate. R4U did recruit several new candidates; however, it did not stand a full slate of candidates and challenge declined from the other parties. Without full contestation the proportion of all possible votes used (if voters used all possible votes available to them) dropped markedly, from 80.1% of possible votes cast in 2011, to 56.0% of votes in 2015. There was increased challenge in 2019, with contestation across all wards and a renewed challenge from the Liberal Democrats, giving citizens more choice in who they could select (see Table 6.3 above). This was reflected by voters using 76.7% of the maximum possible votes they could cast in the 2019 election. All else being equal, the presence of R4U should have increased the opportunity for voters to exercise their choice but this was reliant on the presence and activity of other parties.

6.3.2   Saffron Walden Town Council meetings

The typical route of citizen participation in a parish and town council is through attendance at town council meetings. Saffron Walden Town Council had 4 decision-making meetings: Full Council; Planning & Road Traffic Committee; Finance & Establishment Committee; and, Assets & Services Committee. This analysis will focus upon the Full Council meeting, the only meeting that all councillors attended, and the meeting where key decisions were made. The Democracy Mapping indicates that the public meetings of Saffron Walden Town Council allowed for open participation through expressing preferences or observing, across a relatively broad range of participants, and across several stages of the policy cycle (see Table 6.5 below).

Table 6.5   Democracy mapping of Saffron Walden Town Council meetings

| Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		<1% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Control of Stages in the Process**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by R4U		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by R4U	

Participant Selection

In line with legislation, Full Council meetings were open to the public, aside from confidential matters (NALC, 2020) and are indicated as an open process on the Democracy Mapping. There were occasions where stakeholders were asked to give a presentation or discuss a particular matter, such as a business initiative within the town or the development of sports amenities (for example, Saffron Walden Town Council, 2018a, 2019a). However, these were relatively infrequent and only occurred a couple of times in the first R4U administration, being the exception rather than the norm. Sometimes external professionals would attend, advising on a particular development or process (the Environment Agency for example, see Saffron Walden Town Council, 2018b). Every formal public meeting of the town council had councillors leading the meeting, along with the Town Clerk and sometimes another member of administrative staff.

Whilst public participation was not formally recorded on Town council minutes, it was evident from audio recordings and interviews that there were 'virtually no public coming along' unless it was 'a particular planning issue on their back door' (SC2, also SM3). There were no members of the public present at either of the public meetings directly observed, other attendees being county and district councillors. With regard to active citizen participation, there was no initial increase in public questions at the start of the first R4U administration (see Figure 6.7 below). From the 2017/18 administration onwards there appeared to be a

consistent increase in the number of public questions and statements, with over 1 question asked for every two Full Council meetings. Yet, this level remained so low that whether this change over time was due to changes influenced by R4U, or happenstance, could not be evidenced.

Figure 6.7   Average public questions at SWTC Full Council
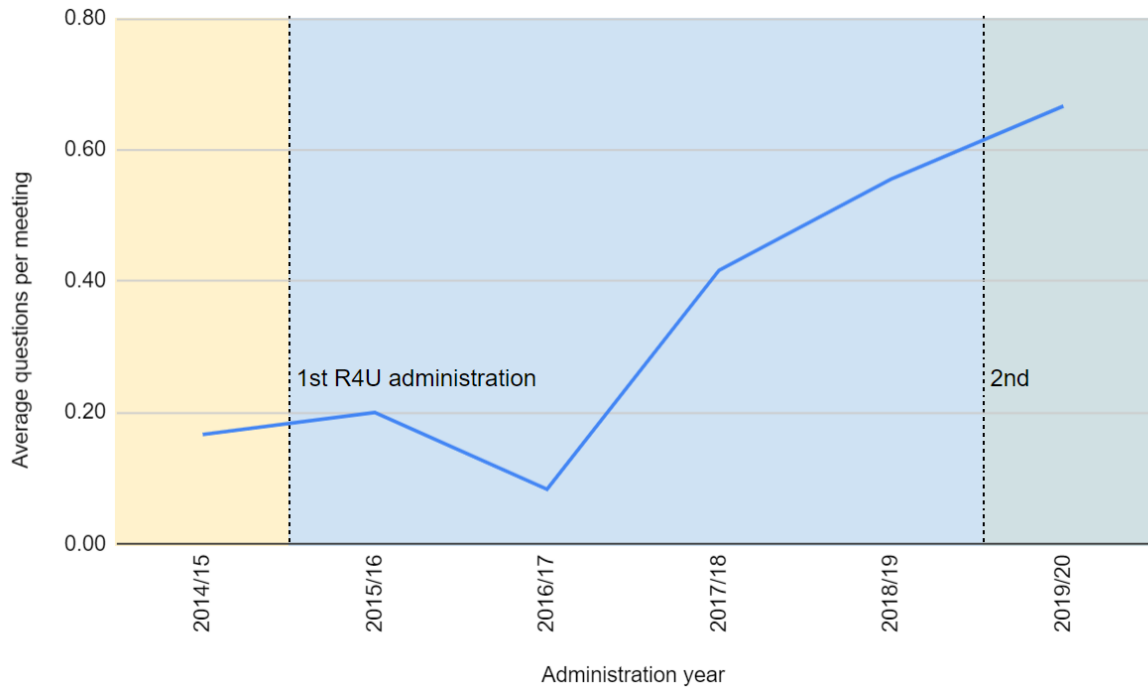
In addition to council staff and town councillors, there was usually an Essex County Councillor for Saffron Walden in attendance, and sometimes a district councillor aside from those who also sat as town councillors. The attendance of these councillors was valued by interviewees, particularly the County Councillor, who acted as a point of connection with a large municipal authority that was significantly removed from Saffron Walden (SC2, SM2, SM4).

Citizen Authority

The Chair and Town Clerk were the most influential participants within the meeting, in terms of steering the meeting and providing information, a finding that echoes other research in councils at this level (Giovannini et al, 2023). Broadly, the town council meetings were observed to be formal with regard to communication, particularly within Full Council meetings, and around decision-making points within other Committees (FC1, SO1; for example, Saffron Walden Town Council, 2017b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). This example from the Standing Orders of Saffron Walden Town Council illustrates the level of formality, and relationship between councillors and citizens determined by these rules:

> A person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak and stand when speaking (except when a person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort). The chairman of the meeting may at any time permit a person to be seated when speaking … A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct his comments to the chairman of the meeting (Saffron Walden Town Council, 2021, p.6).

As noted above, there was relatively little participation within the set time for public statements and question. Where questions from citizens involved wider authorities, there were usually district and county councillors present, who would respond. Citizens might simply make statements as a form of communicative influence, or there could be discussion between councillors and citizen tending towards consultation. For example, an audio record of a Full Council meeting covered a discussion about development of local garages into housing and the need for storage space in the town (Saffron Walden Town Council, 2016a). Here councillors asked questions of members of the public, placing attendees more in a consultative role. As noted above, whilst direct public participation within Full Council meetings did not occur regularly, there was the opportunity for public questions, and more in depth discussion was occasionally recorded. Whilst there may have been an assumption that citizens would benefit in terms of civic or personal benefits, this was not explicitly articulated by R4U councillors nor practice changed to facilitate this.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

In line with practice (NALC, 2020a) there was a period for public participation at the start of decision-making meetings where the public were invited to ask questions. The section for public participation allowed citizens to express preferences with regard to the definition of problems, setting the agenda, or defining a solution. Public statements and questions often referred to items on the agenda of the Full Council meeting, or activities that the town council was directly involved in. This section also allowed citizens to indicate their preference with regard to decisions being made in the meeting, though the point of decision-making was reserved for councillors. In the sense of allowing citizens to define what they wished to talk about, the public participation section of council meetings offered citizens influence across a number of process stages (see the Democracy Mapping in Table 6.5 above).

The monitoring of policy implementation was a process that occurred in town council meetings and would have been open for citizens to monitor. The R4U administration placed a limitation on the extent to which councillors could review previous decisions, as it had been the practice for councillors to 'each meeting, update on what's going on, and [we] found that was an excuse for people to say "well, why don't we revisit the previous decision or let's not do it in that case"' (SC2; also SM3). There was little evidence that there was a formal

process of review after a policy had been implemented, though aspects of previous policy were discussed.

Citizens and Communication

In terms of communication, citizens mainly expressed preferences or demanded the councillors justify their reasoning, though the councillor was not obliged to do so (for example, Saffron Walden Town Council, 2016b). With regard to transparency and monitoring, alongside published agendas and minutes, the R4U administration initiated making audio recordings available of meetings, to increase the transparency of the town council decision making process (SC1). Whilst transparency of council meetings was a national priority (see The Local Government (Transparency Requirements) (England) Regulations, 2015), it was also an explicit priority for R4U, and the availability of audio recordings is noted as an initiative of R4U in Table 6.5 above.

Some elements of the decision-making process were not open to scrutiny. A senior R4U member here sets out the process within internal party meetings, aiming to reach a policy decision that would be voted for by all R4U councillors within the public council meeting:

> We try and work out, the things that really matter, that you ought to have … some sort of collective decision on, [we] debate internally and reach a majority decision … and then people ought to follow the majority decision … it's, the eight of us sitting together and having fairly a robust debate about stuff (SC2).

These kinds of agreed decisions were an exception, tied to key aims of R4U and the R4U town councillors. Interviews also evidenced that some bargaining between councillors of R4U and councillors from other parties had taken place to secure agreement on budget decisions. However, this appeared to be fair bargaining, rather than involving pressure, and would not adversely affect democratic outcomes. In general, agreements prior to meetings would have suppressed the publicity of dissent, either internal to R4U or where cross-party agreement had been reached.

As noted above, the procedures of Full Council meetings were formal, and this extended to the environment of the council chamber itself. Councillors sat round a meeting table and citizens were called to the table to speak (see Figure 6.8 below). The formality of procedure and environment did not appear to allow for equitable preference development or deliberation between citizens and decision-makers, and these participatory practices were not found to be present within Full Council meetings.

Figure 6.8   Saffron Walden Town Council chamber

The role of R4U

The R4U administration had a clear impact in facilitating the monitoring of meetings through providing audio recordings online; however, other influence was limited. One influential change had been implemented through the Annual Town Meeting, which had an attendance of 'four or five' members of the public prior to 2019 (Saffron Walden, 2018f). In a discussion about attendance to the Town Meeting, several SWTC councillors expressed a view that this lack of engagement was a normal reflection of public apathy or scepticism. One R4U councillor argued the town council could be more active in inviting citizens. This councillor, who was in the role of mayor, prompted a shift to include a 'community champions' ceremony in 2019, with outreach to local community groups. The attendance grew to 80 members of the public, greatly exceeding that for previous years (Saffron Walden, 2018f). This indicates the impact of individuals with regard to changing participatory practice within the town council, particularly when in roles that allowed for more influence.

6.3.3   Residents initiating contact

Informal contact and citizen initiated contact were important ways that R4U councillors communicated with citizens. This kind of interaction was the most commonly spoken about in interviews, particularly for those R4U councillors who were also district councillors and had a higher public profile. This mode of participation only had communicative influence, but allowed for considerable citizen control over the subject, location and/or timing of contact (see Table 6.6 below).

Table 6.6   Democracy mapping of informal or citizen-initiated contact

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**					More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process		Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		<1% of all citizens aged 14+					
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**					Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult		Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**					Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution		Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**					Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences		Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key	Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage		Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by R4U		Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by R4U	

Participant Selection

R4U councillors were resident within the community they represented and had informal everyday contact as part of personal networks and in everyday life. This contact could be through membership of a sports club, discussing local sports facilities with lay-stakeholders (SM3, also SC1, SC2, SM4), or talking with unaffiliated citizens, for example on a shopping trip:

> I do a lot of my surgery work in Tescos and I go shopping, it takes a long time. I think, 'if I go at eleven, as long as I'm back by three…' Actually, it's amazing, because people think they can talk to you comfortably in that kind of surrounding and I don't have an issue with that … that's a nice way of people feeling confident that they can just talk to you and say 'by the way can you help' (SM2).

Informal contact between citizens and councillors was an open process occurring in the public sphere, as indicated on the Democracy Mapping (see Table 6.6 above). This kind of informal contact was also structured through R4U activities, for example: public stalls; councillor surgeries in public spaces; at campaigning meetings; through canvassing; and, through online channels of communication (Lodge, 2016; Residents for Uttlesford, 2016). One of the R4U media co-ordinators summarised the aim as 'being available, multi-channel, understanding the issues they care about, and finding as many ways for them to tell you stuff' (SC1). Here, R4U activities increased the presence of councillors and the accessibility of councillors in the informal public sphere.

Citizens also contacted council officers. This occurred through two physical spaces: the Tourist Information Centre and the town council offices. Saffron Walden Town Council staff indicated both spaces provided a route for citizens to informally raise issues (SO1, SO2), with staff viewing this route of participation as important. One member of staff framed this kind of contact as "sort of the front line of democracy ... we're very accessible" (SO2). Queries received in this way would typically be forwarded onto councillors, or become actions for staff. Saffron Walden Town Council also had an active social media presence that allowed for citizen contact through that channel.

Citizen Authority

Informal and citizen-initiated contact tended to be at the level of communicative influence, but evidently affected the activities of councillors (SM2, SM3). The strong narrative of "listening to residents" articulated by R4U councillors was reflected in a stated importance of informal communication and citizen-initiated contact. However, it was also evident that this contact was often through networks that councillors were engaged in, whether in business or leisure, and dependent upon the councillors' own interests and motivations. Where contact was initiated from citizens outside of these networks, councillors related examples that overlapped with their own interests and motivations (SC2, SM2). For informal and citizen-initiated contact with councillors, the authority of citizens was largely dependent upon the interests and motivations of councillors, something which echoes other research (see Copus, 2010) and is discussed further in Section 7.3.2. It is unclear if there was a similar filtering of citizen-initiated contact that occurred through R4U social media channels, or where contact was with council officers.

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

Citizen initiated contact could be focussed around particular consultations or campaigns, but could also be around any issue the resident was concerned about, as this councillor states:

> People come up and talk to us and say ... "what are you doing about this, what are you doing" and it's not about plumbing and potholes, it's about bigger things, it's about where are we going in the future and what's your view on Brexit for example, so we do have to listen (SM4).

Citizens were able to express preferences with regard to a range of points in a policy cycle, including the definition of problems, setting the agenda, defining or indicating solutions, noted in the Democracy Mapping above (see Table 6.6 above). Interaction was in the public sphere, or otherwise at times and/or in spaces that the citizen had control over, which made this typical form of contact a distinctive form of participation; citizens had over an element of control over the whole process.

Citizens and Communication

According to interviewees, informal and citizen-initiated contact was broadly one of an expression of preferences on behalf of the citizen. However, where contact was with lay-stakeholders, this was more likely to be repeated discussion around a particular issue, with the possibility of the development of preferences over time (SC2, SM2). The mode of communication is also important given R4U also had an online presence, where questions or comments were communicated through to councillors, with a response then given to the citizen (SC1, SM1). This at least allowed for the seeking of councillor preferences, and potentially the development of preferences.

The role of R4U

As noted above, R4U initiated and sustained a number of activities in the public sphere that enabled citizens to express preferences to, or seek justification from, councillors (SC1, SM3, SM4). The practice of canvassing is notable in how this invites residents to express their concerns to councillors (SM2, SM3), as this councillor relates:

> we were canvassing recently, and ... people were complaining, saying that the terms of the lease means they weren't allowed to change the colour of their front door. And essentially every time they want to do anything they had to apply for permission to do it and funnily enough every time they did, it said "yes you can do it, but that's £100 admin" sort of thing ... and it's just absolutely scandalous (SC2).

As noted above, which complaints or issues were reacted reflected the interests of the councillor, with this issue resonating with concerns the R4U councillor had over development. However, the campaigning activities by R4U in the public sphere facilitated this contact to occur in a way that did not rely upon citizens having to enter into more formal spaces and processes (see Cornwall, 2008), and evidently influenced the prioritisation and actions of councillors. The facilitation of contact between citizens and councillors in the

public sphere appears to be a key role taken by R4U in relation to communication, and a role that aligned with the commitment to listen to citizens.

