

DEMOS

**BEYOND THE
USUAL SUSPECTS**
A NEW MODEL
FOR MP-CITIZEN
ENGAGEMENT

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	PAGE 4
FOREWORD	PAGE 6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	PAGE 8
INTRODUCTION	PAGE 12
CONSTITUENCY PROFILES	PAGE 16
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	PAGE 20
PRINCIPLE 1: BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS	PAGE 22
PRINCIPLE 2: PARTICIPATORY	PAGE 31
PRINCIPLE 3: BUILDING RECIPROCITY	PAGE 36
PRINCIPLE 4: ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY	PAGE 41
PRINCIPLE 5: BEING PRAGMATIC	PAGE 50
IMPACT ON TRUST	PAGE 52
MP PERSPECTIVES	PAGE 62
CONCLUSION	PAGE 66
APPENDICES	PAGE 72

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos is the UK's leading cross-party think tank producing research and policies that have been adopted by successive governments for more than 30 years. Demos' mission is an upgraded democracy, with a new deal to mend the broken relationships between the state, institutions, and citizens.

Britain is living through a democratic emergency: the bonds between state and citizen, between institutions and the public, and between citizens themselves, are fraying. This feeds a doom loop, in which mistrust breeds disengagement, this lack of legitimacy weakens government's ability to deliver, and that failure to deliver deepens mistrust further still. Breaking this cycle demands practical, deliverable policy solutions capable of repairing these frayed relationships - solutions that together add up to a new deal for how democracy works.

This report turns a lens on one specific and critical relationship in the democratic system: the one between MPs and the constituents they represent.

Few relationships expose the problems inherent in the current democratic system as clearly as this one. The usual channels for reaching an MP - a surgery, a coffee morning, an email - are used by a narrow demographic and leave most constituents unheard. For most people in any constituency, getting in touch with their MP has simply never occurred to them or has been rejected as a course of action - they have no intrinsic motivation to reach out. Yet this is also a relationship with real potential: the constituency offers a human scale touchpoint at which trust can plausibly be rebuilt. Following Demos' earlier paper, '*A two-way street: The decline of the MP-Constituent relationship - and how to fix it*', which set out the scale of the problem, this report puts a proposed solution into practice. This project piloted and evaluated a new model of MP-Constituent engagement against measures of trust-building. The experiment is small scale but the principles and mechanisms tested hold a promise of a new deal between MPs and the people they serve. Next, Demos is trialling the approach on the subject of immigration with a Labour and Conservative MP.

This work sits within Demos' **Everyday Democracy** pillar, which is about putting participation and deliberation back at the heart of political life, building civic power and habits, and tackling polarisation.

FOREWORD

BY DAN ALDRIDGE MP AND
SAMANTHA NIBLETT MP



Most weeks, residents contacting an MP's are asking for one of two things: an answer, or an advocate.

It might be an email about a planning objection, their benefits appeal or to report a pothole outside their house.

That is real work, which matters to people and it is something our incredible teams work hard to get results on. The role of an MP has however, changed significantly over recent years; where vital public services have struggled to cope with ever decreasing budgets and growing need, especially in Local Government, casework has grown significantly.

When services have failed, when the computer-says-no, we are their point of last resort when things fall through the cracks. It is a privilege, to be able to make real difference to people when they are struggling, but it rarely leaves room for a conversation that runs the other way; where a constituent isn't asking us to fix something but sitting down to work out with us what's actually fixable, and what isn't. To have some of the bigger conversations about why things might be as they are and what we all can do to make a difference. Our democracy isn't here just to serve us, indeed it will not survive if we don't rediscover our collective agency and participation in it. As MPs, we can only do our jobs effectively if we have active and engaged constituents.

That is what this pilot helped us with, it helped us look again, with external expertise and a structure to follow to help us shape a better, more productive relationship with the people we represent.

In Weston, the conversation started, as it often does, with a conversation about our local A&E. Ours has run daytime-only for nearly a decade, despite Weston soon projected to overtake the city of Bath in population, it has, frustratingly, not kept up with Bath's infrastructure. Our A&E comes up in almost every conversation on the doorstep, in the café, at the school gate. It's one of the town's loudest grievances, and understandably so. It points to something that was taken away and the unfairness of places that have, and those that have not. Our participants raised it in the first session with real, justified anger. What was different this time was what happened next: we could explain, honestly, what levers an MP does and doesn't have over an NHS trust's operating hours, that beyond the ease of simply calling for the return of the 24 hour A&E, what did the reality of an effective campaign to reopen it might look like, and also, big questions like, if we did have the money to do it, would this be where we put the investment, is it the priority, or is radiotherapy or indeed maternity services something we might want to see prioritised first.

Nobody stopped caring about the A&E. But something shifted. Instead of that anger sitting there unaddressed, or being deflected with a promise we couldn't keep, participants started asking a different question: given everything, what could we move together? By session two, the group had turned its attention to the high street, the empty shops, the litter, the sense that the town centre had stopped being somewhere you'd choose to spend an evening or even an afternoon. That is something we can build an Action Plan around, with local businesses, the council and residents all pulling in the same direction. It's not a smaller ambition. It's a shared one that constituents felt they had more agency and influence over.

Samantha saw the same pattern play out in South Derbyshire, from a different starting point. Traffic came up constantly, new estates, no buses, roads that can't cope. Entirely understandable, and largely out of an MP's hands in the short term. But as the sessions went on, residents kept circling back to something quieter: they didn't feel like they knew their neighbours any more, and new housing had gone up faster than any sense of community around it. That's not a problem you solve with a planning intervention, but it is one we could work on together, and by the third session, that had become the shared priority, not the ring road.

What made this possible was being able to talk as equals, in both directions. We were candid about the limits of the job, something the evaluation bears out: before the sessions, only 37% said they understood what their MP actually does; by the end, that had risen to 64%. And in return, we got a kind of honesty we don't often hear in a surgery: not just what people were angry about, but what they'd noticed, cared about and wanted to build. Trust followed. 94% of our participants ended up agreeing that we have good intentions, up from 51% at the start, a bigger jump than anything the control group saw over the same period.

We didn't lose the hot-button issues, and we won't stop working on them. But this process showed us something we hadn't fully appreciated: given the time, the facts, and a genuine seat at the table, people don't just vent at their MP, they reason with them. That is a much better foundation for democracy than the one we started with.

Dan Aldridge MP

Samantha Niblett MP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trust between citizens and their elected representatives is eroding. Just 4% of the public believe politicians act in the country's best interests.¹ As that trust falls, so does people's willingness to engage constructively with politics at all. Demos' mission is to upgrade democracy by rebuilding the relationships throughout the system and, in a system of representative democracy, arguably none of those relationships is more important than that between an MP and their constituents.