6.4   Processes initiated by R4U

This section will consider the R4U manifesto, mapping the participatory processes within it and considering what initiated and sustained this innovative process. This section considers the R4U manifesto, which was an ongoing public consultation on the policies of R4U, distinctive for the influence that it potentially gave ordinary citizens over the R4U party policy, mediated by R4U councillors and members. The Residents' Manifesto was not the only consultation process that R4U undertook (see Section 6.2.3), with the party regularly running consultations and polls on specific policy issues; however, the Residents Manifesto was the most extensive kind of consultation run by R4U and instituted a wider set of practices than other consultations, such that a consideration of this process covers other narrower forms of consultation.

6.4.1   The Residents' Manifesto

The process that most clearly demonstrated R4U's commitment to listening to residents, as cited by interviewees, was the crowdsourced construction of a manifesto and policy platform. R4U's website stated that 'we have built our manifesto with the community and it includes input from more than 600 Uttlesford locals' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2015, p.1), and included requests for feedback. The basis for the 'Residents Manifesto' and policy platform was a consultation held by We Are Residents to form a 'Saffron Walden Town Plan' (We Are Residents, 2014; see Figure 6.9 below).

Figure 6.9   We Are Residents (2014) flyer for the formation of a Town Plan

National parties and their branches have used public consultation on what priority issues are to inform the construction of their manifestos (see Bara, 2006, pp.267-268); however, the

commitment to construct a manifesto through the gathering of resident preferences by R4U is innovative[26]. The commitment to a Residents Manifesto reinforces R4U narratives around listening to residents and being responsive (see Section 6.2.2). This process created a broad policy platform for R4U, along with a more specific set of commitments that were developed into a 'Residents Charter' specifically related to the administration of Uttlesford District Council.

Before turning to the mapping, it needs to be noted that the policy platform did not pledge actions specific to Saffron Walden Town Council, although if an element of the manifesto was relevant then the R4U group leader argued "clearly we ought to be doing that" (SC2). A senior member described the policy platform as "a structure for us to refer to" (SC1), and several councillors referred to it as an implied commitment to citizens (SM1, SM2, SM5). For R4U councillors in the town council, the policies were a broad framework, part of an ongoing process of communication, and a demonstration of how municipal policy aligned with citizen preferences. In practice, many everyday policies of the town council were driven by:

> either individual councillors pushing [issues] because they've got a particular interest or, sometimes it's ... various members of the public coming and saying you ought to have a [particular] policy, why aren't you doing this, why aren't you doing that, and clearly you can't do everything, but I think that did capitalise doing a bit more (SC2).

To an extent, therefore, the policy of the town council followed more the processes of town council meetings and citizen-initiated contact discussed above, but with some more pivotal policy issues a matter for group discussion, and potentially influenced by the Residents' Manifesto.

Participant Selection

The We Are Residents Town Plan event in 2014 was the main public event that contributed to the R4U policy platform. As was a founding member of both We Are Residents and R4U, stated:

> "we ran an event in the Town Hall in Saffron Walden … we had about six hundred people through and we took lots of input, then we formed these policies and then we put them out to consultation and we got feedback and we changed and adopted them

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[26] There is very little scholarship on branch party manifestos, though an online search for 'manifesto for "county council"' and 'manifesto for "district council"' produces a number of results, with some inviting public feedback, though none that claimed to be sourced from citizen consultation. There are other innovative manifesto projects at national level that claim to be sourced from citizens, such as the Pirate Party (2015) and Open Politics (2022) manifestos.

and that became our manifesto and our platform, all of those policies, have come out of what people told us, not what we think is best for them" (SC1).

Feedback was also gathered in person, including at public events and in public spaces. An R4U councillor spoke about the process as part of the 2019 local election campaign:

we had [listening post] gazebos up and we had our … pre-manifesto, going, talking to people and we had, we were giving out questionnaires for people to fill in and give us back so we could look at other issues that obviously we may not have picked up on … For the whole year, we had a listening post online, on the website. People were firing in things that they would like to see (SM1).

As indicated in the Democracy Mapping (see Table 6.7 below) the consultation process was open, and sometimes located in the informal public sphere.

Table 6.7   **Democracy mapping of the R4U Residents Manifesto**

Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
Extent of participation:		~4% of all citizens aged 14+				
Least influence		**Citizen Authority**				Most influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	Advise and consult	Co-governance	Direct authority	
Least control		**Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle**				Most control
Review	Implement	Indicate solution	Define solution	Set the agenda	Define problem	Design process
Least intense		**Citizens and Communication**				Most intense
Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate or Vote	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue	
Key		Partly practiced in a policy stage	Fully practiced across a policy stage	Partly practiced in a policy stage – influenced by R4U	Fully practiced across a policy stage – influenced by R4U	

Aside from unaffiliated citizens, lay-stakeholders active within particular policy areas were also consulted, as this councillor involved in drafting the 2019 manifesto states; "I'd go along to the [interest] group(s) when I can and at one meeting I was very open and said I was developing a policy, what would you want to see?" (SM5). Whilst these lay-stakeholders were targeted, it was not evidenced whether any groups were targeted to involve those typically underrepresented. Another group of lay-stakeholders closely involved across the process were party members on the R4U management committee – the group that finalised the manifesto. As "ordinary residents", these members were viewed as making an important

contribution to R4U strategy distinct from that of elected councillors (FC1, FM1), though both were closely involved in shaping the manifesto.

Citizen Authority

The Residents' Manifesto process was a consultation over policy, with citizen invited to express their views on any issue, or with regard to the existing manifesto commitments. Where discussions around the manifesto were in-person, this gave citizens an opportunity to have communicative influence over councillors (FM1, FM4). Statements around the manifesto suggested that the manifesto would be fed into a process that held councillors and council officers to account, with citizen preferences, statutory requirements and the views of R4U councillors and members combined in an almost mechanised process of responsiveness (see Figure 6.10 below).

Figure 6.10   Delivering the Residents Agenda (Residents for Uttlesford, 2020)
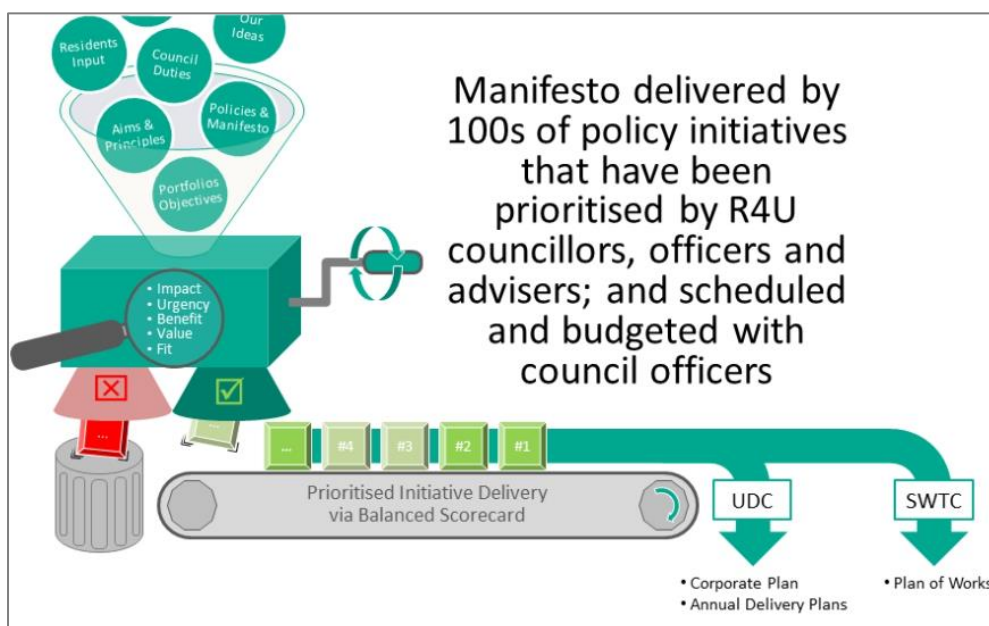
This was an explicit alignment with 'values traditionally associated with the private sector, such as customer care, customer responsiveness, sensitivity with demand' and 'performance indicators' that Haus and Sweeting (2006 pp. 276-277) describe as 'managerialist'. The prominence of private sector values in R4U reflected the business background of influential members, who intentionally incorporated these practices. As noted above, the actual policy practice in R4U, particularly in Saffron Walden Town Council, departed some way from this idealised model (SC1, SC2, SM1, SM5).

Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

Citizens could raise any issue through the Residents' Manifesto consultation process, from raising or redefining a problem, to indicating their preference regarding the published policy platform, as this was in the public domain and open to comment. However, there was evidently a non-public process of revision and selection that implied citizen preferences could be limited in influence. The final editing process of the Resident's Manifesto involved just a few R4U councillors and members, and then the Management Committee:

> those were then brought together and … two or three people were ... tasked with ... putting into a coherent whole and then it was approved [by the] management committee" (SC2, also SM2; SM5).

Citizen participation is not indicated to be the whole of any stage of the process in the Democracy Mapping as this input was mediated by R4U, though it was not clear to what extent citizen preferences shaped the R4U policy platform, were mediated, or filtered out.

Citizens and Communication

Citizens expressed preferences with regard to policy issues with interviewees and the narratives of R4U clear that citizen feedback shaped the manifesto. However, comments from the public were not displayed and reasons for the specific manifesto policies were not given. The outputs of the process were observable in that the R4U policy platform and Residents' Manifesto or Charter were publicly available, but much of the process was not open to public scrutiny, with the transparency in rationale not present (see Mansbridge, 2009).

The role of R4U

If viewed sceptically, the Residents' Manifesto is a closed consultation based on one large scale public event that has subsequently been used as part of a narrative of responsiveness, connecting with typical managerialist conceptions of participation whilst not significantly shaping actual policy practice. In contrast to participatory instruments implanted through municipal government, the construction of the manifesto was largely obscured and evidently shaped by the preferences of R4U councillors and members. Whilst elements of this interpretation may be accurate, the narrative of those involved in the drawing up of the manifesto and of influential R4U members and councillors suggest that the manifesto was viewed as an expression of citizen and R4U commitments, and one that was internally contested (SC1, SM1, SM5). The Residents Manifesto offered citizens influence over stages of the policy cycle there were usually hidden from view by internal party processes; with the resulting policy platform then being implemented by the R4U administration, though this was

partly dependent upon the extent R4U councillors committed to following the manifesto. The democratic potential of the Residents' Manifesto is discussed further in Section 7.4.2 below, and in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

6.5   Conclusion

Residents for Uttlesford sustained processes of citizen participation that were largely defined by legislation and typical practice, not greatly changing processes that were already present within the town council. The Saffron Walden Town Council elections were strongly contested prior to R4U's challenge and, as opposing parties failed to mount a strong contest, the opportunity for citizens to express their preferences through the ballot box actually fell. R4U's instituted channels of communication in the public sphere, from stalls in Saffron Walden town centre to social media. The invite for citizens to participate in the formation and development of the R4U policy platform was an innovation, though the extent to which it aligned with democratic municipal government is somewhat unclear. The importance placed upon informal and citizen-initiated contact, and the Residents' Manifesto (see Section 6.3.4) aligned with narratives that R4U as a party listened, invited participation oriented around representatives, and was responsive to citizen preferences.

This chapter has demonstrated that Residents for Uttlesford did not greatly impact upon the institution of participatory practices in Saffron Walden Town Council. Yet, the changes that R4U did institute did appear to align with a standard of democratic municipal government. To assess whether this was the case requires the comparison to the Democracy Mapping of democratic municipal government, and the consideration of the role of R4U. This will be done in Chapter 7, in an analysis that will address the research question driving this thesis.

Chapter 7.   Comparison and analysis

Whoa! All of this stuff is just a bunch of voluntary people who stuck their head above the parapet (Independents for Frome councillor)

It's hard work and you get some thanks, but a lot of the time you just feel you've slogged your guts out and there's people saying "well you didn't do this and you didn't do that" (Residents for Uttlesford Councillor)

7.1   Introduction

The previous two chapters have analysed municipal processes in the two case-studies using the Democracy Mapping approach (see Chapter 3). This chapter will synthesise these mappings, collating them to form a Democracy Mapping of ILP influence with regard to the standard of democratic municipal government. The overarching question driving this analysis is:

Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?

The groundwork was carried out in Chapters 2 and 3 to define the central concepts and develop a framework of analysis, the Democracy Mapping, answering the first three research sub-questions:

1. What constitutes an ILP in the context of English municipal government?

2. What is an appropriate standard of *democratic* municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?

3. How can the impact of an ILP be evaluated across a system of municipal government?

Discussing the evidence from both cases and incorporating relevant scholarship, this chapter will primarily address the fourth research sub-question:

4. Do ILPs institute or sustain practices aligned with democratic municipal government?

This analysis will lay the groundwork for exploration for the fifth research sub-question:

5. How do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government?

This analysis in this chapter rests upon the collated Democracy Mapping of participatory practices and influence of the ILPs within the two case-studies, shown in Table 7.1 below. The leftmost column in Table 7.1 below indicates the standard of democratic municipal

government developed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.6). This standard does not prescribe how practices should be present for each municipal process, but how practices should be present across all the policy cycles in a system of municipal government. The presence of practices for municipal processes in each case study is shown in the main body of the table, indicating whether the practice is present across all or only part of the policy cycles within the process, and whether the presence of the practice was influenced by the ILP.

Comparing the leftmost column in Table 7.1 to the broad presence of practices, in the 'Selection' dimension, it is evident that the practice of targeted involvement is not present to the extent that might be expected if it were in every policy cycle. Targeted involvement is the facilitation of the participation of underrepresented citizens, an important practice for inclusiveness, but its presence is only partial across the case studies. This will be discussed along with other aspects of participant selection in Section 7.2 below. Also immediately evident in Table 7.1 is that two municipal processes instituted by IfF, the Frome Peoples' Budget and Advisory Panels, have notably high levels of influence on the 'Authority' dimension. Citizen authority is considered in Section 7.3, progressing from processes where citizens have limited authority to where citizens can exercise direct authority. Turning to the mapped processes for the 'Policy Cycle' and 'Communication' dimensions in Table 7.1, it is evident that practices at the beginning and end of the policy cycle and the practice of deliberation and argument are present at some points, but partially and not present as might be expected. Section 7.4 will consider citizen influence over the policy cycle, ranging from where citizens had high levels of control to where they had little control. Section 7.5 considers citizen communication, moving from the least intense forms of communication to the most intense.

Across the four dimensions considered in these sections, the evidence will be synthesised into a Democracy Mapping of ILP influence with regard to the standard of democratic municipal government. This will enable the concluding chapter to answer the primary research question of whether ILPs institute democratic municipal government. The Democracy Mapping in this thesis is focussed upon the influence of the ILP, so that not all municipal processes are presented here (the process of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and consultations were set aside for brevity, see Sections 5.2.3 and 6.2.3). The sections below will contribute to a Democracy Mapping of the participatory practices present because of the influence of the ILP, and the extent the presence of these practices aligns with democratic municipal government.