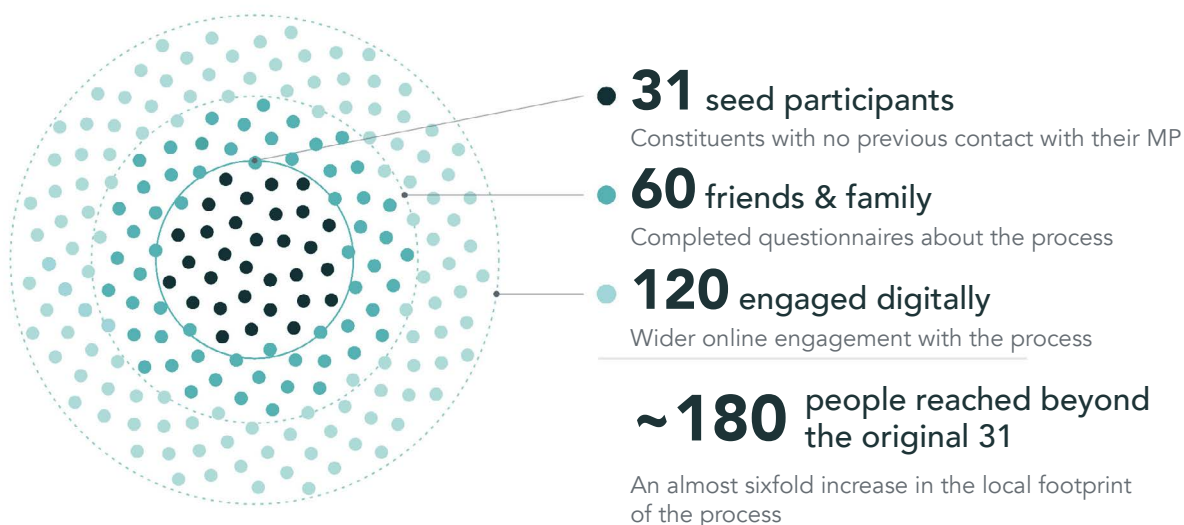
This report evaluates a new model of MP-constituent engagement, designed and facilitated by Demos and piloted in two constituencies - South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare. The model brought in over 30 'seed' participants - constituents who had never previously had contact with their MP. Across three structured sessions, participants worked alongside their MP to identify a local issue and co-create an Action Plan to address it. The model was built around five design principles: reaching beyond the usual suspects, being participatory, building reciprocity, ensuring accountability, and being pragmatic enough for MPs' offices to deliver. This evaluation tests how well the model lived up to each of these principles, and, crucially, what impact it had on participants' trust in their MP and in democracy more broadly.

The results are encouraging. The model successfully recruited a politically disengaged group and kept the majority engaged throughout, with an 81% attendance rate across all three sessions. It also triggered a genuine ripple effect: from a starting sample of 31, this evaluation conservatively estimates the process reached around 180 people in total, once friends, family and wider digital engagement are included. That's an almost sixfold increase in the local footprint.

¹ <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/52925-do-britons-think-politicians-are-out-for-themselves>

FIGURE 1 THE RIPPLE EFFECT

From 31 participants, the process reached around 180 more people in South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare



Conservative estimate. Source: Demos evaluation of the MP-constituent engagement pilot.

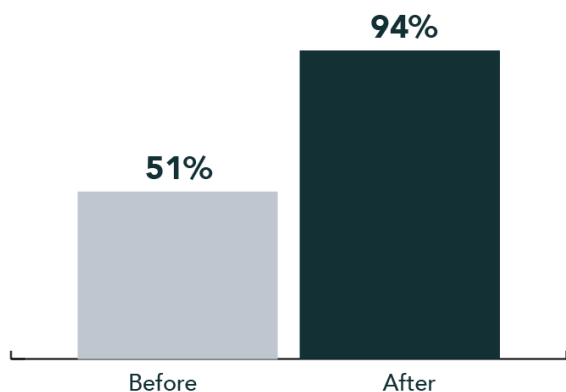
The impact on trust was substantial and the control data shows that it was participation in the model that drove that difference. Participants became markedly more trusting of their MP - after the sessions, 94% agreed that their MP has good intentions, up from 51% prior to taking part. They also became less distrustful - for example, the proportion who disagreed that their MP 'usually ignores my community' rose by 49 percentage points, against just 10 points in a matched control group. These gains extended, more modestly, to participants' friends and family, and most were still clearly visible three months later, though some had softened by the follow-up survey - a reminder that sustaining trust requires ongoing engagement, not a single intervention.

FIGURE 2 TAKING PART BUILT TRUST IN MPS

Change in participants' views of their MP, compared with a matched control group

MORE TRUSTING

"My MP had good intentions" - % of participants agreeing



Beyond the room

Gains extended, more modestly, to participants' friends and family

LESS DISTRUSTFUL

Rise in share disagreeing that their MP "usually ignores my community" (percentage points)



A gap of 39 points - evidence that taking part, not wider trends, drove the change

Three months on

Most gains still clearly visible, though some had softened - trust needs ongoing engagement

The model performed less well against two of its five principles. Accountability suffered once the formal sessions ended: momentum was lost in the handover to a WhatsApp group intended to keep participants updated on progress against the Action Plan, weakening the sense that their input had led to action. And while Demos covered the direct costs of the pilots, the model still asked a good deal of MP office staff time - time that competes directly with urgent casework - raising real questions about how deliverable it would be without additional support.

The reflections from the two participating MPs reinforce and extend these findings. National distrust in politics was seen as a persistent, corrosive sense of powerlessness amongst their constituents. So they found real value in bringing that abstract problem down to earth - structured conversations about concrete problems in the local area and a deliverable Action Plan, co-created with a small group of residents. They contrasted the model sharply with their existing channels of engagement - largely one-directional broadcast and digital contact - and saw its two-way, reciprocal structure as central to why it worked. Structured, in-person deliberation, in their experience, also tends to surface common ground rather than division, in contrast to the more adversarial tone of debate online or in the media.

"We can get lost in a kind of existential dread about the future of democracy... but [this was about] actually bringing it back down to what you can control and what you can deliver."

— Participating MP

The main challenge was considered to be a resourcing one and how to achieve impact at scale. The capacity of the MP's office to run this kind of engagement was linked to a wider structural problem - the erosion of local government - which they said has pushed a large share of casework onto MPs' offices. Despite these constraints, one MP was keen to repeat the process, with ideas for a more targeted, hyperlocal iteration in future.

The key learnings about what works and what doesn't in running this type of process are as follows:

- **Payment to participants can buy insight and local intelligence, but it isn't a route to genuine, long-term engagement.** It's effective for drawing in a disengaged group for something short, like a one-off focus group, and best used to remove barriers to taking part - covering childcare or transport - rather than as the incentive itself. What sustains people beyond that first session is a genuine conversation about an issue they care about.
- **The model works best when it focuses on constituents with latent potential, rather than trying to reach everyone.** Some drop-off and self-selection turned out to be a feature, not a flaw - it's worth over-recruiting and expecting to top up numbers along the way. Low-cost recruitment through the MP's own office worked as well as paying professional recruiters.