Table 7.1   Democracy Mapping of DMG and participatory practices present for selected municipal processes, including ILP influence

	DMG	IfF and Frome Town Council							R4U and Saffron Walden Town Council			
		Elections to FTC	Formal council meetings	Citizen initiated contact	Participate Frome	Campaign initiatives	People's Budget	Advisory Panels	Election to SWTC	Formal council meetings	Citizen initiated contact	Residents manifesto
Least inclusive												
Council staff	Yes		Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	(Yes)	
Councillors	Yes		Yes	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	(Yes)	Yes
External professionals	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)		Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)		
Lay-stakeholders	(Yes)		Yes	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes		(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes
Open process	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public Sphere	(Yes)	(Yes)		Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)		Yes	(Yes)
Targeted involvement	Yes		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)				
Most inclusive												
Extent of participation		*15-46%*	*<1%*	*<1%*	*~8%*	*~0.5%*	*0.1-4%*	*0.1-1%*	*36-53%*	*<1%*	*<1%*	*~4%*
Least influence												
Public sphere	(Yes)				(Yes)	Yes		(Yes)				
Personal Benefits	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)					
Communicative Influence	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
Advise and Consult	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)	Yes				Yes
Co-Governance	(Yes)						Yes	Yes				
Direct Authority	(Yes)	Yes					Yes		Yes			
Most influence												

Row groups: **SELECTION** (Least inclusive → Most inclusive); **AUTHORITY** (Least influence → Most influence)

		DMG	IfF and Frome Town Council							R4U and Saffron Walden Town Council			
			Election to FTC	Formal council meetings	Citizen initiated contact	Participate Frome	Campaign initiatives	People's Budget	Advisory Panels	Election to SWTC	Formal council meetings	Citizen initiated contact	Residents Manifesto
P O L I C Y C Y C L E	**Least control**												
	Review	Yes	(Yes)	(Yes)				(Yes)		(Yes)			
	Implement	Yes		Yes			Yes		(Yes)		(Yes)		
	Indicate solution	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)
	Define solution	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
	Set the agenda	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
	Define problem	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)
	Design process	Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)		(Yes)	
	Most control												
C O M M U N I C A T I O N	**Least intensive communication**												
	Observe or monitor	Yes	(Yes)	Yes		(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	Yes		(Yes)
	Express or Seek Preferences	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Develop Preferences	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes			(Yes)	
	Aggregate or Vote	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes	(Yes)	Yes			
	Pressure or Cajole												
	Deliberate or Argue	Yes		(Yes)		(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	Yes				
	Most intensive communication												

Key:

Yes – Present across all policy cycles	(Yes) – Present at some stage / in some policy cycles	(Yes) – Practice in some policy cycles in at least one stage	Yes – Practice across most or all policy cycles in at least one stage	(Yes) – Practice in some policy cycles in at least one stage – influenced by ILP	Yes – Practice across most or all policy cycles in at least one stage – influenced by ILP

7.2　Participant selection

Drawing upon the analysis in Chapter 2 and Section 3.2, this section considers the selection of participants to processes of municipal policy formation and implementation. Section 7.2.1 explores the role of council staff and councillors, along with that of external professionals, with a particular focus on the actions of IfF and R4U in shaping these roles towards facilitating democratic goods. Section 7.2.2 considers the extent of participation, closely associated with the concept of popular control, discussing the elections to municipal council, participation within the public sphere, and the increase in participation associated with IfF in particular. The inclusive involvement of citizens is then discussed in Section 7.2.3, with a focus upon the role of lay-stakeholders. The consideration of participant selection concludes in Section 7.2.4 with a summary discussion of the influence of IfF and R4U over participant selection and the alignment of this with democratic municipal government.

7.2.1　Elite involvement

Within Frome Town Council and Saffron Walden Town Council, processes of citizen participation were largely embedded and facilitated by council staff and councillors. With the exception of the elections to the town council and the R4U Residents' Manifesto, all processes in the two case studies involved town council staff and councillors, see Table 7.1 above. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, the involvement of council staff and councillors aligns with the production of democratic goods, but external professionals can also help facilitate processes that are less embedded in municipal government.

Regarding the participation of councillors, this is a focus for some who advocate the role of parish and town councillors as a mode of citizen participation (see NALC 2015a, 2015b). The involvement of IfF and R4U expanded the range of citizens who might become councillors. Whilst the ILP councillors were not necessarily more diverse with regard to demographic characteristics, several interviewees were motivated by the democratic commitments of the ILPs to join the party (see Sections 5.2.2 and 6.2.2). This kind of motivation is typical for political parties, for example Poletti, Webb and Bale (2019, p.167) find 'an attachment to the party's principles' and 'to support the party's general policies or a specific policy that mattered greatly to me' as important motivators towards a citizen joining a political party. Therefore, the public aims and narratives of R4U and IfF around democracy influenced who would wish to join the ILP, shaping the commitments of members and councillors to come (see also Section 2.1). As a mode of citizen participation, the selection of councillors was an exclusive small group process that contributed in a very limited way to

inclusive popular control. As elite representatives, the ILP councillors provided political representation, acted to initiate and sustain participatory instruments, designed and facilitated participatory instruments, and acted as a channel of participation by connecting citizens with the formal processes of government (for example, see Sections 5.4.3, 5.4.4, 6.3.3, 6.3.4). The primary impact of ILP councillors with regard to democratic goods is not, therefore, their participation as citizens, but their participation as elites oriented towards the preferences of citizens. The role of councillors with regard to participation will be further discussed in Section 7.3.2 below.

Turning to council staff, Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks (2019, p.221) argue that council staff may support citizen participation when they are oriented towards 'increasing the influence of inclusive, deliberative and participatory trajectories on public decision making'. In Frome Town Council, the IfF administration: recruited to a community project support role that included facilitating direct citizen participation; changed other job roles to emphasise community engagement; and, introduced a communications function aligned with citizen participation (see Section 5.2.3). Without capable council staff in support roles, the facilitation of a number of processes of citizen participation within Frome would not have occurred, given processes were wholly embedded in the town council and reliant on those resources (the People's Budget for example, see Section 5.4.3). In Saffron Walden, the influence of R4U over the culture of staffing, and particular staffing roles, was less evident, with change due to a combination of the new administration and a new Town Clerk (see Section 6.2.3). The role of R4U was important as an enabler, though not an initiator, in supporting the development of an improved working relationship and culture in the town council. Staff perceived their role as being the 'front line of democracy' (SO2), transmitting citizen views to councillors and municipal government at larger scales; in this way staff were 'fundamentally Janus-faced, facing informal-societal democracy as well as formal-political democracy, while being able to negotiate between the two' (Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks, 2019, p.222; see also Dzur, 2019). With regard to the Democracy Mapping of participant selection, the ILPs did not change the presence of council staff within municipal processes (see Table 7.2 below); however, the changes ILPs made to the roles and responsibilities of council staff had impacts on a range of other participatory practices, set out in the remainder of this chapter.

Another resource for facilitating and enabling direct participatory practices was external professionals, acting as advisors and facilitators. In Frome, external professionals acted as facilitators in both strands of the People's Budget and supported its review (see Section 5.4.3 and Table 7.1 above), though this was exceptional, being part of a funded external study. Professionals can provide an independent and skilled form of facilitation, and are

better placed to 'be perceived as an honest broker by all participants', providing a useful external intervention (Escobar, 2019, p.184, see also Section 3.2.1). The use of external professionals likely contributed to democratic goods within some policy cycles in Frome, with IfF instituting this practice. The role of external professionals in Saffron Walden was limited to presenting, giving information and responding to questions in formal council meetings (see Section 6.3.2); there was no evident use of external professionals by R4U. The use of external professionals for facilitation or other support was, therefore, limited, with its presence only occurring where there was external funding or the participation of external professionals was on a voluntary basis.

7.2.2   Participation needs participants

This section will consider the extent of participation in the two case studies, including a discussion on citizen participation in the public sphere, beginning with the role of municipal elections. As discussed in Section 3.2.2, the extent of participation is important with regard to popular control. By far the most extensive participatory process in both case studies was the elections to the town council, which gave citizens direct authority over the selection of councillors to multiple municipal authorities. Broadly, the participation of both IfF and R4U increased the extent of citizen participation, though this depended upon electoral challenge from other parties. The presence of IfF increased the level of competition and choice between 2007 and 2011 in the elections to Frome Town Council (see Section 5.2.1), with double the number of voters and those voters using a higher proportion of the votes available to them. In the elections to Saffron Walden Town Council, the entrance of R4U to the municipal election in 2015 was offset by other parties fielding fewer candidates than in 2011, leading to voters using a lower proportion of votes available to them (see Section 6.2.1). In an innovative study, Tavares, Raudla and Silva (2020) found the presence of ILPs increased voter turnout in municipal elections. The case studies of IfF and R4U evidence how the impact of the ILP in municipal elections is dependent upon political competition, which is discussed further in the concluding chapter.

As the municipal elections generated broader public interest, they created conditions for more participation in the public sphere, through discussion as well as direct contact with party members, candidates and councillors. Both case-study ILPs launched active campaigns to gain candidates to municipal government, with campaigning stalls and events in public spaces, going door-to-door and speaking directly to residents, and having a presence on social media. However, again, the activity of campaigning was in part a reflection of an election that was contested by other parties.

The presence of IfF and R4U councillors in the public sphere continued after the election period through everyday contact and instituted processes. Whether councillors were visiting organisations as part of their role, or simply being recognised when out shopping, they engaged in informal conversations with citizens (see Freeman, 2020). More structured contact also occurred in public spaces. For IfF councillors, contact with citizens in public spaces often occurred through processes facilitated by the town council, including the Participate Frome event and community activities; for R4U councillors, contact with citizens in public spaces often occurred through R4U 'listening posts' and door-to-door canvassing between elections, facilitated to some extent by the party. Formal politics was present within the 'realm of our social life' (Emirbayer and Sheller, 1999, p.155), sometimes literally knocking on the door of citizens as ILP councillors campaigned. These conversations were valued (see Sections 5.3.3, 6.3.3) occurring with people who would not necessarily attend council meetings, nor be in an organisation that the town council or councillors had links with. As noted in Section 3.2.2, the public sphere is distinct from semi-formal and formal spaces, with 'fewer rules and constraints' (Hendriks, 2006, p.501; see also Section 7.4.2 below). The presence of councillors and council staff in public spaces engaged citizens who would not necessarily enter more formal spaces, contributing to inclusive popular control.

The final aspect of extensive participation considered in this section highlights the importance of wider context in the two cases and the impact of existing participation. Prior to the election of IfF, public participation in Frome Town Council meetings was often high, there were a substantial number of residents dissatisfied with the town council administration, and changing that administration was the primary focus of IfF. There was a significant increase in public attendance and participation at the start of the IfF administration, apparently connected to the publicity surrounding the IfF campaign and election, which gradually diminished (see Section 5.3.2). Prior to the election of R4U there was little citizen engagement with Saffron Walden Town Council, there was no broad dissatisfaction with the town council administration, and changing the town council administration was not a key aim of R4U. It was not clear that a slight increase in public questions during the R4U administration represented a trend (see Section 6.3.2). The engagement of citizens with municipal government prior to, and at the point of, the election of the ILP could strongly affect the extent of citizen participation. It is unclear to what extent the impact of IfF on the institution of participatory practices was contingent on existing citizen participation and the movement around its election; similarly, R4U may have acted to institute more participatory practices from a higher base of citizen engagement with the town council. The influence of local circumstances will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

7.2.3 Inclusive involvement

As discussed in Chapter 3, targeted involvement is critical for inclusiveness given the tendency for political participation to leave the preferences of some citizens underrepresented. This section will consider targeted involvement before considering the role of open and closed processes with regard to popular control.

The underrepresentation of young people was raised as a key issue by Willet and Cruxon (2019) in their study of parish and town councils. The involvement of young people in Frome was perhaps most visible in the presence of a Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor in formal Frome Town Council meetings from 2013 to 2015 (see Section 5.3.2), having the same speaking rights (though not voting rights) as councillors. However, this form of ongoing direct participation in formal town council processes, struggled due to a lack of both internal and external capacity. Other forms of participation, such as one off activities as part of Participate Frome, the People's Budget, and Advisory Panels, appeared more sustainable. In Saffron Walden, the proposal of a youth councillor was made by an R4U councillor in 2019, receiving unanimous support (see Section 6.3.2), but there again appeared to be a lack of external networks to support the engagement of young people with the council.

The presence of a Youth Council prior to the administration of IfF, supported by previous town council administrations, appeared to facilitate a continuation of this focus on the provision for, and engagement of, young people. This resonates with the arguments of Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006; see also Briggs, 2008; Rolfe, 2016) that:

> The existence of networks and groups that can support participation and provide a communication route to decision makers is vital to the vibrancy of participation.

Targeted involvement did not occur for a number of other processes where this practice would have contributed to inclusiveness, with internal and external capacity to support targeted involvement a likely factor. The focus on youth participation in Frome Town Council was a case of targeted involvement, but civic networks, schools, and other organisations working with youth were required to sustain it.

Another notable kind of targeted involvement was the community engagement project initiated by IfF in an area of Frome with high multiple deprivation. Councillors and council staff participated in community activities and, through these activities, had increased contact with unaffiliated citizens and lay-stakeholders (see Section 5.3.3). The initiation of activities in underrepresented areas directly increased the, albeit mediated, participation of those typically underrepresented. This engagement may also, as Cornwall (2002b, p.77) puts it,

have opened 'chinks to widen spaces for involvement in decision-making, and building the political capabilities for democratic engagement' for those typically underrepresented, with the potential to develop democratic skills and political ties (see also Hirlinger, 1992).

The activity of both town councils was open for at least one stage of the policy cycle across most policy cycles. Exceptions were targeted involvement in the closed process of short-listing for the Frome Peoples' Budget, the outreach to lay stakeholders as part of the Residents' Manifesto, and lay stakeholder meetings that occurred in the Participate Frome event. As discussed in Section 3.3.3, these processes could contribute to considered judgement, but would frustrate popular control if not connected to practices elsewhere in the policy cycle that aided alignment with broader citizen preferences. In these cases, the processes were connected to more extensive participatory practices through the People's Budget "Town Vote" and the oversight of councillors. Through the creation of additional participatory instruments that were open to all citizens, both ILPs created additional opportunities for citizens to engage with open processes.

7.2.4 The role of IfF and R4U

The influence of IfF and R4U on participant selection with regard to a standard of democratic municipal government is summarised in Table 7.2 below. For clarity, this table focuses only on the influence of the ILP and the extent to which this influence aligned with democratic municipal government. As discussed in Section 7.2.1, council staff and councillors were very influential across the processes of both town councils, including within participatory instruments and in the facilitation of participatory practices, but their extent of participation in municipal policy did not change in either case study. The IfF administration brought in external professionals and, though this was largely dependent upon external funding, this is noted as a change that aligns with democratic municipal government. The R4U administration did not involve external professionals in ways that changed previous practice.

Table 7.2   The influence of IfF and R4U on participant selection towards DMG

	Less inclusive		**Participant Selection**				More inclusive
IfF	Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement
R4U	Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	Lay stakeholders	Open process	Public sphere	Targeted involvement

Key:	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence	Fully aligns with DMG with little change due to ILP

Both IfF and R4U involved lay-stakeholders, though the practice in Saffron Walden was primarily through the participation of party members in the Residents' Manifesto (see Table 7.1 above). The interest, expertise and connections of lay-stakeholders was used as a resource within Frome (see Fung, 2007b; Briggs, 2008; Della Porta, 2013), in particular in presenting to formal council meetings (see Section 5.3.2) and participating in the Advisory Panels (see Section 5.4.4). Both parties are indicated as using lay-stakeholders in a way that aligns with democratic municipal government, though they did so quite differently.

The campaigning activity of IfF and R4U around municipal elections was a key way in which both ILPs contributed to the participation of citizens in municipal government. As set out in Section 7.2.2 above, both ILPs tended to increase participation by contributing to the possibility of a contested election, by being present in the public sphere, and otherwise instituting open activities. These changes are indicated in Table 7.3 as aligning participation in the public sphere and the institution of open processes with democratic municipal government. IfF introduced several elements of targeted involvement, but ultimately these were limited in nature across the policy cycles of Frome Town Council, and this was not a practice instituted by R4U (see Section 7.2.3 above). Given the apparent importance of targeted involvement for inclusiveness, set out in Section 3.2.3, and the lack of this practice evidenced in Table 7.1, this is one notable way in which the cases did not align with democratic municipal government.

7.3 Citizen Authority

Drawing upon the review of literature in Chapter 2 and Section 3.3, combined with the analysis presented in Table 7.1 above, this section considers citizen authority. First, in Section 7.3.1, is a consideration of where citizens had authority short of influence on municipal authority. As will be set out, this could involve influence over issues beyond municipal authority or increase the ability of citizens to have authority in other processes. Section 7.3.2 undertakes an analysis of whether citizens had influence, which is critical to the wider question of whether citizen participation was meaningful, particularly where mediated by councillors. A broader consideration of participation is undertaken in Section 7.3.3, with an exploration of why the forms of participation advocated by IfF and R4U differed. The consideration of citizen authority concludes in Section 7.2.4 with a summary discussion of the influence of IfF and R4U over citizen authority and the alignment with democratic municipal government.

7.3.1 Beyond municipal policy

Two practices do not have direct influence over municipal policy in the Democracy Mapping, being: where processes seek to influence opinion in the broader public sphere; and, where processes seek to develop personal or civic benefits. Considering participation aiming to influence the public sphere, it is distinctive that IfF instituted participatory instruments directed towards influencing public opinion in the wider informal public sphere (see Table 7.1), including on policy outside of the control of the municipal administration that IfF, as a party, was oriented towards. The two main processes that exemplified this were Participate Frome and the campaign initiatives.

Participate Frome was a process that asked citizens what they would change about the town and 'How would you change it?' (FO2; see Section 5.4.1). The aims of Participate Frome were to inform municipal policy and encourage citizens to consider their own role and efficacy in acting to affect change beyond municipal policy. This involved the expression and exchange of personal opinions in everyday public spaces about a range of policies and issues, though did not necessarily result in any collective action. The encouragement of citizens to express and reflect on issues of their choice in a public space, facilitated to some extent, would be expected to produce inclusive considered judgement, and ultimately contribute to popular control, albeit tentatively linked (see Section 7.5.3 below).

A different approach was exemplified by the campaign initiative on a plastic free Frome. This initiative extended an existing commitment by Frome Town Council to become plastic free,

facilitating a public meeting designed to encourage collective actions in the public sphere to shift the town towards becoming plastic free. Actions agreed included protests that lobbied businesses to change their practices, and campaigns to change wider public opinion (see Section 5.4.2). This approach aligned the political strategies of the IfF administration with local stakeholders and citizens to encourage collective action on a particular issue in the public sphere. This kind of facilitation by IfF of public action and debate over issues has also occurred around food poverty, housing, and climate change. The support given to the campaign initiatives could be described as giving authority and resources to citizens in the community to act in the public sphere, facilitating and stimulating public debate (see Section 7.5.3 below). Alternatively, the campaign initiatives could be argued to be supporting 'privileged actors in the public sphere who dominate discussion and debate' (Hendriks, 2006, p.495). Considering the campaign initiative against a standard of democratic municipal government (see Table 7.1), the practices of targeted involvement and open involvement at the beginning of the policy cycle were notably absent, with the agenda produced by an alignment between active civil networks, councillors, and council staff. The democratic goods produced by this kind of action would be partly dependent upon the extent to which the campaign initiatives themselves were subject to inclusive popular control, were transparent, and involved considered judgement (following Fung, 2005). For the Plastic Free Frome meeting, the involvement of councillors, transparency of proceedings, and facilitation of discussion within the event, gives confidence that this was broadly the case. For the campaign initiatives, therefore, these practices of influencing public opinion instituted by IfF aligned to a standard of democratic municipal government.

This section now turns to where participatory instruments were instituted, either wholly or partly, with an aim of creating personal or civic benefits (see Section 3.3.1). For the IfF administration, part of the motivation to institute processes of citizen participation for some IfF councillors was the development of skills and awareness around democracy and the development of civic responsibility (see Section 5.2). This was also reflected in the Frome Town Council (2011b, pp.9-10) strategy document, written by IfF councillors, with ambitions for a 'vibrant participatory community' that acts as an 'antidote' to 'the fact that many of us have relatively little control over our lives'. Civic and personal benefits were a stated motivation for instituting participatory practices, though not all the policy processes in Frome allowed for direct participation, nor was the development of skills explicit to participants. Whilst narratives of citizens gaining civic and personal benefits through participation were present in some interviews with R4U councillors, this was exceptional, and did not appear influential with regard to the institution of participatory practices. The practice of participation for personal or civic benefits is indicated as partially present in several municipal processes

in Frome (see Table 7.1), with the institution of the practice by IfF judged as sufficient to meet a standard of democratic municipal government (see Table 7.3 below).

7.3.2   Between the policy and the people

Most processes within the case studies allowed the public to express preferences, allowing for communicative influence upon councillors (see the authority scale in Table 7.1). The focus of this section reflects concerns that have long been raised about elites using participatory instruments to manipulate and co-opt participants (Arnstein, 1969; White, 1996; see Section 3.2.2). Research has found decision-makers sceptical of the capacity and motivations of participating citizens, and so discounting and filtering participation (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker, 2001b; Hendriks, 2009; Copus and Wall, 2017). Regardless of the circumstances of the participatory instrument, if participants did not have communicative influence then the apparent institution of participatory practices would be meaningless, with the situation not meeting the standard of democratic municipal government developed in this thesis.

The primary forum for citizens to express their views to councillors was the formal town council meeting. Audio recordings of Saffron Walden council meetings recorded the statements of citizens being acknowledged and responded to, and where R4U councillors sought advice (see Section 6.3.2). In-depth discussions with citizens and regular presentations from local civic bodies, introduced by IfF into Frome Town Council, influenced the viewpoints of IfF councillors (see Section 5.3.2). For both ILPs a level of communicative influence, at least, was evidenced as present in these processes.

There was no evidence citizens were invited into discussions and processes purely 'for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support' (Arnstein, 1969, p.218); however, this does not prove that all citizens were listened to equally, or to what extent. In the examples IfF and R4U councillors gave, citizens tended to help councillors form a viewpoint or reinforce an existing position. IfF and R4U councillors did not always accept viewpoints expressed by citizens, reserving their right to represent broader interests (FC2, FM6, SM3) or the value of their own knowledge (FC3, SC2, SM4). Council staff defined what was possible, excluding or amending the views of both citizens and councillors in processes such as the Frome People's Budget (see Section 5.4.3) and internal policy processes. This selective process is common to other studies of municipal government, finding that councillors determine which groups they connect with, and which messages are communicated (see Öhberg and Naurin, 2016; see Section 3.3.2). Such a process might be interpreted as cherry-picking issues (see Font et al, 2018; Rico Motos et al, 2019) or

otherwise exerting power through 'excluding certain participants or issues from politics' (Hendriks, 2009, p.177). Conversely, such practice could be argued to be a necessary mediation of the views of a relatively small number of citizens through the councillors' wider mandate (see Rehfeld, 2009; Urbinati, 2011), and a recognition of the expertise of both councillors and council staff (see Section 7.2.1 above). Some agendas and interests were favoured by individual councillors; however, there was no evidence that any one section of citizens or kind of interest was being explicitly excluded from policy processes by the ILP or town council as a body. Therefore, both IfF and R4U are considered here to have enabled communicative influence in a way that was broadly inclusive, both acting to increase the opportunities through which citizens could express their preferences and have influence. Potentially the strongest indication that interests were not systematically excluded is where citizens themselves were given greater authority within a process, which is where this chapter now turns.

7.3.3   Giving away authority

As indicated in Table 7.1 above, there were just a few processes where citizens had authority beyond practices of giving advice or otherwise being consulted. This section will briefly consider the municipal elections as a practice of direct authority before turning to two processes where IfF councillors ceded authority over municipal policy: the People's Budget; and, the Frome Advisory Panels. R4U did not institute practices beyond consultation. This section will discuss the alignment of these practices with democratic goods, in particular that of popular control.

The election of councillors in the municipal elections formed the town council administration and was the most extensive process in the case studies, citizens having direct authority over the broad direction of municipal policy. The case-study ILPs gave authority to citizens through this process in two important ways: first, through ensuring that the elections were contested, ensuring that citizens could participate in the formal process of selecting candidates, which was particularly relevant to IfF during the research period (see Section 7.2.2); second, through presenting a broad platform that citizens could select, influencing the policies and procedures of the council (see Section 7.4.1). Whilst IfF and R4U did not have authority over how municipal elections were run, they did have an impact in the extent and kind of authority that citizens had.

Turning to processes initiated by the ILPs, the Frome People's Budget process was notable in that, particularly in the case of the 'Town Vote', it gave citizens the opportunity to exercise direct authority or co-governance across the policy cycle (see Section 5.4.3). Participatory

budgeting is a widely used participatory instrument that is distinctive in the extent of authority it gives citizens (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016). Council staff and councillors did have considerable influence over the shaping and developing of citizen proposals. For example, the external professionals supporting the development of the People's Budget (Public Square, 2019b, pp.25) noted that in the shortlisting process, council staff and councillors 'felt it was valuable to involve participants in a conversation about feasibility and understand constraints they work with'. This intervention appeared to unduly constrain participants with regard to proposing alternate solutions, echoing the concerns around the filtering of citizen preferences set out in Section 7.3.2 above. The authority of citizens was bounded. However, this was a transparent process that involved citizens at every stage and was a process of co-governance, resulting in a practice of direct authority in the town-wide vote, giving extensive popular control.

Another process instituted by the IfF administration was the Frome Advisory Panels, which were influential on the policy programme of Frome Town Council, with their recommendations for a range of policies taken as binding (see Section 5.4.4). Lay-stakeholders were the main body of participants in the Advisory Panels, with fewer unaffiliated citizens participating, though the process was open. IfF councillors were very influential, setting the themes of the Advisory Panels alongside chairing and facilitating, whilst Frome Town Council staff supported through facilitation and the provision of information. As with the People's Budget, citizen authority was bounded to some extent by what council staff and councillors thought feasible and aligned with their priorities. Unlike the People's Budget process, there was no final authorising vote, with the popular control resting on: the role of the councillors (see Parkinson, 2006, pp.152-154; Lafont, 2020a, pp.127-128); other processes where citizens could express different preferences (see Section 3.3.3); and, the role of lay-stakeholders in bringing 'non-participants' values, wishes, and experiences to the forum and [transmitting] back to their principals the reasons for and against those points of view' (Parkinson, 2006, p.153; see Section 3.2.3). With the recommendations created iteratively with the involvement of participants, the councillors committing to those recommendations, and forums subsequently monitoring implementation, the process was one of co-governance.

Both R4U and IfF, by contesting elections and presenting a distinct policy platform, contributed to the ability of citizens to exercise direct authority. The institution by IfF of the People's budget and Advisory Panels gave authority to citizens in ways that would be expected to produce popular control, so aligning with democratic municipal government.

7.3.4   The role of IfF and R4U

The influence of IfF and R4U on citizen authority is summarised in Table 7.3 below. As discussed in Section 7.3.1, IfF initiated two kinds of process that directly aimed to influence the public sphere and would be expected to produce democratic goods, such as considered judgement and inclusiveness. Several participatory instruments initiated by IfF were connected with narratives of participation being a civic or personal benefit, partly aligning with a standard of democratic municipal government – as reflected in Table 7.3 below. There was no evident participatory practice seeking to influence the public sphere or develop civic benefits by R4U, with R4U as a party restricting these kinds of practices to those who were party members and supporters.

Table 7.3   Influence of localist ILPs on citizen authority towards DMG

	Less influence		Citizen Authority			More influence
IfF	**Public sphere**	Personal / civic benefits	**Communicative influence**	**Advise or consult**	**Co-governance**	**Direct authority**
R4U	Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	**Advise or consult**	Co-governance	Direct authority

Key:	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	**Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence**	Fully aligns with DMG with little change due to ILP

Both IfF and R4U were evidenced to facilitate the practice of communicative influence, with a public commitment to listen to citizens and evidence of citizens influencing councillors. Councillors from both ILPs filtered citizen preferences with regard to their own motivations and viewpoints; however, there was no indication that this was systematic. There was no evidence that R4U influenced a strong change in practice of communicative influence. The expansion of opportunities to influence IfF councillors and Frome Town Council staff was evidenced as ILP influence over this participatory practice. Both IfF and R4U instituted practices involving consultation, with R4U notably instituting consultation through the Residents Manifesto (see Table 7.1 above). Both IfF and R4U influenced municipal elections in ways that gave citizens direct authority to some extent. As discussed in Section 7.3.3, IfF instituted participatory practices that gave citizens authority, with the Advisory Panels and the People's Budget examples of co-governance, with elements of direct authority for the People's Budget, as indicated on Table 7.3 above. This was distinct from R4U, where direct authority was only enabled by the ILP through it providing more choice in municipal elections, and so indicated as only partly aligned with democratic municipal government.

7.4   Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle

This section will consider citizen influence in the policy cycle, drawing upon the literature and discussion in Chapter 2 and Section 3.4, and the analysis summarised in Table 7.1 above. The influence that citizens have over process design is discussed in Section 7.4.1, with reference to specific processes of consultation on process and to the ILP being elected on a platform of changing policy processes. The breadth of citizen influence, from the defining of issues to indicating a policy solution, is explored in Section 7.4.2, discussing participation in the more formal spaces of town council meetings, and the informal contact in everyday spaces. The extent citizens had influence over the implementation of policy is discussed in Section 7.4.3, partly focusing on the role of the Frome Advisory Panel forums. The consideration of citizen influence in the policy cycle concludes in Section 7.4.4 with a summary discussion of the influence of IfF and R4U over citizen influence in the policy cycle and the alignment with democratic municipal government.

7.4.1   Procedural influence

The analysis in Section 3.4.3 argued that the ability of citizens to influence process design should occur across all policy cycles, suggesting an active role for citizens in remaking and renewing processes of policy formation and implementation. This section will consider two forms of process design, beginning with those instituted by the ILPs, before turning to the role of ILPs in municipal elections. As set out in Table 7.1 above, the explicit practice of citizen participation in process design was partially present in several processes where IfF had influenced the institution of the process. This included the Participate Frome event, where citizen feedback helped steer future participatory activities (Frome Town Council, 2013f; see Section 5.4.1). Similarly, feedback from young people on their view of the process was gathered by the review of the People's Budget youth strand (Purple Elephant, 2018). The institution of citizen influence over process design by the IfF administration in Frome was limited to consultation or advice within particular time-limited processes, and was not a practice instituted by the R4U administration in Saffron Walden

From an agonistic perspective, Lowndes and Paxton (2018, p.706) call 'for citizens to be involved in crafting and adapting specific institutional arrangements, and in holding politicians accountable for previous decisions on institutional design'. This radical conception suggests citizen influence at the level of co-governance, having a greater level of authority over process design. Neither ILP gave citizens this level of authority through town council processes. However, ILP candidate statements and the democratic narratives of the case

study ILPs criticised the way discussions in previous administrations had proceeded, and proposed broad changes in the approach to decision-making, which stimulated public debate (see Sections 5.2.2; 6.2.2). As noted in Section 7.3.3 above, elections enabled citizen authority both through the point of voting itself, and through the narratives and discussions around that point of voting. To the extent that these narratives and discussions included consideration on how municipal policy was formed, citizens gained direct authority with regard to institutional arrangements of decision-making through the process of municipal elections.

The candidate and campaign statements of R4U and IfF included comments relating to democracy and participatory practices. Just over a fifth (21%) of R4U candidate statements included comments on democratic themes, tending to orient around listening and acting 'on behalf of residents'. These narratives echoed the headline R4U commitment for the party to 'listen to residents and make objective decisions that are right for local communities' (Residents for Uttlesford, 2019a), with a focus on responsiveness, transparency and accountability. A third (33.3%) of IfF candidate statements included comments on democratic themes and tended to orient towards actively involving citizens. These narratives echoed public statements by IfF for 'a society run by all' (Frome Times, 2011b), advocating the inclusion of citizens within processes, along with responsiveness and transparency. In different ways, both ILPs were engaging with a process of 'meta-deliberation' about the nature of democracy of the municipality (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011, p.1867; also, Landwehr, 2015; Holdo and Öhrn Sagrelius, 2020). Given localist ILPs have a 'general focus on the quality of the local administration and democracy' (Boogers and Voerman, 2010, p.85), it may be expected that their programmes would, in part, contain meta-deliberative consideration of municipal decision-making processes. It is notable that where statements for candidates for national parties were available for analysis, the theme of democracy was wholly absent (see Section 5.2.2). As a counterpoint to this interpretation, the emphasis of R4U communications around the 2019 election focused upon being competent providers of public goods and services, this aligning more with a de-politicisation of small-scale municipal government than seeking a debate about the form of municipal democracy (see Sections 2.5, 6.3.1). There is evidence that ILPs can define municipal elections as being about both the procedure and substance of municipal policy, but the extent that citizens are given some authority over process design is dependent on whether narratives of democratic reform and responsiveness take precedence over policy programmes and claims to administrative competence.