- **This approach is better suited to surfacing broad issues that might otherwise go unnoticed than to resolving the “hot-button” issues MPs already know about.** It excels at finding consensus across a whole constituency; a more targeted version, run with a specific group affected by a specific issue, could complement it.
- **Making sessions feel special and enjoyable is what keeps people coming back.** An in-person session, genuine access to the MP, and the chance to meet other people from the local area all helped build the rapport and trust the model depends on.
- **Keep ongoing communication with participants simple.** A dedicated WhatsApp group proved hard for staff to sustain and saw low take-up. Pointing people to existing public channels is likely to work better.

In order to achieve the next level of scale and ambition, there are three policy recommendations made in this report:

- **A national audit and review of the MP role in the 21st century**, led by the House of Commons - including a national citizens’ jury on what the role should cover and where community-focussed work fits in it, and a targeted audit of the casework pressures constraining MPs’ offices, including the growing impact of AI on the volume and quality of correspondence they receive.
- **A multi-year Democratic Innovation Fund**, administered by IPSA and championed politically by No.10 North, open to all MPs’ offices and structured as successive rounds of funded piloting, with independent evaluation built in from the start to measure impact and guide how the fund grows.
- **Endorsement and practical support for MPs who want to run these processes**, with formal backing from the House of Commons, clear funding guidance from IPSA and a package of training and materials.

INTRODUCTION



What's the point of speaking to [an MP]? They're going to do what they and their party want anyway."

- Participant in Session 1



Across the country, people are losing faith in their elected representatives. Just 4% of the population think politicians do what is best for the country.² As confidence falls, frustration grows. People become less willing to compromise, less ready to accept political trade-offs or even constructively engage with those who hold different views. As trust between citizen and government erodes, the democratic contract itself begins to fray, leaving democracy itself on fragile foundations. Rebuilding that trust is one of the defining challenges of the current time. It must begin by strengthening the relationship between citizens and their representatives. It must start by improving communication between constituents and MPs, and demonstrating that people's concerns are heard and acted upon. As this report will illustrate, finding a way to do just that offers significant promise.

Demos has piloted a new model of MP-constituent engagement to confront this challenge. In two constituencies, with over 30 participants, Demos has launched a new way for MPs to connect with their broader electorate to overcome the critical failures in the MP and constituent relationship identified in the previous paper '[A two-way street: The decline of the MP-constituent relationship - and how to fix it.](#)' Demos' research found that current engagement practices are not meeting their full potential, leaving many constituents feeling unheard and contributing to growing distrust and frustration. In response to these findings, this project has designed and trialled a new model of MP-constituent engagement. Rather than replacing existing approaches, this model intends to complement them, by addressing the gaps they leave behind.

Developing this model is a crucial step towards building a stronger, more resilient MP-constituent relationship - one that better supports and enriches the democratic process. This evaluation is important because the data and evidence must show there is promise in a new approach. The evaluation in this report proves that a model is able to make the case that there is a different way of doing things at the constituency level - that the MP/constituent relationship can be formed around joint concerns.

2 <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/52925-do-britons-think-politicians-are-out-for-themselves>

This report evaluates the efficacy of this model, drawing on the two pilots in South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare. This is done by evaluating the model against each of the five principles it was designed to follow and understanding the impact that the model had on view on trust.

INTRODUCING THE MP-CITIZEN CONVERSATION MODEL

This model was designed around five core principles, principles that emerged from the discussions with constituents, MPs and their staff last year. These principles were considered to be the most critical for ensuring the model would building a trusting relationship between the MP and the constituents that were engaged through it:

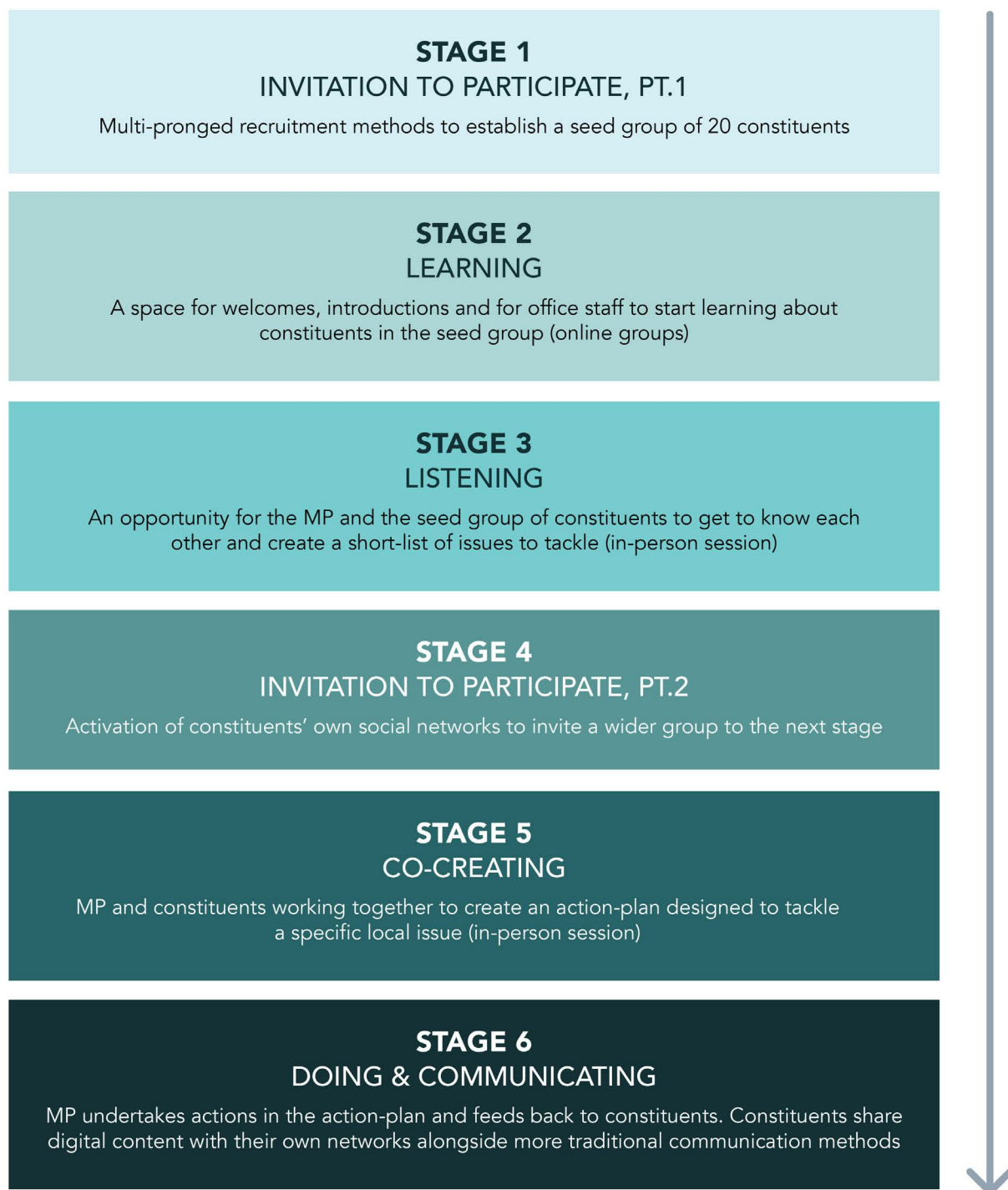
The principles

1. **Beyond the usual suspects:** Giving a voice to the unheard majority, not just amplifying those who are already being heard.
2. **Participatory:** Giving constituents the time and space to have meaningful and collaborative interactions with their MP.
3. **Reciprocal:** Both MPs and constituents have a role to play in the model; the relationship can't be one-sided.
4. **Accountable:** A feedback loop ensures that the MP reports back on actions they have taken as a result of engagement.
5. **Pragmatic:** Takes into account practical barriers to engagement facing both the MPs/ staff and constituents.



The engagement model consisted of six sequential stages, as seen in Figure 1. The model recruits a seed group of 20 constituents who, among other criteria, have never engaged with their MP before. They take part in three workshop-style sessions with their MP's staff and MP. At the end of the model, participants work with their MP to create an action plan. These are a set of steps that the MP and constituents take to tackle the issue they chose at the beginning. These action statements are then tested at scale with the wider constituency with the most popular forming the final action plan that the MP and seed group of constituents take away.

FIGURE 1
ENGAGEMENT MODEL



The first pilot programme, titled the South Derbyshire MP Big Chat, took place in South Derbyshire between October 2025 and January 2026. The second, named Weston's Big Conversation, then took place in Weston-super-Mare from December 2025 to February 2026.

RECRUITMENT FOR THE MODEL

The five principles structure the design of the engagement model. At its core, the model must go beyond those who typically engage with their MPs already. This is achieved through the model's recruitment.

The model required recruitment of two groups. Recruitment was pursued through different channels.

1. The Seed Group

The first stream of recruitment was for 20 members for the seed group in each constituency. These are the participants taking part in the three core sessions. Recruitment was split into two strands, with both strands using the same criteria to select 10 participants each.

The first strand was done through a national market research recruiter. The objective of this was to outsource recruitment to professional agencies experienced in finding, screening and securing research participants so as to lighten the load for constituency staff. Recruiters were selected solely on their capacity for the job.

The second strand of recruitment was done through the MP's constituency office. They used: letters in (bottom 5) low voter turnout areas, social media posts on Facebook and LinkedIn,^{3,4} posts in online neighbourhood groups, verbal/ digital invitations from community organisations, leaflets in third spaces. In one instance, MP Dan Aldridge wrote about the sessions in a local newspaper.⁵ Participants were asked to complete a simple registration of interest.

The most successful of these were letters - accounting for 80% of constituency recruited participants in South Derbyshire and 70% in Weston-super-Mare. In both constituencies, letters were sent across random houses in the bottom five wards with the lowest voter turnout during the 2024 general election. Each registrant was then emailed a link to complete a Google Forms link asking them questions to assess their eligibility (see [Appendix 1](#) for a copy of the survey).

2. Friends and family

The second stream of recruitment was for the friends and family of the seed group. The seed group were asked to involve their friends and family in different ways throughout the process. After the first session, participants were asked to share a survey with their friends and family to benchmark their starting points on trust and participation (see evaluation surveys). The seed group were also asked to continuously engage with their friends and family to discuss local issues, get their insights and share across the sessions. Finally, they were asked to bring friends and family to the final session.

CHOOSING THE PILOT CONSTITUENCIES

The two pilots constituencies, South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare, were selected on the basis of the MPs and offices who were most likely to commit to the process. A variety of constituencies were approached across the country, with MPs from different parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat). Constituencies approached as part of this research were selected on the basis of the MP's interest in participatory policy-making, voter turnout, and levels of trust in the constituency.

The MPs for South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare remained the most engaged throughout the process, which promised longer-term engagement and investment in the pilots.

3 Samantha Niblett's post on LinkedIn inviting constituents to get involved can be found here: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/samantha-niblett-mp-a2a78213_southderbyshire-wenotme-southderbyshirempbigchat-activity-7397958818468614145--ccM/

4 Dan Aldridge's post on Facebook inviting constituents to get involved can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/DanielAldridgeMP/photos/weston-chosen-by-leading-education-charity-demos-to-pilot-its-new-project-to-imp/122221872812126177/>

5 Dan Aldridge's news article can be found here: <https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/25650029.dan-aldridge-mp-democracy-works-stay-it/>

CONSTITUENCY PROFILES

Despite their different geographies - one inland and rural, one coastal - South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare share a number of structural similarities that shaped how residents engaged with this process.

Both are mid-sized constituencies of around 100,000 people with an older age profile: residents aged 65 and over make up 21% of the population in each, above the national average of 19%, while 18–24 year-olds are underrepresented in both (7%, against a national average of 8%). Both are also less ethnically diverse than their surrounding region and the country as a whole, with white residents accounting for 93% of the population in South Derbyshire and 95% in Weston-super-Mare, compared with 83% across the UK.

Politically, both seats swung to Labour for the first time in 2024 by almost identical margins - Samantha Niblett in South Derbyshire (38.8%) and Dan Aldridge in Weston-super-Mare (38.5%) - ending long periods of Conservative representation. In both cases, current projections point to growing support for Reform UK ahead of the next general election, and both councils face local elections on the same cycle in May 2027. Turnout at the 2024 general election was identical in both seats, at 59.4%, and in both, turnout tracked affluence: consistently higher in wealthier wards and considerably lower in more deprived ones.

These similarities also showed up in what residents told us. In both places, participants described a strong sense of local pride and friendliness, but paired this with concern that housing growth was outpacing infrastructure - particularly roads and public transport - and with frustration at how difficult it had become to get around:

"I live on a new estate where predominantly 1,400 new-build houses fall into South Derbyshire... there is no bus coming into our estate to take us to Swadlincote."

- Participant, South Derbyshire, Session One

"There's more and more housing, but the roads and services just can't cope with it."

- Participant, Weston-super-Mare, Session One

Healthcare access was raised unprompted in both locations - GP appointments and rehabilitation services in South Derbyshire, NHS dentistry and the absence of a 24-hour A&E in Weston-super-Mare - and in both, participants' underlying tone was one of cautious optimism rather than resignation: a sense that these were places worth investing in, and that a process like this could help bring people together.

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

South Derbyshire is a predominantly rural constituency in the East Midlands, south of Derby, with Swadlincote as its main settlement and employment centre. It is one of the fastest-growing areas in England - the population is projected to exceed 132,000 by 2039 - and ranked fifth nationally for new housebuilding, with 900 homes completed in 2024–25 alone.