7.4.2   Substantive influence

This section will consider where citizens had influence over the substantive stages of the policy cycle, beginning with the formal spaces of town council meetings, then considering informal and citizen-initiated contact, before concluding with a discussion of processes initiated by the ILPs. Beginning with town council meetings, this was the formal route for citizens to enter an issue onto the agenda or challenge the policy preferences of councillors. Within the meeting, the space for public questions allowed citizens to raise any issue of concern (see Sections 5.3.2 and 6.3.2). As noted in the analysis of these meetings, citizens could raise issues unrelated to the agenda, being able to raise issues that defined problems or aimed to set the agenda, as well as aiming to define or indicate solutions to particular problems. Therefore, this kind of contact allowed citizens a significant level of control, even if not authority (see Section 7.3.2 above).

Another process that allowed citizens considerable control was informal and citizen-initiated contact in everyday informal spaces, and semi-formal contact through community activities or associations (see Sections 4.3.3 and 5.3.3). Informal contact with citizens and citizen-initiated contact is a typical part of the councillor role, and subject to the same issues of inclusiveness as other kinds of participation (see Freeman, 2020). The policy cycle analysis highlighted how, in contrast to formal council meetings, citizens often had choice of the time and place of this contact, giving a level of control over process as well as substantive stages (as shown in Table 7.1 above). In a traditional 'ladder of participation' sense these might be viewed as trivial instances of communication with 'no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account' (Arnstein, 1969, p219), yet, in a finding that aligns with that of Hendriks and Marshment (2019), councillors placed importance on this kind of everyday participation. As a council staff member stated, 'people are able to talk to [councillors] in their environment about anything and everything, wherever they are' (SO1), which reduced the barriers to inclusion compared to more formal spaces. However, patterns of inequality were likely to be similar unless directly involving those underrepresented in these informal practices (see Hirlinger, 1992; Copus, 2010). The community project initiated by the IfF administration, where councillors litter-picked alongside residents, was an example of targeted inclusiveness in informal settings (see Section 5.3.3). Informal and citizen-initiated contact gave citizens considerable control over an instrument of participation, and could also produce inclusiveness where involvement was targeted.

Regarding processes initiated by IfF, citizens generally had control over substantive elements of the policy cycle. The agenda was defined for the Frome Town Council campaign initiatives and Advisory Panels, though in these processes citizens had the freedom to shape

and define policy through defining and indicating solutions under the broad theme (see Table 7.1 above). Defining the agenda of events allowed relevant stakeholders to be engaged, suitable spaces chosen, and citizens with interests in the particular area drawn in (see Section 7.2 above; also Warren, 2002). The constraining of the agenda to particular issues benefited inclusiveness, whilst the incorporation of the practice of defining solutions ensured control was not limited to simply indicating preferences on pre-defined policies. For R4U, the institution of the Residents Manifesto was a way in which citizens could have a more nuanced influence over the strategy of R4U administrations than would be allowed simply through voting (see Section 6.4.1). The influence over a policy platform prior to the election of the R4U administration allowed a route for citizens to influence municipal policy such that it could align with citizen preferences. Indeed, this process had similarities with the influencing of the Frome Town Council strategic plan by the Vision for Frome public consultation (see Section 5.2.3), but for R4U this was an ongoing (albeit mediated) participatory practice.

7.4.3   Implementing influence

The possibility of citizen influence over the policy cycle does not end at the point of decision-making, with the Democracy Mapping following the argument of Boswell (2016, p.730; see also Section 3.4.3) for 'greater public scrutiny over these otherwise opaque matters' of policy implementation and review. As set out in Table 7.1 above, this was present to some extent in the case studies. Frome Town Council had a detailed work programme and review process that was publicly available, alongside updates on ongoing projects through the council website and social media; the monitoring and review process was less formal, and less accessible to the citizen, for Saffron Walden Town Council (see Sections 5.3.2, 6.3.2). What was evident in both cases was the extent to which oversight over the implementation of policy, and review of that implementation, were stages of the policy cycle that could be obscured from view to councillors as well as citizens. For the stages of implementation and review to be open to citizen influence implied a greater transformation in the practices of municipal authorities than for those stages of the policy cycle that were typically in public view.

There were arguably two explicit practices of citizen participation in implementation or review. First were the Advisory Panel forums that, amongst other activities, enabled citizens to monitor the implementation of recommendations from the Advisory Panels (see Section 5.4.4). These forums were not a long-lasting initiative, though they did enable some of the work of the Advisory Panels to be continued. Second were the municipal elections, with ILPs and opposing parties reviewing the policy decisions of the incumbent administration (see

Sections 5.3.1 and 6.3.1). With municipal elections being a typical form of accountability, this was not an aspect that was changed by the ILP.

7.4.4   The role of IfF and R4U

The influence of IfF and R4U on citizen influence in the policy cycle is summarised in Table 7.4 below, showing the Democracy Mapping of IfF and R4U influence over the policy cycle. The participatory practice of process design was instituted in a limited way by IfF, discussed in Section 7.4.1. Although not a process instituted by IfF or R4U, the elections to town council allowed for both ILPs to stand on a platform that included commitments to change policy processes. Whilst being one strand of a broad process, this enabled meta-deliberation and control over process design to some extent, partly aligning with democratic municipal government. A number of processes influenced or instituted by IfF and R4U allowed citizens to influence the substance of policy, including the definition of problems and agenda setting (see Section 7.4.2), with citizen involvement in these elements being expected to produce popular control.

Table 7.4   Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle and the influence of IfF and R4U

	Less control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				More control
IfF	Review and evaluate	**Implementation**	**Indicate solution**	**Define solutions**	**Set the agenda**	**Define problems**	Design process
R4U	Review and evaluate	Implementation	**Indicate solution**	**Define solutions**	**Set the agenda**	**Define problems**	Design process

Key:	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	**Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence**	Fully aligns with DMG with little change due to ILP

The institution of practices of implementation and review were relatively limited, particularly for the R4U administration (see Section 7.4.3). The combination of Advisory Panel forums, the strong communications function updating on major projects, along with the formal routine process of monitoring within Frome Town Council, indicated an alignment with democratic municipal government (see Boswell, 2016, p.730).

7.5 Citizens and Communication

This section will consider citizens and the mode of communication, drawing upon the literature and discussion in Chapter 2 and Section 3.5, and the analysis summarised in Table 7.1 above. Section 7.5.1 considers the transparency of the decision-making process and the ability of the citizen to express their own preferences and demand councillors justify theirs. The analysis focuses to some extent on the formal meetings of the town council as the key venue of municipal decision-making. Section 7.5.2 explores aggregative modes of communication, and in particular the role of the municipal elections as a venue for communication. There is then a discussion of more intensive modes of communication in Section 7.5.3, including deliberation and argument, with a consideration of deliberation and argument in semi-formal and informal spaces. The consideration of citizen communication concludes in Section 7.2.4 with a summary discussion of the influence of IfF and R4U over the modes of communication engaged in by citizens and the alignment with democratic municipal government.

7.5.1 Transparency and hidden processes

As set out in Section 3.5.1, the ability of citizens to know what decisions had been taken and the justification for those decisions, a transparency in rationale (Mansbridge, 2009), is a practice that should be present in all processes to align with democratic municipal government. The transparency of town council meetings in both case studies aligned with wider sector initiatives on increasing the transparency of parish and town council decision making (see The Local Government (Transparency Requirements) (England) Regulations, 2015; NALC, 2020a). Transparency is one of the founding five principles of IfF (see Section 4.2.1) and a key commitment of R4U around democracy (see Section 5.5.4). Both localist independent parties moved to support opportunities for the observing and monitoring of formal processes, with R4U notably introducing the recording and publishing of council meetings. The availability of documentation and the public nature of meetings around the points of decision-making did not mean that all stages of the policy cycle were transparent. In Frome Town Council, municipal policy underwent significant development from the point of proposal to decision-making, with most of the discussion in this development process occurring within internal meetings of IfF, and between councillors and staff (see Section 5.3.2). In Saffron Walden Town Council, there were internal agreements and bargaining over municipal policy decisions by the R4U administration that were not in public view (see Section 6.3.2). The unanimity that resulted from these internal discussions could then obscure the reasons and justification for policy preferences, particularly where there was a

lack of a political opposition to publicly challenge decisions, which was the case for the second IfF administration.

If scrutiny did not always come from councillors, citizens could insist on transparency. Formal town council meetings allowed citizens to express preferences and to challenge councillors with regard to their policy decisions and preferences. Whilst citizens can 'assert their rights' to speak within meetings and challenge set agendas or decisions made (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007, p.11), it was the response by councillors and staff that determined if citizen preferences would be listened to within the municipal process, or whether citizens would be forced to resort to protest outside of those processes to have influence (for example; Frome Town Council, 2015g; Saffron Walden Town Council, 2016b; FM4; SM4). Whilst the formal meetings of both case-study town councils were generally responsive to questions from citizens, the changes instituted by IfF reduced barriers to citizens stating preferences and seeking the reasons of councillor decisions, alongside the institution of other participatory instruments such as the Advisory Panels that further aligned with the practice.

The transparency of other municipal processes was variable (see Table 7.1 above), with processes typically covered in formal minutes or reports to the town council, or open to citizens to observe as participants. A particular example of transparency was the People's Budget for Frome Town Council, developed in 2019 to be more transparent, as in previous years, 'it was not clear to most residents where the projects to be voted on came from' (Public Square, 2019a, p.5; FM7). The revised process collated and developed proposals online, so that the process of defining problems, prioritising issues and suggesting solutions was open and transparent, with documentation also setting out the rationale for the process design (see Section 5.4.3). The IfF and R4U administrations had both innovated with regard to transparency of processes and, whilst some elements were obscured, most policy cycles were transparent at some stage.

7.5.2 Elections and conversations

The elections to town council were a process that was outside the authority of the case study ILPs, but was also a focus of their activity and influential on municipal policy. The elections, as an aggregative practice, did not involve anything more than the citizens expressing their preferences over the selection of councillors. However, the presence of competing political agendas in the public sphere meant that communication around this aggregative practice included the expression and seeking of preferences. Both IfF and R4U communicated their preferences around municipal policy and procedure to the public, and in doing so invited

citizens to express preferences and engage in dialogue, both online and in public spaces (see Sections 5.3.1 and 6.3.1). This very much echoes the finding of Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.323) that elections to parish and town councils are 'a crucial way for the potential new council and the community to have a conversation'. As both IfF and R4U mounted active election campaigns, this increased the possibility of these wider conversations occurring (see also Sections 7.3.3 and 7.4.1). However, as noted in Section 7.2.2 above, communication around and through elections depended upon electoral competition and the presence of other parties or unaffiliated independents, which was not assured in either case.

Voting was also used by the Frome People's Budget processes, though there was less evidence that this process generated discussion and communication, apart from where the process sparked unintentional public controversy (Public Square, 2019a; FM6; FM7). Indeed, whilst the results of the People's Budget strands were not foregone conclusions, neither were they processes that considered issues where there were strong differences of opinion. Other forms of aggregation were used across processes of discussion where consensus was not gained, or not sought; here, citizen preferences were themed or summarised to give prominence to those preferences most commonly held. As noted by Mansbridge (1999), such procedures are necessary where differences cannot be resolved in the process, with the use of this practice aligning with democratic municipal government. This use of aggregation, mainly used by the IfF administration in aggregating themes from facilitated discussions, would be expected to produce popular control and inclusiveness.

7.5.3   The facilitation of deliberation and argument

The practice of argument, and in particular deliberation, is assumed within this thesis to produce a range of democratic goods (see Section 3.5.3). Independents for Frome instituted table discussions within Frome Town Council meetings, creating the potential for citizens, council staff and councillors to develop preferences, deliberate and argue (see Section 5.3.2). Interviewees and reports from the Frome Advisory Panels indicated facilitated conversation with "lots of discussion … a lot of real debate came out of those sort of things" (FM2; see Section 5.4.4). Whilst councillors and council staff were influential (see Section 7.3.2) there was no evidence of pressure or cajoling being practised. The practice by IfF to use external facilitation for internal group meetings (see Section 5.3.3) indicates that practices of facilitated respectful argument were valued by, and would have been familiar to, at least some IfF councillors. The institution of argument and deliberation within municipal processes was an evident change introduced by IfF, with no comparable institution of such practice by R4U (see Section 6.4.2).

A particular use of the practice of preference development instituted by the IfF administration deserves particular focus. Participate Frome and the campaign initiatives specifically sought to stimulate discussion in the public sphere (see Section 7.3.1 above). These processes might be characterised as seeking to 'reignite and facilitate the ongoing public debate on contested political issues' (Lafont, 2020a, p.148), though the campaign initiatives were more oriented towards ignition than facilitation. The presence of preference development, argument and debate in the informal public sphere is important to wider benefits of inclusive popular control and considered judgement (see Mansbridge, 2012; Urbinati, 2014; Lafont, 2020a). The stimulation of discussion did not form a consistent or large part of the processes instituted and sustained by IfF; however, that ILPs and municipal authority at the scale of parish and town council could intentionally play such a role appears a novel finding and is discussed further in the concluding chapter.

7.5.4   The role of IfF and R4U

Both IfF and R4U increased the ability of citizens to observe or monitor policy decisions, with R4U's recording of council meetings and elements of the Frome People's Budget being particularly strong examples of transparency. Whilst the reasons for decisions were not necessarily made accessible, both ILP administrations were open to challenge (see Section 7.5.1). Both ILPs instituted additional processes involving citizen participation, expanding the possibility for citizens to express and seek preferences. The greater citizen engagement in Frome, which was partly stimulated by IfF, increased the level of citizen challenge and expression of preferences, aligning more fully with democratic municipal government (see Table 7.5 below).

The process of municipal elections enabled a level of popular control, though dependent upon political contest (see Section 7.5.2). IfF instituted further processes that used aggregative practice in ways that aligned with democratic municipal government, though this did not greatly change the situation given the process of municipal elections was the dominant aggregative practice in place.

Table 7.5   **Citizens and communication, and the influence of the case study parties**

	Less intense		Citizens and Communication			More intense
IfF	Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate preferences	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue
R4U	Observe or monitor	Express / seek preferences	Develop preferences	Aggregate preferences	Pressure or Cajole	Deliberate or Argue

Key:	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence	Fully aligns with DMG with little change due to ILP

A range of participatory practices instituted and sustained by IfF aligned with democratic municipal government, from the development of preferences in round-table discussions or campaign initiatives, to facilitated argument towards agreement (see Section 7.5.3). This kind of citizen communication was aligned with the narratives of including citizens within processes and, intriguingly, included ambitions to stimulate discussion in the wider informal public sphere. The initiation and sustaining of practices of deliberation and argument would be expected to produce a range of democratic goods (see Section 3.5.3), therefore, this influence of practice by IfF was significant. Whilst the focus of R4U on listening and being responsive facilitated the expression of citizen preferences, R4U did not institute practices of argument as a mode of citizen communication. Neither ILP was evidenced to pressure or cajole, which would not have aligned with a standard of democratic municipal government.