Its economy is anchored by manufacturing, led by Toyota's Burnaston plant: manufacturing accounts for 17.9% of local jobs, more than double the national average (7.3%). South Derbyshire is also among the top 5% most productive local authorities in the UK, with output per hour 37.2% above the national average - placing it in a small club of high-productivity areas otherwise concentrated in London and the South East.

South Derbyshire District Council has been Labour-run since 2023 and Labour-controlled for most of the period since 1974, with only a Conservative interlude from 2007–2020.

What residents told us

Participants were proud of the area's friendliness, particularly newer residents settling in for the first time:

"I really liked the area. It was a bit of a culture shock really, coming into living around so many people that were so welcoming and open to talk."

- Participant, Session One

At the same time, several felt that community cohesion was quietly eroding - pointing, for example, to a rising number of "don't knock without an appointment" stickers in windows as a small but telling sign of communities becoming more closed off. Concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour surfaced too, often framed as tension between younger and older residents - notable because it runs counter to the data: South Derbyshire's recorded crime rate (52.2 per 1,000) is well below both the regional (77.3) and national (83.5–84.8) averages, making it one of the safest places in the county.

Congestion was a recurring frustration, especially around Woodville and Swadlincote:

"Sometimes I've left the house and tried to get to the shops, which were about 10 minutes down the road, and I ended up coming back because it's just car, car, and just stuck in it."

- Participant, Session One

Underneath these frustrations, though, participants consistently described a sense that South Derbyshire has strong community foundations - they simply weren't sure how to plug into them:

"There's a lot of people who want to help... but they don't know how to."

- Participant, Session One

WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Weston-super-Mare is a mixed rural–urban seaside constituency in the South West, south-west of Bristol, and one of Britain's best-known Victorian resort towns. Like many UK seaside towns, it has seen a long decline in traditional domestic tourism since the 1970s - though the visitor economy still accounts for 16.2% of local jobs. Health and social care is now the town's largest employer (19.4% of jobs), and the area has growing strength in advanced manufacturing, with Weston College recently designated a Technical Excellence College in the field.

The town also carries significant deprivation, concentrated in the town centre and southern estates such as Bournville, which has been selected for Phase 2 of the Pride in Place programme (£20m over 10 years for regeneration). Youth unemployment-related benefit claims are rising faster than the national average (11% vs 9%), and overall crime is genuinely high - 47–71% above regional and national averages, unlike South Derbyshire's perception–data gap.

North Somerset Council, historically Conservative, has been under no overall control since 2019; since 2023 it has been run by a cross-party administration led by Liberal Democrat Mike Bell.

What residents told us

Weston's creative scene - street art initiatives like Weston Walls - was a genuine point of pride, seen as evidence the town is becoming more vibrant:

"Weston feels friendly, where everyone knows each other... I can't imagine living anywhere else."

- Participant, Session One

"Weston is friendly and feels safer than London."

- Participant, Session One

But the decline of the high street loomed large — expensive parking, empty shops, visible homelessness and anti-social behaviour, with residents comparing the town unfavourably to out-of-town retail parks and other seaside towns offering free parking. Congestion was also a live issue, compounded by the fact that only two main roads connect the town to the outside world — prompting some to call for a second M5 junction:

"A 10-minute journey can take 30 minutes."

- Participant, Session One

Participants also wanted to see more recreational facilities and activities for young people. As in South Derbyshire, the overall tone was affectionate rather than despairing - a shared desire to see Weston prosper and to help it move beyond its identity as a fading holiday town.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of Demos' pilot consisted of 6 activities:

1. **Benchmarking pre-survey:** This was shared with the seed group and control group before the three sessions.⁶ All participants were then asked to share the pre-survey with their friends and family.
2. **Post-session 2 survey:** Participants were given a short survey to evaluate their experience of the sessions.
3. **Post-session 3 survey:** The post-session 3 survey was shared with the seed group and control group. Friends and family present in the third session of both pilots were also asked to complete the survey.
4. **Participant interviews:** Demos conducted interviews with 8 participants, 3 friends and family.
5. **MP/ Office staff interviews:** Demos conducted interviews with the MPs from both pilot constituencies as well as their constituency staff.
6. **Follow-up survey:** This asked the same questions as the benchmarking and post-session 3 survey in order to capture the longer term impact of engagement with the model.

⁶ A total of 35 participants completed the pre-survey for Activity 1. Of these, 31 participants went on to attend the first session. An additional 4 participants completed the pre-survey but did not attend the session; their pre-survey responses have still been included in the Survey 1 evaluation dataset. Therefore, references to Survey 1 data are based on n=35.

The design of the surveys was drawn from the conceptual framework of trust employed by the University of Southampton for their project on 'Trust and Trustworthiness in National and Global Governance'.⁷ The framework treats trust as a family of three concepts (trust, mistrust and distrust) each with distinct implications. For each there was an agree to disagree scale, with 'strongly agree/disagree, agree/disagree, neither agree/disagree and a don't know option. The table below lists out the statements that were tested:

TABLE 1
CATEGORIES OF TRUST AND THEIR CORRESPONDING STATEMENTS

TRUST The objective was to see an increase in the levels of agreement with these statements	I know what my MP does
	My MP has good intentions
	My MP represents the interests of my community
	My MP listens to constituents and makes decisions based on what they say
	The UK is a well-functioning democracy
	Most people in my local area can be trusted
	I can influence decisions affecting my local area
MISTRUST The objective was to see a decrease in the levels of agreement with this statement	I am unsure whether to believe my MP
DISTRUST The objective was to see a decrease in the levels of agreement with these statements	My MP usually ignores my community
	My MP doesn't respect people like me
	My MP is often incompetent

In addition to questions testing for each of these concepts, there were also questions to test the impact the model has on an individual's interest in their local community and likelihood to vote.⁸

⁷ <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES/S009809/1#/tabOverview>

⁸ A copy of the surveys used can be found in Appendix 2

PRINCIPLE 1

BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

As identified in Demos' first paper,⁹ the 'usual suspects' are definitionally people who have intrinsic motivations to proactively seek out and make contact with their MP. Therefore, the principle of 'going beyond' this group, is about bringing new constituents into contact with their MP; constituents who have no prior relationship with the MP, nor would be likely to initiate one. They are people for whom the standard routes of engaging with their MP - attending a surgery, writing an email or going to a coffee morning - have not been sufficient to prompt, encourage or facilitate contact.

The one thing, therefore, that was most important for all the participants of this project to have in common, was that they had *never had any direct or personal contact with their MP*. This simple criterion cast the net wide - those who fall into this group would be in the vast majority in any constituency and would encompass a wide range of demographics and political views. The intention was to keep the group as inclusive as possible in this regard - the problem of political disengagement isn't just an issue at the fringes of the electorate, it is now a mainstream problem. For that reason the recruitment didn't focus nor exclude non-voters..