7.6   Conclusion

This chapter sought to inform the main research question, being whether localist ILPs institute democratic municipal government, through analysis of the two localist ILPs and their role in initiating and sustaining participatory practices. IfF and R4U had influence across all dimensions of the Democracy Mapping and in many participatory practices. IfF in particular initiated considerable change in Frome Town Council, instituting several participatory instruments and shifting the culture of the authority towards enabling citizen participation. The change initiated by R4U was less radical, but tended towards the same direction of increased routes of citizen participation and alignment with democratic municipal government. This initiation of participatory practices and broad narratives of valuing citizen participation through listening and involvement indicated that citizens had the ability to influence council policy, rather than participatory instruments simply being used for purposes of manipulation or display.

The ILPs had significant impact on municipal government, tending towards a standard of democratic municipal government, but this finding raises more questions than it resolves. IfF involved citizens in facilitated spaces for deliberation and argument over municipal policy, sought to influence policy beyond that controlled by municipal authority, and involved interested citizens in particular. Participation in R4U was more typical, with a greater focus on consultation and informal contact with citizens and individual councillors outside of formal spaces, whilst the party was viewed as a route for more intensive participation. These were both ILPs that valued participation, but in different ways. This thesis now moves to a conclusion, to consider the main research question and related literature, before moving to take stock of the factors that potentially shaped these case studies, then highlighting some key questions for research going forward.

Chapter 8.   Conclusion

Councillors are a really cool thing... they've got a power that's not written, that isn't a real power, they've got a ... "this is an elected councillor therefore you must listen to them", in a way that just a group of people, however much influence they might have otherwise, wouldn't (Independents for Frome councillor)

There's no power in it, but ... the role of town council, it's a leadership role ... it's not going to be financial, it's not going to be structural, it's going to be "this is what we are" (Residents for Uttlesford councillor)

This thesis sought to answer the question: **Do independent local parties institute democratic municipal government?** Answering this question first required discussion of three research sub-questions:

1. What constitutes an ILP in the context of English municipal government?
2. What is an appropriate standard of *democratic* municipal government for the purpose of evaluating the impact of an ILP?
3. How can the impact of an ILP be evaluated across a system of municipal government?

These research sub-questions were answered in Chapters 2 and 3, through: developing a definition of an ILP that would be useful within the English context; setting out a standard of democratic municipal government; and, developing the Democracy Mapping, a means of comparing the presence of citizen participation across whole authorities with regard to a standard of democratic municipal government. The subsequent chapters used this approach to answer the fourth research sub-question:

4. Do ILPs institute or sustain practices aligned with democratic municipal government?

The evidence and analysis that enabled the Democracy Mapping also pointed to several themes emerging from this research, summarised in Table 8.1 below, pointing to areas of future research. This chapter will discuss these themes and in doing so, consider the final research sub-question:

5. How do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government?

The case studies of IfF and R4U evidenced that these two localist ILPs instituted particular participatory practices and instruments within their respective town councils that aligned with a standard of democratic municipal government. Neither case wholly aligned with this

standard, though participatory practices within Frome Town Council were changed considerably by IfF such that only a few practices did not align. In the case study discussion and comparison in Chapter 7, three key themes emerged: localist ILPs can change the democratic character of municipal government but are shaped by their context and history; the consideration of diverse participatory practices and the policy cycle are key contributions of the Democracy Mapping; and small-scale municipal government can be a site of citizen participation and an enabler of activity in the public sphere. Prior to discussing these areas further, the main findings from the research programme in this thesis will be summarised.

Table 8.1   The main themes emerging from the research

Localist ILPs and democratic change	The evaluation of participatory practice	Municipal government and participation
ILPs can act to create democratic municipal government, but with their trajectory partly depending on the conception of democracy broadly held by the ILP	Discontinuous mapping accounts for the impact and presence of diverse participatory practices	Small-scale municipal government can be a site of citizen participation, but inclusiveness remains a challenge
The orientation of the ILP to participation is shaped by local circumstances, from the people involved to local political norms	The analysis of the policy cycle enables a better understanding of the role of participatory practices in relation to democratic goods	Small-scale municipal government could stimulate and enable discussion about the policies of government at larger scales

8.1   Main findings

Summarising the analysis presented in Chapter 7, the main finding in relation to the research question is that both IfF and R4U made municipal government more democratic through influencing the institution of, and sustaining, participatory practices (see Tables 8.2 and 8.3 below). This is with reference to a standard of Democratic Municipal Government. The extent to which the localist ILP changed participatory practices in municipal government, and which participatory practices were introduced, depended upon the people involved, the political context and challenge, and the engagement of citizens with municipal government.

The Democracy Mapping developed in Chapter 3 sets out a range of participatory practices across four dimensions describing: who participates; the authority citizens have; when in the policy cycle citizens have influence; and, how citizens communicate. Some participatory

practices are argued to be necessary across all policy cycles to make municipal government more democratic; some participatory practices are argued to be necessary in just some policy cycles; and the unequal communicative practice to 'pressure or cajole' is argued not to provide the right conditions for democratic goods in any situation. If a localist ILP influenced participatory practices as set out in the Democracy Mapping, then it would have instituted a standard of democratic municipal government. However, were a parish or town council to meet this standard there would still remain considerable room to produce more democratic goods, including those that do not form the minimal standard used here. Further, the priority given to particular participatory practices here may be challenged, as the selection of democratic goods used is a choice appropriate to this thesis and analytical approach. Also, the asserted links between participatory practices and democratic goods are shaped by the context of their institution in ways that empirical evidence in the literature does not, and cannot, fully describe. This analysis does empirically test whether the case study ILPs instituted participatory practices that align with a coherent standard of democratic municipal government, answering the main research question and providing a basis for future research.

In Chapters 5 and 6, participatory practices in municipal processes of policy formation and implementation were mapped for each case study, along with an indication of the role of the case study ILP in instituting and sustaining these practices. In Chapter 7, the Democracy Mappings were then collated and the impact of the case study ILPs evaluated against the standard of democratic municipal government developed in this thesis. As set out in Table 8.2 below, the changes introduced by IfF to existing municipal processes, and the introduction of new processes of policy formation and implementation, resulted in Frome Town Council moving significantly towards a standard of democratic municipal government, with IfF influencing alignment across most participatory practices. In Table 8.3 below, the changes instituted by R4U, including the changes to existing municipal processes and the institution of a new process of policy formation, resulted in Saffron Walden Town Council moving towards a standard of democratic municipal government, with R4U influencing alignment across several practices. This section will discuss findings from each of the dimensions of the Democracy Mapping, before the chapter moves to consider broader themes arising from the research.

Regarding **participant selection**, as shown in Table 8.2 below, IfF made changes in several practices, including a focus on involvement of stakeholders, some involvement of external professionals, and enabling citizen participation in public spaces. IfF instituted additional open municipal processes and increased electoral challenge, though the targeted involvement of underrepresented citizens was partial. R4U also instituted an additional open

process, but did not institute practices of targeted involvement. The outreach to lay stakeholders and R4U's presence in the public sphere helped align practices with democratic municipal government. The difference between the two ILPs with regard to the range of participant selection was primarily a reflection of IfF being active within, and with, underrepresented communities, and having instituted several participatory instruments, which then drew in external professionals.

Table 8.2   The influence of IfF on Frome Town Council

Less inclusive		Participant Selection				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	**Lay stakeholders**	**Open process**	**Public sphere**	Targeted involvement

Extent of participation: up to ~8% of citizens engaged by IfF influenced process

Less influence		Citizen Authority				More influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	**Communicative influence**	**Advise or consult**	Co-governance		**Direct authority**

Less control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				More control
Review and evaluate	**Implementation**	**Indicate solution**	**Define solutions**	**Set the agenda**	**Define problems**	Design process

Less intense		Citizens and Communication				More intense
Observe or monitor	**Express / seek preferences**	**Develop preferences**	Aggregate preferences	Pressure or Cajole		Deliberate or Argue

Key:				
	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	**Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence**	Aligns with DMG - little change due to ILP

Table 8.3   The influence of R4U on Saffron Walden Town Council

Less inclusive		Participant Selection				More inclusive
Council staff	Councillors	External professionals	**Lay stakeholders**	**Open process**	**Public sphere**	Targeted involvement

Extent of participation: up to ~4% of citizens engaged by R4U influenced process

Less influence		Citizen Authority				More influence
Public sphere	Personal / civic benefits	Communicative influence	**Advise or consult**	Co-governance		Direct authority

Less control		Citizen Influence in the Policy Cycle				More control
Review and evaluate	Implementation	**Indicate solution**	**Define solutions**	**Set the agenda**	**Define problems**	Design process

Less intense		Citizens and Communication				More intense
Observe or monitor	**Express / seek preferences**	Develop preferences	Aggregate preferences	Pressure or Cajole		Deliberate or Argue

Key:				
	Does not align with DMG	Partly aligns with DMG with ILP influence	**Fully aligns with DMG with ILP influence**	Aligns with DMG - little change due to ILP

With regard to the extent of participation in the two cases, the relatively exclusive nature of participatory instruments other than voting is emphasised. Notable exceptions were where the activity of IfF and R4U engaged citizens with politics in everyday spaces, with the open consultation that became the R4U Residents Manifesto and Participate Frome being present in shopping centres and on the streets. The campaigning activity of IfF and R4U also engaged citizens, adding to the activity of other political parties. The extent of political participation was not greatly increased by activities that required citizens to enter formal and semi-formal spaces, but was impacted by activities that reached out to citizens in the informal public sphere.

Considering ***citizen authority***, the central question for this dimension is whether citizens did have at least some influence through communicating with councillors and council staff. The analysis found that the orientation towards listening and responding to citizens held by both ILPs facilitated an orientation toward citizen influence. Given the significantly increased opportunity for citizens to have influence under the IfF administration compared to the previous administration, this was indicated as a positive change in practice in Frome Town Council. In Saffron Walden Town Council, as both the R4U administration and the administration before it appeared to be responsive to citizen influence and the opportunity for citizen influence remained broadly similar, this was not evidenced as a change in practice due to the ILP.

Councillors in IfF were partly motivated by a belief that participatory practices had personal and civic benefits for citizens, with this influencing the institution of participatory instruments in Frome. Some of these participatory instruments included the practices of co-governance and giving direct authority to citizens, in ways that aligned with democratic municipal government. R4U councillors did not, generally, talk about citizen participation as being a personal benefit to citizens, and this did not influence the institution of participatory practices. The municipal processes instituted by R4U limited citizen authority to giving advice or being consulted, aligning with a managerialist rather than participatory conception of local democracy. Whilst both R4U and IfF enabled citizens to have direct authority on policy through the electoral process, this was not considered a significant impact on citizen authority. However, IfF had a demonstrable impact on the extent of participation through electoral challenge, noted here as an influence on the extent that citizens had direct authority (though see Section 8.2.1 below), along with the People's Budget.

Turning to practices that did not have authority over municipal policy, the connection of participatory instruments to the public sphere was a practice that IfF instituted, guiding and enabling citizens towards influencing wider public opinion (see Table 8.2 above). This was

not a practice instituted by R4U (see Table 8.3 above), with R4U exerting influence over the public sphere as a political party but not enabling citizens to do so through separate participatory instruments. This difference illustrates a broader difference between the cases: IfF was intentionally not active as a political body between elections; R4U engaged in year-round campaigning activity and communication. Both ILPs were viewed by those within them as routes for citizen participation; however, with a membership and year-round activity, this was more the case for R4U. The study of the interaction between party organisation and participatory practice is developing (see Gherghina and Jacquet, 2023); IfF and R4U are examples of how internal party organisation and citizen participation may interact.

Exploring *citizen influence in the policy cycle*, there was evidence that IfF supported citizen involvement across much of the policy cycle in Frome, from the design of processes to their review (see Table 8.2 above). IfF instituted practices that enabled citizens to monitor the implementation of policy, mainly through increased communication and reporting from council staff. Some participatory instruments instituted by IfF also invited views on participation generally, or feedback specific to that instrument, enabling citizen influence over the design of processes. R4U did not institute practices of citizen participation in the implementation of policy or design of processes (as indicated in Table 8.3 above). However, by raising questions of how municipal policy should be decided, both R4U and IfF introduced an aspect of meta-deliberation or meta-organisation into municipal elections, giving citizens a broad influence over process design through voting (see Section 8.3.2 below). Both case study ILPs also increased citizen influence in the substantive stages of the policy cycle through the institution of additional participatory instruments that gave citizens the opportunity to define problems and set the agenda, along with being able to define and indicate solutions.

Regarding *citizens and communication*, both R4U and IfF changed practices so that citizens had more opportunities to observe or monitor processes of policy formation and implementation, through improved communications and recording of council meetings. For R4U, little changed in how citizens communicated in most municipal processes, with town council meetings retaining their formality; however, the Residents' Manifesto did allow an innovative route for citizens to express preferences across municipal policy, reflected in Table 8.3 above. Deliberation and argument was particularly important, given its relationship to a number of democratic goods, but was not present as an instituted participatory practice by R4U. IfF instituted a number of changes that enabled citizens to develop preferences, and instituted practices of deliberation and argument across several processes, though these were judged to only partially align with democratic municipal government. The Advisory Panels were a notable example of a process oriented around facilitated discussion.

These changes were accompanied by more extensive citizen participation within processes that were less formalised, allowing citizens to express and seek preferences to a significantly greater extent.

The Democracy Mapping analysis has demonstrated that R4U and IfF both influenced municipal government in ways that aligned with producing democratic goods. They both instituted participatory practices that would be expected to better align municipal policy with the preferences of citizens in the locality, satisfying the primary claim of a localist ILP in a democratic way. Only IfF instituted participatory practices across the broad range of the Democracy Mapping, doing so through: the institution of practices within existing municipal processes; initiating new municipal processes that revolved around participatory instruments; and, enabling this through changes to the staffing and the culture of the town council. Aside from a few practices, which will be discussed below, the changes brought about by IfF aligned Frome Town Council with a standard of democratic municipal government. This finding has important implications, with important caveats.

Discussing local governance reviews in England, which can establish small-scale municipal authorities such as town councils, McIntyre and Halsall (2011, p.275) suggest that local government at the scale of parish and town has a potential role in 'engaging and enabling communities to involve them in decision making and energizing them to manage their needs at a more local level'. The analysis presented in this thesis demonstrates that this can be instituted. Discussing the potential for small-scale municipal government to play a role in creating a participatory representative democracy, Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.314) argue:

> representative democratic systems themselves … need to be made more amenable to participatory democracy. National policy [needs] to foster greater local participation, both for enhancing the legitimacy and trust in and of decision-making, but also for the instrumental reasons associated with a vibrant, participatory democracy.

The analysis in this thesis has demonstrated that the tools for a participatory representative democracy are already present, such that citizens could participate in a variety of ways in municipal government at this scale, influencing what is done and where resources are spent. There is an open door for national policy to enable local participatory representative government. The findings presented here reinforce calls for renewed focus upon the role of parish and town councils, made by those advocating the continued importance of place and community (see Bevan, 2003; NALC, 2015a; Wills, 2016).

However, it was noted in the selection of these case studies that simply by taking and retaining administration in municipal government, both IfF and R4U are exceptional. The people involved in these ILPs were exceptional, with experience of running and transforming

businesses and public sector organisations, along with experience of leading community organisations and campaigns. The political context was exceptional, with active civil society networks coming up against an active town council in Frome, and a network of residents' campaign groups coming up against a resolute district council in Uttlesford, gaining administration of Saffron Walden Town Council almost by accident. This is not to state that these situations are not replicable, but to underline that their context and history shaped the changes that happened. Understanding this context and history helps explain why these two cases were different and suggests useful avenues for further research. More broadly, these were two localised political experiments, producing novel forms of participatory instruments that may point to new democratic possibilities.