The research overlaid some additional behavioural requirements to the definition, to strengthen the focus on 'politically disengaged' constituents. These were, to have never:

- Taken part in a consultation
- Attended a local council meeting
- Had any contact with local councillors
- Taken up any political leadership position as either an elected representative or protest/campaign organiser

⁹ <https://demos.co.uk/research/a-two-way-street-the-decline-of-the-mp-constituent-relationship-and-how-to-fix-it/>

In addition to those core behavioural requirements, one attitudinal criteria was included to the participant profile to ensure that there was some headroom to grow their trust. All had to *disagree* with the statement 'I trust my MPs to make decisions in the best interests of their constituents'. And to ensure some demographic diversity, the following quotas were included in the sample:

- Min. 2 individuals in the DE socioeconomic grade
- Min. 1 individual from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background
- Min. 1 individual under the age of 25

DESIGN FEATURES OF THE MODEL TO ENSURE THE PROJECT WENT 'BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS'

In order to engage a politically disengaged group with the model, the following actions were taken:

1. Deployment of recruitment approaches that proactively sought out and screened participants (rather than relying on self-selection)
2. Payment of an incentive for initial attendance
3. Asking participants to bring their friends and family into the process
4. Running a Polis exercise to draw in people from the wider community into the process

Recruitment

To recruit people 'beyond the usual suspects' constituents were invited to take part in a 'Big Chat' or 'Big Conversation' relating to their local area. The title of the conversations were decided by the MPs, ensuring it felt natural to them. The framing was intentionally community focussed rather than positioned as a political discussion. The language used was informal and intended to make the process sound inclusive and open. It was also explicitly labelled as a South Derbyshire or Weston-super-Mare series of events - which was to help draw people in with an interest in their local area.

Using this wording, the project trialled two approaches to recruitment to test which would be more successful at finding participants who met the profile:



APPROACH 1

MARKET RESEARCH RECRUITMENT

Using local recruiters who were paid a per head fee to source participants to match the screening criteria. They used a range of standard recruitment practices to source participants - **database screening, social media posts and snowballing methods** (which is when recruiters ask an existing contact if they know anyone within their network who meets the criteria).



APPROACH 2

MP OFFICE OUTREACH

Using existing media and channels with a tailored approach to draw in a pool of potential candidates who were then taken through a screening process. Facebook was used in both locations, where an **invitation was posted from the MPs account** on the main timeline and posted within specific community groups as well. **Direct mailouts** were also made, targeting wards with low voter turnout. In total over 500 letters were delivered across the two constituencies. Community organisations were also used to help spread the word, allowing the MPs office to leave **leaflets** in their spaces or emailing their members with the invitation. In Weston, a **local newspaper** ran an article quoting the MP which explained the purpose of the events and included instructions on how to get involved.

Incentivisation

In order to draw in those 'beyond the usual suspects' the model offered an extrinsic motivation for participants - in the form of a £90 payment - that was intended to incentivise attendance at the first two sessions and survey completion. This amount is considered broadly in line with market industry levels of remuneration, although market research recruiters told us it was on the low side. The aim of the model was to build sufficient intrinsic motivation in the early stages of engagement (i.e. interest and faith in the process) to prompt attendance at the third session.

Extending the circle

The model is designed to trigger a ripple effect of participation. At various points, participants were asked to reach out to friends and family members and invite them into the process. The broad expectation was that given their own attitudes towards politics, those in their social circle would have similar views and experiences.

Participants were asked to share a short questionnaire after the first meeting, the purpose of which was to crowdsource ideas for 'local issues' that the Action Plan could focus on. And, most importantly, were asked to bring people with them along to the final session.¹⁰

¹⁰ Please see the Appendix for a copy of the text used to ask participants to invite friends and family.

Digital engagement open to all

The digital engagement stage of the model sought to extend participation beyond those directly involved in the workshops using Polis - an interactive voting platform. It was deployed to test and prioritise the action statements developed during the co-creation sessions. Constituents could engage with the proposed action statements by voting "agree" or "disagree" on statements, as well as submitting new statements of their own. The highest-supported statements subsequently formed the basis of each constituency's final Action Plan.

The link to take part was circulated amongst the seed participants with an instruction to share it with friends and family. It was also widely circulated via the MP office, using typical channels of public communication - Facebook, LinkedIn and mailing lists - in order to reach even further out into the constituency.

FIGURE 3

SCREENSHOT OF DAN ALDRIDGE MP'S INSTAGRAM POST¹¹



11 https://www.instagram.com/p/DVMK_MdEcc5/

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

This principle is evaluated on the basis of on three criteria:

- Firstly, to what extent did the recruitment methods work to find people 'beyond the usual suspects'.
- Second, to what extent did the model keep such participants engaged i.e. was the model able to generate intrinsic motivation to attend sessions?
- Finally, to what extent would the model draw an even wider group of people 'beyond the usual suspects' into the process.

The evaluation of this principle covers these three measures.

31 seed participants were successfully recruited into the process who had never contacted their MP before

The overall target across the two constituencies was 40 people - over a 4 week period in each location a total of 35 people signed up to take part, which dropped to 31 by the time of the first session. At first measure, the two recruitment approaches used were neck and neck: market research recruiters found 16 of 20 participants and the MP office outreach brought in 15 of 20.

MP office outreach was relatively low lift for staffers, who used existing channels and templated invitations to reach out. The response rate was encouraging - across the two constituencies 147 replies were received via this route. Responses from young people and people from an ethnic minority were also good - 11 were under-30 and 10 people had an ethnic minority background. Where this approach was less strong was in reaching the group of 'un-engaged' constituents, because it still relied heavily on a self-selection bias i.e. those people most likely to respond were more likely to have previously been in touch with their MP. So, of the 147 only 23 were considered eligible after screening.¹² Specifically, of those in the under-30s pool only 1 person passed through the screening and similarly, of the ethnic minority applicants, only 1 was considered eligible in terms of being 'politically unengaged'.

The market researcher recruitment route took up even less of staffers' time, because the recruiters themselves handled the outreach activity, screening and participant communications with Demos in the oversight role. This route relied much less on self-selection as more proactive forms of outreach were deployed by recruiters. This lightened the load in terms of screening participants. But market research recruitment was on a par in terms of securing young and ethnic minority participants - finding 1 person under 30 and 2 from an ethnic minority background.

A challenge across both approaches was the self-imposed requirement to recruit from across the whole of each constituency and the people with the lowest trust. This meant the final sample had fewer people from rural locations than was planned and three people who *somewhat agreed* rather than *disagreed* with the statement 'I can trust MPs to make decisions in the best interests of their constituents'.

¹² And of those 23, only 15 responded to the follow-up messages.

Throughout the process, a group of committed participants engaged at every stage, but there was attrition - based on the starting sample size of 31 the overall attendance rate was 81%¹³

The table below shows the combined attendance rates across the process:

TABLE 2
ATTENDANCE FIGURES

	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
Attendance figures	31	26	18
Attendance rate as a %	100%	84%	58%

These figures tell a mixed story.

On the one hand, they show it was hard to maintain engagement from participants across the entirety of the process. Some of the reasons for dropping out - illness, caring responsibilities, or having to deal with something unexpected - illustrate the challenge of fitting into people's busy lives. Other reasons for dropping out - something else taking priority on the day, lack of sufficient financial incentive - are more indicative of the process not managing to kindle enough interest or motivation for some people.

"I was really disappointed not to be able to attend the face-to-face session which was due to a family bereavement."

- Participant in follow up interview

On the other hand, the figures also tell a positive story. They show that even within a group of people *specifically recruited to be 'politically unengaged'* there is scope to excite and inspire on the topic of local political issues and lay the foundations for a different type of relationship with their MP. Drivers for continued interest and attendance ranged from being interested in the local area, wanting to meet the MP in person and feeling like they could make a difference and be involved in positive change:

"I wanted to stay involved because the discussions felt constructive and meaningful."

- Participant in follow up interview

"I wanted to add value and see what would happen."

- Participant in follow up interview

"Getting some access to the MP and having the chance to meet [them] properly - that's a big thing."

- Participant in follow up interview

13 Calculated as $(31+26+18)/(31+31+31)*100$

The participants who remained involved through to Session 3 were categorised as a 'hardcore' of committed people, who had become bought-into the process and really enjoyed being involved. They were amongst the most talkative and energetic in the early sessions and remained engaged and connected throughout. Feedback from their follow-up interviews show an intrinsic motivation had been ignited. They were certainly likely to reference the value in talking about local issues, but a large part of their intrinsic motivation to continue attending was down to enjoying the experience - especially meeting other people from their local area, hearing thoughts from a range of perspectives and coming up with ideas.

"[There were] so many people all with different views and opinions - [it] was productive and fun."

- Post session 2 survey response

"I think [I stayed involved] because I found it interesting. Once I started, I wanted to stick with it and see what would happen. It's not something I would normally have done, but I did enjoy the sessions - especially coming up with new ideas."

- Participant in follow up interview

"I would have attended even without being paid... I'm interested in what's happening in the area and would have taken part anyway."

- Participant in follow up interview

"These sessions showed that people are willing to give up time for something that's meaningful."

- Participating MP

The other notable insight from this process, is that the group of committed participants were typically those who had been recruited via the MP office rather than via the market research recruiters. It appears that the small element of self-selection inherent in the office outreach approach, meant that participants that came in via this method were more likely to be predisposed to finding this exercise engaging and rewarding. They entered the process already holding a latent interest in connecting with others in their local area or serving their community, but had not managed to find a ready outlet for those energies. All they needed was an invitation and a chance to feel they had a role to play.

"I felt positive about being part of the Big Chat. It was a constructive experience and a good opportunity to get involved in the community."

- Participant in follow up interview

"I think they would need an incentive. If you ask me why I turned up on day one, it was money, right? Let's be honest. But then why I came back the next times was because it was interesting and I liked being part of it."

- Participant in follow up interview

On the other hand, those who came into the process via the market research recruiter method demonstrated a more transactional mindset i.e. the financial incentive was their main driver of attendance. This meant that overall they were more likely to drop out of the process over time. By the time of the final session (which was not incentivised) only a third of those remaining came from the market researcher route, whereas participants recruited via the MPs office made up around two thirds.

There is evidence that the model had a 'ripple effect' and brought other people 'beyond the usual suspects' into the process

The other success story from the pilot was that constituents across the locations proved effective in engaging their friends and family with the process. The first measure of this was the enthusiasm with which participants canvassed the views of friends and family about local issues in their area. It was seen by constituents as a valuable opportunity to feed back thoughts directly to the MP and prompted many conversations within participants' networks. One person even knocked on a neighbour's door to get their thoughts.

"I made sure I spoke to as many people because it's not often you get this opportunity."

- Participant during Session 2

Then between the first and second sessions participants were asked to circulate a survey to friends and family resulting in 60 completed questionnaires - an immediate doubling of the local footprint.

The Polis exercise - which was live for just under a month in each constituency - drew in 151 people, casting a total of 3,435 votes. Based on the assumption that all seed participants also took part in the Polis (as they were invited to do) then that leaves an additional 120 new members of the public.

Therefore, from the starting sample of 31, a conservative estimate is that the process engaged a total of 180 people - that's almost a sixfold increase. Not included in this figure (to avoid the risk of double counting them) are the 13 people that the seed participants invited to join the final session. This represents not only a 42% increase on the starting sample, but means that despite attrition the total number of attendees in the final session was actually exactly the same as the first - people dropped out but equal numbers of people were brought in. For this research, this is the most significant 'ripple' to have caused, because it was able to bring those additional constituents into a deeper form of trust-building participatory engagement.

As well as including more people, there is evidence that the model successfully included people who would be defined as being 'beyond the usual suspects.' When asked in the survey 'what problem do you think the Action Plan should address?' the answers that came through were strongly indicative of low trust and frustration. For example one person responded: "No one listens to us 'normal local folk'. Decisions have already been made before the public even hears about it". Another person said simply "Don't get me started". This group of friends and family also recorded comparable, if slightly lower, levels of trust than the participant group at baseline: 42% agreed their MP has good intentions, against 53% of participants, and 38% agreed their MP represents their community's interests, against 44% of participants. Averaged across all

seven trust measures, friends and family stood at 30% agreement compared with 35% among participants - a modest but consistent gap.

Consequently, it can be seen that using the friends and family of carefully recruited seed group participants did ensure reach to a further group of constituents that broadly fell under the category of 'beyond the usual suspects', with striking indications of distrust.

PRINCIPLE 2

PARTICIPATORY

This principle is about giving constituents the time, space and support to have meaningful and collaborative interactions with their MP. Compared to every other opportunity that a constituent currently has for interaction with their MP - an email, a surgery appointment, an exchange on social media, a chat at a coffee morning - a participatory approach enables a more in-depth and 'bigger picture' level discussion about problems and solutions to local issues. Participation goes beyond allowing constituents to express their views, it is about a constructive and shared process of problem-solving.

It is also much more balanced in terms of who is setting the agenda and who influences the shape and outputs of the conversation. The process should leave constituents with a greater understanding of how the MP role operates in the local context and how power and change might happen. There should also be opportunities to get into the complexity of trade-offs and reach a shared consensus on difficult decisions.

DESIGN FEATURES OF THE MODEL TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION

In order to meet the participatory principle, the model:

- Convened participants on three separate occasions, twice in-person and with the MP to create space to build rapport and get under the skin of the issues.¹⁴
- Structured the whole process around a central task - creating an Action Plan for the local area - that required consensus-seeking on what it should focus on.
- Designed prioritisation exercises that prompted discussion of trade-offs and consideration of the MP role.
- Designed the workshops to be 'open' enough to enable some back and forth between the MP and constituents.