8.2   ILPs and democratic change

This thesis has evidenced that both IfF and R4U instituted and sustained participatory practices that moved their respective town councils towards a standard of democratic municipal government. However, such a finding is some distance from answering whether localist ILPs more broadly could be expected to make municipal government more democratic, and in what circumstances this would occur. This is a consideration of the fifth research sub-question: how do the characteristics of an ILP facilitate, or frustrate, the institution of democratic municipal government? This section will first consider the extent to which ILPs act as a countervailing force to institute democratic municipal government, with a discussion of the kind of citizen participation advocated by each ILP and two key contextual factors that shape their ability to institute citizen participation: the level of existing citizen engagement; and, the level of political challenge from other parties. This section then turns to the role of local circumstance in shaping the ILP itself, discussing the importance of the people who found and join them, and the political norms of party and locality.

8.2.1   Localist ILPs as a countervailing force for democracy

This thesis has concluded that ILPs can 'represent a countervailing force … generating a distinctive political life of their own' (Grant, 1977, p.1). The mechanism that stimulates the formation of ILPs and gives them the power to change municipal government is the municipal elections. The entry of IfF and R4U into the municipal elections offered electoral choice for citizens who did not believe that national political parties had a role in municipal government, or any role at all (see also Otjes, 2018; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020). In this way, ILPs might be considered purely a mechanism for a protest vote against the incumbent representatives of national parties. However, this thesis agrees with Åberg and

Ahlberger (2015) that localist ILPs do not simply negate national political parties. Localist ILPs necessarily assert that they would better align municipal policy with the preferences of citizens. Both IfF and R4U sought to stimulate discussion about how municipal policy was formed and decided upon, claiming to reflect local preferences through being more connected to citizens, and in particular, *listening* to citizens. This narrative was the counterpart to arguments made by both ILPs that other parties did not listen, being tied to national partisan commitments that were inappropriate within the locality. As part of this, narratives in R4U advocated a kind of managerialist form of local democracy that emphasised being *responsive* to citizen preferences through consulting citizens (see Haus and Sweeting, 2006). IfF had a strong narrative favouring direct participation, emphasising *involving* citizens in processes of policy formation and implementation. Whilst both ILPs made a commitment to improving local democracy, IfF and R4U had distinct narratives about their ideal form of local democracy and, to some extent, this shaped the kinds of participatory practice that they instituted.

If ILPs are a countervailing force, the case studies evidence that they needed something to push against. In 2011, IfF challenged incumbents, ensured electoral competition, and doubled citizen opportunity for participation by standing. However, over successive elections the other parties gradually withdrew. In the 2022 elections to Frome Town Council, just one opposition candidate stood against the 17 IfF candidates, with most seats uncontested. IfF as a political group was in municipal administration but essentially unelected, with many citizens no longer having the opportunity to exercise direct authority over elections. Without electoral legitimacy to underscore the role of councillors in facilitating and shaping processes of participation, the extent to which the administration of IfF could be said to align with democratic outcomes could be challenged. The control of a parish or town council by unelected councillors has been perceived as 'fundamentally undemocratic' by citizens (Willet and Cruxon, 2019, p323). Unelected councillors are effectively lay-stakeholders, with the same concerns arising around inclusiveness and popular control as for any process dominated by a small group of unaccountable interested citizens (see Section 3.3.3). The lack of contested elections also removes the most extensive kind of political participation along with the discussion about the future policy and procedures of municipal government that is stimulated by municipal elections and party campaigning (see Sections 7.2.2, 7.4.1). As Gerring et al (2015, p.2015) evidence, 'the level of contestation found within a jurisdiction or district seems to affect a variety of outcomes that scholars and citizens care about', including those taken as a basis for democracy in this thesis. The broad argument made by ILPs is that national parties have no place in municipal government; if this argument is

accepted then it needs to be demonstrated how popular control might be sustained in municipal government without municipal elections and party political competition.

8.2.2   Are ILPs victims of local circumstance?

Grant (1971, p.37) found that the character of process and policy-making in ILPs varied 'in accordance with local circumstances'. The local circumstances considered here are the *people* who founded the ILP and the *political context* around and within the ILP. Turning to people first, IfF and R4U had individuals in prominent roles, either formally or informally, who were key in sustaining the party, and who were central to the initiation and sustaining of participatory innovations (see Section 7.2.1). Such a finding echoes the wider literature, which evidences the impact of political leaders upon municipal government at this scale (Copus and Wall, 2017) and in the initiation of participatory instruments (for example, Geurtz and Van der Wijdeven, 2010; Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016). In particular, it echoes Grant (1977, p.83) in finding that the success of ILPs 'can depend to a considerable extent on the skill and energies of a few key activists'.

Due to the small size of ILPs, the capacity and motivations of individual members have a very significant impact on their activity. The founding narratives, structures and practices of each ILP was a product of the citizens who decided to become involved at their inception, and particularly a product of those who were most influential, either formally or informally. Even at an early stage, the public statements of IfF and R4U included kinds of democratic commitments that resonated with their different conceptions of democracy and the role of citizen participation. These narratives were not consistent across individual councillors (as would be expected, see Heinelt, 2013), but within each ILP formed a broad norm of what local democracy should be. The democratic narratives of each party shaped, at least partly, who subsequently joined, reinforcing the trajectory of the ILP (see Section 7.2.1). The initial trajectory of the ILP, set by the founders and those most influential in the party, appeared highly influential on subsequent development. This raises a question of the extent to which the nature of a localist ILP is mainly determined by the happenstance collection of individuals who formed it.

Noting the argument of Grant (1971) that ILPs are particularly likely to reflect local political and social norms compared to national parties, it would be expected that these norms would include their tendency to institute participatory practices. The political profiles of the two towns cannot, on the evidence presented in this thesis, be causally tied to how the ILPs instituted participatory practices. However, the differences between the two parties were consistent with the broader context. The political mainstream of IfF was 'left-of-centre,

slightly environmentally conscious' (FM5), possibly a reflection of both the broader political mainstream in Frome (see Section 5.2.1) and those who were initially involved. The earliest statements of IfF advocated a participatory and inclusive conception of local democracy that would be expected within this political norm (see Section 5.2.2; Gourgues and Mabi, 2020; Pascalo, 2020, pp.7-8). In contrast, the political norm of Saffron Walden was centrist or centre-right, with local employment strongly orienting around business and finance. Whilst R4U as a party had a broad spread of internal viewpoints, the party manifesto could be described as centrist, a common position for ILPs (Gross and Jankowski, 2020); a strong managerialist narrative accompanied the incorporation of private-sector approaches (see Haus and Sweeting, 2006), with neither of these positions tending towards the institution of direct participatory practices. The individuals who happen to form a localist ILP are within the locality, and localities have different political and social norms and characteristics. Whilst tentative, this analysis suggests that the orientation of ILPs towards instituting participatory practice would depend upon both happenstance and local circumstance.

Another way in which political context may have influenced trajectory is in the extent to which citizens engaged with the town councils. Frome Town Council already had relatively strong connections to civic networks, and the ILP then motivated participation through a supportive movement towards the town council. This provided a base for inclusive and relatively extensive participatory activities, with ordinary council meetings regularly gaining over twenty members of the public. The relevance of Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker's (2006) framework of promoting participation is evident here, in that citizens are mobilised towards participation by loyalties and civic networks (see Section 2.3). Where this is not in place, there would be more distance to travel in enabling a situation of democratic municipal government. For R4U, to propose the institution of practices such as round-table discussions in formal town council meetings when virtually no members of the public attended would have appeared optimistic at best. In Frome, the number of participatory practices instituted by IfF increased considerably into the second IfF administration, as the capacity of the town council and councillors to successfully institute these practices increased (see Sections 5.2, 5.4; also Briggs, 2008; Rolfe, 2016). The context of civic engagement does not appear to be the only factor that has shaped the trajectory of IfF and R4U with regard to participatory practices; however, the ability of an ILP to institute participatory practices, and the kind of practices they can institute, will be supported by strong civic engagement, and is likely to face barriers if this civic engagement were not present.

8.3   The evaluation of participatory practice

The development of the Democracy Mapping and the use of this approach has largely shaped this thesis. This section will set out two aspects of the Democracy Mapping that connect to wider functionalist analysis; the discontinuous mapping of participatory practices; and, the incorporation of the policy cycle. The utility of these aspects of the Democracy Mapping for the purposes of this thesis will be set out, pointing to the strengths of these techniques and therefore where they may be most usefully applied.

8.3.1 Discontinuous mapping

The functionalist analysis of participatory instruments and practices faces a tension between simplicity and complexity. Sherry Arnstein's (1969, p.216) ladder of participation was a 'simplification' that was 'designed to be provocative', juxtaposing 'powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them'. The continuing popularity of Arnstein's ladder is evidence of the normative power of a simple framework. Whilst moving away from this simplification, Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube retained the assumption that participatory practices could be analysed as contiguous in relation to democratic goods. Policy making processes are located as points or regions in the Democracy Cube, highlighting differences, but neglecting particular practices. For this thesis, given the need for an inclusive approach, it was important to consider participatory practices without assuming pre-defined relationships in a mapping of municipal democracy. The Democracy Mapping took the discontinuous approach of Bishop and Davis (2002) but, as with Fung's (2003) study of institutional design choices, retained the assumption of a relatively context-independent link between participatory practices or instruments and democratic goods (see also Geissel, 2012).

The discontinuous mapping approach has two clear strengths: it does not make assumptions of contiguity, and it directs attention to particular participatory practices that are important to sustaining minimal democratic goods. The Democracy Mapping analysis detailed in Chapter 7 illustrated how very different participatory practices were linked to the production of democratic goods in the same broader process of policy formation and implementation: elites facilitated the inclusion of underrepresented citizens; the practice of developing civic and personal skills conferred little authority itself, but was a motivation for elites instituting practices of co-governance and direct authority; the review of a process at the end of one policy cycle enabled the input of citizen preferences into the beginning of another policy cycle. The Democracy Mapping also made it evident where particular practices were less

present than would be expected for the institution of democratic municipal government. The Democracy Mapping accommodates the messy reality of municipal processes and enables a relatively clear comparison and evaluation of two complex cases. The discontinuous mapping approach is, therefore, a useful method for researchers who need to accommodate a complex and messy set of processes, or for those wishing to identify particular gaps in participatory practice.

This section is not setting out an argument for researchers to avoid approaches such as Arnstein's Ladder or the Democracy Cube. Rather, it echoes Fung's (2006, p.66) argument that the use of the Democracy Cube depends upon 'the context and problem in question'. There is a need to recognise that assuming a contiguous character to participatory practices may limit consideration of how diverse practices contribute to democratic goods. Further research using the Democracy Mapping could establish the use of a discontinuous mapping to different contexts, such as larger forms of municipal government, or processes of policy formation and implementation in less formalised political systems (see Smith et al, 2020).

8.3.2 Participation across the policy cycle

The Democracy Cube (2006) developed by Fung included consideration of who participates, how they communicate and make decisions, and what influence their participation has. A critical dimension omitted from this analysis was *when* in the policy cycle the citizen participates. In Chapter 3, the development of this dimension is set out, ranging from citizen influence in the design of processes, through influence over the substantive elements of policy, through to the implantation and review of that policy. The incorporation of the policy cycle within the Democracy Mapping draws attention to where citizens do, or do not, have influence. The analysis in this thesis has indicated aspects of municipal processes that, without the policy cycle dimension, would have gone unremarked (see Section 7.4). These included: first, that informal and citizen-initiated contact allows citizens to define problems, set the agenda, and dictate some of the terms of engagement, emphasising how a typical process grants citizens significant control (see Eliasoph, 2009; Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019); second, public updates on the progress of projects, both through formal meetings and public communications, provides a route for citizens to monitor policy implementation, which is linked to important democratic goods (see Cornwall, 2008, p.272; Willet and Cruxon, 2019). However, perhaps the most intriguing aspect evidenced by the consideration of the policy cycle was the role of the ILP in enabling citizen influence over process design.

The political party is apparently absent in the literature with regard to the stimulation of meta-deliberation and citizen influence over the design of processes (see Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011; Landwehr, 2015; Holdo. 2020). Narratives of what democracy should look like were present to a greater extent in the statements of IfF and R4U than political opponents and, as argued in Chapter 2, connect with their commitments to align municipal policy to citizen preferences. Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.323) argue that the elections to parish or town councils are 'a crucial way for the potential new council and the community to have a conversation'. That the content of this conversation prominently included discussions about the preferred form of democracy made this partly a meta-deliberation in the public sphere (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011; Holdo, 2020). The meta-deliberative role of ILPs is, however, dependent upon the extent to which democratic narratives are a core part of the ILP electoral platform. In particular, the managerialist conception of democracy, present in some narratives of R4U, positions citizens as the depoliticised customers of efficiently delivered services, rather than as active participants in democracy. The direct participatory conception of democracy was a prominent narrative for IfF, but it was not always explicit or present. ILPs make a broad meta-deliberative claim, and can stimulate meta-deliberative discussion, but they do not necessarily do so. More broadly, national political parties make claims to democratic renewal, influencing the salience other parties place on democratic renewal (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2002), suggesting the role of political parties in stimulating meta-deliberation should be further explored.

The inclusion of the policy cycle within the Democracy Mapping enabled the consideration of municipal processes in ways that illuminated the value of diverse kinds of processes for municipal government. Whilst forms of participation oriented towards representation and political parties link with democratic goods, forms of direct participation are also required for democratic municipal government. These forms are the focus of the next section, considering parish and town councils, and the wider role of the ILP.

8.4   ILPs and municipal government

This thesis has considered the interaction between two institutions that have been advocated as mechanisms for democratic renewal; parish and town councils, and ILPs. This section revisits key arguments over the risks and rewards in seeking democratic renewal through small-scale municipal government. The evidence and analysis presented will be drawn into this discussion, concluding with a consideration of the boundaries and possibilities of ILPs in parish and town council administration.

8.4.1   The possibility of a democratic municipal government

As discussed in Chapter 2, parish and town councils have been advocated as potential sites for citizen participation; a simple and democratic way 'to boost the capability of local places to take back control of their own destiny' (Krasniqi et al, 2021, p.3; see also NALC, 2015a; Wills, 2016; Locality, 2022). This is a scale where citizens participate more, at least if they feel political structures can have an impact on the place around them (Houwelingen, 2018; McDonnell, 2020; see also Pratchett, 2004; De Moor, 2016). However, if small-scale municipal government can have an impact, this raises 'the difficult question of what should be done when local communities act in ways which violate liberal principles' (Parvin, 2009 p.357; see also Fraser, 1996; Forst, 2001). If an ILP instituted democratic municipal government, with its democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, transparency and considered judgement, then this would institute a pluralist participatory local government that would enable local communities to 'take back control' in a way that would include all those in the locality.

ILPs make a broad commitment that they will align municipal policy to citizen preferences to a greater extent than national parties. To the extent that this is a democratic commitment, it signifies a 'move towards the citizen' (Geurtz and Van der Wijdeven, 2010, p.533; see Section 7.3.2 below), implying an orientation of municipal government to listening to, responding to, or involving, citizens. The main findings of this thesis demonstrate how localist ILPs can institute a range of participatory practices that make municipal government more democratic. However, this thesis has not demonstrated that parish and town councils could meet a standard of democratic municipal government based on minimal democratic goods. In particular, participatory practices that produced inclusiveness were not fully instituted.

The practices of citizen influence over process design, deliberation and argument and, in particular, the targeted involvement of underrepresented citizens, are all practices that have been linked with greater inclusiveness (see Fung, 2005; Owen and Smith, 2015; Lowndes and Paxton, 2018; Lafont, 2020a). With a strong narrative of inclusion, IfF engaged youth networks, removed formalities within council meetings, and undertook community work to connect with underrepresented communities. These were important practices, opening up communication for people who did not usually engage with municipal government in formal spaces. However, these were instances across some policy cycles, involving narrow groups of those underrepresented, where equitable participation remained some distance from reality. With regard to inclusiveness, Andrea Cornwall (2002b, p.7) asks:

> whether the processes or institutions created to enhance participation ... explicitly seek to disrupt the order of hierarchical institutions, creating new and different spaces in which different rules of the game offer otherwise silenced actors a chance to speak and be heard.

Such radical remaking of municipal government may require wider movements or different governments. To consider them here is to be guilty of searching for, what Barnett, Griggs and Sullivan (2020) term, the 'councils-to-come'. The critique of Barnett (2011, p.286) seems to hold, that in municipal government:

> full democratic inclusion on deliberative lines requires a level of 'empowerment' which local government is unable to deliver, because it requires the tackling of fundamental inequalities.

As noted earlier in this thesis, parish and town councils may play a part in democratic renewal, but they are by no means identical with it (see Section 2.3). Yet, to leave the possibility of democratic municipal government to the actions of national government or broader movements places a boundary around the politics of the locality that both IfF and R4U reject. If ILPs are to institute democratic municipal government, then they will have to look beyond municipal government, which is where this chapter now turns.

8.4.2 Beyond municipal policy

Discussing the role of citizen participation within the locality, Christina Lafont (2020a, p.31) argues that:

> the democratic potential of micro and local deliberative innovations very much depends on whether their general implementation would have beneficial or deleterious impacts on the ongoing process of public opinion- and will- formation in which all citizens (actively and/or passively) participate.

This is a view of democracy where popular control at a national level relies upon discussion within the informal public sphere and the slow change of citizen preferences. Participatory instruments and practices instituted by municipal government or ILPs can have no direct authority over national policy; however, these instruments and practices can stimulate discussion, activity, and argument. Small-scale municipal government can engage citizens in debate, taking advantage of the autonomy and freedom from the statutory responsibilities that push principal authorities towards depoliticised governance and the delivery of services (see Copus, Sweeting and Wingfield, 2013).

Both case study ILPs engaged in intensely political activity. IfF and Frome Town Council supported campaigns around food poverty, housing provision, wellbeing, litter, literacy, climate change, plastics and more. Participate Frome went out onto the streets and invited

comments and thoughts, stimulating the expression of preferences and aiming to re-present these back to citizens. R4U did not bound Saffron Walden Town Council to parochial concerns but sought to address climate change, biodiversity, over-development, lack of public amenities, plastic use, and more.

As Kambites (2010) found, small-scale municipal government can be constrained to the administration of dog-poo bins and car parks, parochial because to be otherwise crosses the boundaries of 'selective depoliticization' (García-Espín, 2017, p.1) that helps citizens to get along. To some extent the managerialist conceptions of R4U and the participatory conceptions of IfF aligned with de-politicisation, emphasising common solutions to common problems being delivered by the council or developed by citizens. However, whether the taxes levied from citizens by small-scale municipal government are used for wildflower planting, firework displays, or food banks, is a political decision. Alongside narratives of unity were narratives in R4U and IfF that acknowledged pluralism within the locality, and valued pluralism within the ILP. Council staff acted as democratic professionals. Councillors oriented towards citizen participation within the council and in the public sphere. Conversation included both the parochial and the political. The case studies evidenced how the local can play a role in wider public opinion.

8.5   Open questions and possible directions

This thesis was an exploratory research programme, constructing a framework to evaluate the impact of ILPs upon participatory practice in parish and town councils, a contribution to a largely unexplored aspect of political life. It is inevitable that, in answering the questions driving the research, many more questions have been raised. The discussion above has set out key themes, including some tentative areas that are signposts to further potential research. This section will briefly summarise these key areas before turning to the potential development of Democracy Mapping as an approach.

First, the trajectory of both ILPs was evidently shifting over time, with a few individuals critical to their direction and success, whilst their success altered their own political context. At the time of writing, R4U have entered their third administration of Saffron Walden Town Council, holding every seat, whilst IfF are in their fourth administration of Frome Town Council, also holding every seat. In the typology of Boogers and Voerman (2010), these are localist ILPs proper, secure in their administration of municipal government. A future study of these town councils may come to some of the same conclusions as this thesis, but may also come to different, even contradictory, conclusions. The impact of ILPs on the democratic character of municipal government over the long-term remains an open question.

Second, IfF and R4U were two localist ILPs chosen for particular qualities, but these also excluded the study of other ILPs and their impact on municipal democracy. The diversity of ILPs on the continent (see Soos, 2008; Gross and Jankowski, 2020) suggest it is unlikely that all localist ILPs will institute direct or representative participatory practices. Frome and Saffron Walden were relatively large town councils. Smaller parish and town councils have much more limited resources, fewer citizens to participate, and even less political competition. Whilst ILPs might tend to institute participatory practices aligning with democratic municipal government, there appear to be a number of possible constraints on their ability to do so, only some of which were evidenced in this thesis.

Third, some of the innovations around targeted involvement by IfF suggest under-representation in municipal government could be partly addressed by municipal action in communities and the public sphere. Combining the Democracy Mapping with a broad model exploring how municipal government can act to mobilise participation could enable a focus on both the kind of participatory practice instituted and the broader contextual and municipal actions that enabled participation. One candidate is the model of Bakker et al (2012), which explores the motivations, personal resources, social capital and efficacy of local citizens, itself expanding on the CLEAR framework of Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2006), which focuses on how municipal authorities enable citizen participation.

Fourth, the Residents Manifesto developed by R4U is an innovation that appears specific to ILPs, potentially allowing citizen influence over the agenda of a political party prior to election. However, there is very little scholarship on the formation of local party manifestos, and little understanding of the role of citizen influence over such manifestos. A broad exploration of how ILPs form their policy platforms, and the potential for crowdsourced manifestos, in particular, could usefully inform democratic practice.

Finally, on research directions, small-scale municipal councils and ILPs could play a key role in the facilitation and stimulation of political debate. Parish and town councils can raise issues that are beyond their control, allowing them to act as relatively independent critical facilitators in wider public debates. However, this thesis has not evidenced what impact such conversations had on the public sphere in the case of the IfF administration of Frome Town Council or the R4U administration of Saffron Walden Town Council. Whether parish and town councils could play an impactful role in facilitating and stimulating public debate remains an open and intriguing question.

Turning to the development of the Democracy Mapping, this involved a number of decisions about the analysis that were not straightforward and could be further developed. First, the

production of a simple visual comparison is evidently powerful as a means of illustrating differences between cases, and is part of the appeal of tools such as the Democracy Cube and Arnstein's Ladder. However, there is a risk that the visual comparative part of the analysis becomes the basis for a simplistic analysis, rather than being a tool to illustrate a complex consideration of practices of citizen participation. For the Democracy Mapping, it may be that removing the dimension endpoints - for example, 'less inclusive' to 'more inclusive' - would reduce the potential for misunderstanding dimensions as scales, rather than as sets of participatory practices that each have a distinct connection to the production of democratic goods. The visual representation ultimately needs to be driven by the needs of the analysis, not drive the analysis that occurs. For example, if an analysis of differences across the policy cycle was of particular interest then separate Democracy Mappings (without the policy cycle dimension) could be created for the policy cycle stages of: process design, substantive discussion, and policy implementation (for an example using the Democracy Cube, see Li and de Jong, 2017). Ultimately, the approach to the visualisation of analysis should be adapted to the needs of the research.

Second, the standard of Democratic Municipal Government developed in this thesis was useful in gauging whether the presence of participatory practices aligned with the production of democratic goods. However, it was less useful when presenting analysis of how participatory practices had changed due to the intervention of the ILP. In particular, it appeared important to accommodate where the increased presence of a participatory practice continued to contribute to relevant democratic goods beyond the standard of Democratic Municipal Government, for example in the development of personal and civic skills (see Geissel, 2012) or the opportunity to express preferences. In using the Democracy Mapping to explore the impact of an intervention, it would be useful to explore a visual presentation of impact that separately indicated: first, the extent a participatory practice had increased due to the intervention; and, second, whether the absolute presence of the participatory practice met the standard of Democratic Municipal Government.

Third, the participation of staff, councillors and external professionals is indicated in the Democracy Mapping; however, the impact of these participants with regard to democratic goods is only indicated in other scales, such as the presence of communicative influence. This does not, therefore, give a visual indication of how non-citizen participants might be contributing to instituting and sustaining participatory practices. An alternative approach would be to only indicate the presence of council staff and professional stakeholders where they acted as democratic professionals, and councillors where they acted to institute and facilitate participatory practices (see Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker, 2001a, 2006b; Blijleven, van Hulst, and Hendriks, 2019). This could better illustrate the impact of council

staff, councillors and external professionals with regard to the production of democratic goods.

Fourth, the decision to separate bargaining from aggregation noted how they are distinct in practice, and asserted that fair bargaining could be omitted from the Democracy Mapping as a practice (see Section 3.5). However, reflecting upon the analysis in this thesis, fair bargaining could have been reasonably indicated alongside aggregative practice, as Fung (2006) originally proposed in the Democracy Cube. The distinction between fair bargaining, unequal bargaining involving pressure, or bargaining that involves deliberation or argument, could be usefully retained.

Finally, the language of the Democracy Cube with regard to participatory practices has mostly been preserved in the Democracy Mapping, which does not necessarily translate well to broader understanding. Whilst the use of terms such as 'lay stakeholders', 'communicative influence' and 'aggregate preferences' are clearly related to academic concepts and so help communicate with an academic audience, they would not necessarily be easily grasped by an audience of lay stakeholders. In communicating findings back to councils and ILPs involved in research, phrases such as 'community leaders', 'listened to', and 'vote or add up preferences' may be easier to understand. There is a need for conceptual clarity in academic work, but with regard to evaluating citizen participation in particular, there is a need to enable a lay audience to understand and engage with these concepts.

8.6 A Council of the Citizens?

The bulk of literature about political parties and democracy is located at the scale of nations, yet this thesis has followed Grant (1971, p.212) in assuming that 'local polities may be treated as distinct entities, and that local politics may legitimately be approached as a special area of academic study'. This thesis has shown that localist ILPs can act as an intervention to change municipal government, with the commitment of ILPs to involving or responding to local citizens resulting in the institution of participatory practices aligning with democratic outcomes. In short, IfF and R4U made municipal government more democratic. IfF and R4U both sought to change the *procedures* of municipal government policy making and not just the *substance* of municipal government policy making, which was necessarily connected to their nature as *localist* ILPs in particular. Even if the change in practice was limited to an orientation towards responsiveness, this tended towards a democratic form of municipal government.

IfF and R4U were parties with different people, politics, concepts of participation and relationships to municipal government, with a particular set of relations to the wider town. The *extent* to which localist ILPs might make municipal government more democratic, therefore, depends very much upon aims, context and history. If the standard of democratic municipal government set out in this thesis might be described as "a council of the citizens, by the citizens, for the citizens", then neither case study reached that standard. What these cases did underline was the potential for a broader, deeper, citizen participation within small-scale municipal government, facilitated by a localist ILP. Wider changes to the legislation and practice of municipal government at the parish and town level might further facilitate the institution of participatory practices. If municipal government can supply sufficient resources and time, then localist ILPs may supply the political will for 'new ways of doing things' that Willet and Cruxon (2019, p.325) call for in the parish and town council.

The development of the Democracy Mapping in this thesis demonstrates that systems of municipal government may be compared to a democratic standard, providing a system level analysis whilst not losing sight of particular participatory practices. The standard of democratic municipal government developed in this thesis was tied to a particular selection of democratic goods that aligned well with the dimensions of participatory practices in the Democracy Mapping. The approach developed in this thesis offers a detailed and illuminating analytical framework for use in future research on citizen participation and municipal democracy.

This thesis contributes to the growing body of literature focusing upon the role that political parties can play in transforming democracy. IfF and R4U are parties of the locality in a way that branches of national parties can never be, with distinct narratives that have evidently resonated with many citizens in Frome and Saffron Walden. These localist ILPs appeared to attract individuals who wanted to see change, including in democratic practice, and they instituted participatory practices that made municipal government more democratic. Localist ILPs remain on the margins of English local government, dependent upon there being individuals who wish to galvanise change. However, there is no shortage of dissatisfaction with the political status quo. With localist ILPs offering potential for democratic renewal, perhaps at the scale of local politics, perhaps more widely, they will continue to be a presence in politics that deserves attention and study.

Appendices and Bibliography

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Local parties and participatory governance in English Local Councils

Hello,

You have received this information because you have been invited to take part in this programme of research. It's important you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. **Please take a few minutes to read the following information carefully.**

My name is Jason Leman. I am studying for a PhD in Politics at the University of Sheffield. For my thesis, work which counts towards my PhD, I am carrying out a programme of research. I hope the research programme can make a contribution to wider understanding and knowledge about local democracy. This study aims to explore different ways Local Councils, such as Town Councils and Parish Councils, are run in England. It is focussed on two main things. First, the impact a particular kind of local group has on the Local Councils. Second, how the Local Council involves people in discussing and solving problems. The overall study is looking at three Local Councils across the UK, including a pilot study.

The study is being carried out as part fulfilling a PhD in politics, scheduled to complete in Autumn 2020. I may also seek to publish articles and similar based on this research.

Any information that you give as part of the study will be treated confidentially. Information identifying individuals will be removed from any interview transcripts or observations. This anonymized data may be kept for the purposes of future research into views on political groups and democracy for a period of up to five years after the completion of this study.

If you have concerns at any point during the research that you do not wish to raise with me, then please contact Dr Felicity Matthews at the University of Sheffield at f.m.matthews@sheffield.ac.uk or on   . This research programme has been reviewed by the ethics committee at the University of Sheffield and has been given their permission to proceed.

You can decline to take part in the study at any time, or request that any information you have given is deleted.

Thank you very much for reading. Please get in touch if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Contact me, Jason Leman, at jcleman1@sheffield.ac.uk or on   .

Appendix B: Interviewee Consent Form

Local parties and participatory governance in English Local Councils

Below are some questions that ask for your consent before continuing the interview. If you do not understand any of these questions then please ask. If you do not wish to initial any of the statements then please say. It's fine to stop the interview if you do not want to continue.

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study dated January 2018 and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes from this interview in publications. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project

Name of participant	Date	Signature

Name of lead researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix C: Example Interview questions and prompts

Q1.	Thinking about before you joined Frome Town Council	Reason for asking
a)	Why did you decide to become a Councillor? What were your motivations?	Establishing the extent to which citizen participation or other factors motivated councillors, and the extent to which knowledge of participation may have been brought from other areas
b)	Do you remember the first meeting you went to as a Town councillor? How did that feel?	
c)	Do you think you have developed in your skills and knowledge? Did you feel there was sufficient induction / support at the beginning?	
d)	Was there experience you were able to bring from your work or other activity that has been useful in being a Town councillor?	
Q2.	Thinking of what Frome Town Council does as a body	
a)	What can a Town council do that another organisation can't? Why?	Open questions exploring perceptions of the town council and the extent to which citizen participation was viewed as part of the conception of what a Town council and councillor could and should do
b)	Are there issues the town council couldn't, or shouldn't, do anything about?	
c)	Has the group had the expertise needed to make the most of running a Town council?	
f)	What thing are you most proud of doing in your first term? How did that happen?	
h)	What for you is the role of a councillor? What are they for?	
Q3.	Thinking about the involvement of local people in what the town council does	
a)	What's your opinion of the Forums and that format of participation?	Explicit questions around perceptions of processes of citizen participation and policy formation / implementation
b)	What's the purpose of participation? What decisions should local people be involved in?	
c)	Does the town council manage to give a voice to people who would not normally get involved in meetings etc? If not, could it? If so, how?	
d)	Would/could you make currently internal IfF discussions on issues public?	
e)	How are tensions between the town and the town council resolved?	
Q4.	Thinking of what Frome Town Council has done to solve problems	
a)	Where does the expertise come from to solve problems?	Exploring the role of elites and other organisations, exploring implementation and review
b)	How well does the TC work with Mendip District Council? Somerset County Council?	
c)	How important is it for the TC to work with other local organisations in solving problems?	
d)	Does the town council have a way of learning from successes or failures?	
Q4.	Looking to the future, is there anything you would change about Local Councils or IfF with regard to how issues are raised or solved, and how local people are involved?	Open positive question exploring viewpoints, touching on orientation towards participation

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