¹⁴ The third session in South Derbyshire was intended to be in-person but this had to change to an online event due to poor weather conditions affecting travel

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Success in delivering this principle must be judged according to three criteria:

- To what extent did constituents form a bond or constructive working relationship with the MP?
- Is there evidence of a shifted power dynamic with constituents leading the conversation?
- To what extent were constituents able to work through trade-offs and make 'difficult decisions'?

Meeting with their MP in structured sessions helped constituents to connect with their MP on a human level

The 3.5 hours of contact time between MPs and constituents was sufficient to enable a degree of bonding and getting to know one another. It helped constituents to understand more about the values and motivations of their MP and to make an assessment of whether to trust them or not based on a personal interaction.

"In person it's nice to build that relationship with [the MP] and with my fellow constituents."

- Participant in session three post survey

I didn't know [them] before, but [they] came across as a genuine, normal person. That's what I prefer - someone who seems interested in the community rather than in themselves. [They] didn't feel like a typical government figure.

- Participant in post interview

It's worth noting the value of the in-person sessions for this element too - working together in the same room allowed for constituents to more easily initiate a conversation with the MP and for a more natural exchange of ideas and views.¹⁵ In all sessions, the MP rotated between groups and took part in the conversations, asking questions and contributing ideas and suggestions in the same way as constituents. Evaluation data suggests this approach was well received, with participants highlighting the value of informal interactions in making the MP feel more approachable and accessible.

"It was good to see the human side of [them] - [they] listened, engaged, and seemed genuinely interested in local issues, which made [them] feel more approachable."

- Participant in post interview

"Meeting a politician for the first time can be quite daunting so it was nice to meet in a relaxed environment"

- Participant in post interview

¹⁵ Session 3 in South Derbyshire took place online due to adverse weather conditions and we noted the limitations of MP-Constituent relationship-building in this session, vs. the in-person session 3 which took place in Weston, where there was a lot more back and forth between the MP and constituents and greater energy and humour evident in the conversations.

The sessions also generated a balanced, two-way dialogue - crucial for the foundation of any trusting relationship. Evaluation data relating to constituents 'having a voice' and 'being listened to' is used to demonstrate that they felt their contributions were valued and influenced the direction of the conversation. Immediately following session 2, 100% of seed participants agreed that they had 'opportunities to share their opinions and ideas' during the session and 100% agreed that they 'felt heard', dropping slightly to 88% after session 3. It was also encouraging that 90% of friends and family agreed with the same sentiment of 'feeling heard' following their participation in session 3.¹⁶

"[They] actively took part in conversations and listened."

- Friend and family in session three post survey

"The structure worked well because everyone had the opportunity to share their thoughts."

- Participant in follow up interview

"I felt that I was able to say what I wanted to say"

- Participant in follow up interview

"Yeah, 100% - I was able to voice my ideas for the Action Plan."

- Participant in follow up interview

Facilitated prioritisation exercises enabled constituents to better understand the MP role and to make trade-offs

In both locations a similar experience played out in the discussions of local issues and what the focus of the Action Plan should be. What happened demonstrates the value of a participatory approach in enabling participants to go beyond a top-of-mind response to get to a more balanced view between ambition and feasibility.

In initial conversations about 'problems in the local area' a number of issues were raised and discussed - they tended to be 'hot topics' in the constituency that prompted an emotional response from participants. Traffic congestion was a problem common to both constituencies. People got very passionate about it as it was seen to have such a significant impact on day-to-day life. Concerns about access to healthcare also came up in both places, although this had particular resonance in Weston-super-Mare where, since 2023, their local A&E no longer offers 24 hours services (it closes its doors overnight).

Both of these problems were very familiar to the MPs of these constituencies. But there are also problems that would be very difficult for the MP to resolve on their own or in the course of a parliamentary term. However, the final problems that constituents agreed to focus on were not either of these issues. In South Derbyshire it was a lack of community feeling and togetherness; in Weston-super-Mare it was the high street being unappealing and unwelcoming.

¹⁶ After session 2, 100% of participants (n=26) said they either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'I felt heard'. After session 3, 90% of participants (n=18) either agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement, while one participant neither agreed nor disagreed. Another participant said they strongly disagreed. However, a follow-up interview indicated that this response had been submitted in error, with the participant confirming that they had intended to select "agree". If corrected, this would increase the proportion of participants (after session 3), who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt heard, to 94%.

The evaluation data showed that coming out of Session 2, 55% of participants said they had changed their mind about something. So what was it about a participatory approach that refocussed the conversation?

1. In Session 2 there was an in-depth discussion about the impact that resolving this problem would have compared to the amount of time and effort required to make progress in this area. Underpinning this conversation was a process of learning more about the MP role - how it operates in the local context, what type of power and control an MP has and where the limits of that power. Understanding that the top issues in terms of impact (traffic congestion and lack of access to healthcare) were also the issues that the MP would struggle to deliver via the Action Plan, the final voting forced participants to make a trade-off.
2. Whilst the most emotive and top-of-mind issues (e.g. traffic congestion and lack of access to healthcare) got a lot of airtime in the initial discussions, building in extra time enabled different types of issues and themes to emerge.

For instance in South Derbyshire, participants started to bring up a number of things they had noticed in the local area:

- a. That the new large scale housing estates that had been built in recent years were poorly integrated with existing communities, leading to a sense that one 'no longer knew who lived in the area'
- b. When people are out and about there seems to be a reluctance to make eye contact and greet one another in the street, exacerbated by people being on their phones.
- c. Participants - young and old - felt that younger people were disconnected from the rest of the community and often from one another.
- d. Anti-social behaviour was seen as linked to there being a lack of activities or prospects for younger people in the area.
- e. Poor transport links made it hard for those without cars (especially younger people) to get out and about and meet others in the area.

These issues are disparate - they don't have a specific pain point like a well-known road junction with persistent traffic jams. But a participatory approach was able to surface a theme that drew all these experiences together - a lack of connection and community in the area. Through the course of the discussion, participants were able to recognise that despite the diversity of these experiences and observations, they were often talking about the same thing - a sense of weak community ties in the constituency.

Similarly in Weston-super-Mare, there were a number of issues raised about the state and quality of the town and local area and participants spoke about how they rarely ever visited the town centre. For some it even felt, at certain times of day, like a 'no-go area'. Vacant shops, litter, anti-social behaviour, a lack of joy, fun or any discernible sense of a Weston visual identity or style were all raised. There were also complaints about the pervasive feeling of neglect, decline, and a lack of business diversity and investment. As separate issues, none had the same focus or urgency as the local A&E issue. But, similar to the conversation in South Derbyshire, this collection of experiences and observations were given the space to coalesce into a strong theme around the need for town centre renewal, focussed on fixing the key signs and symbols of decline and loss of pride.

When it came to voting for the final 'topic' that was to be the focus of the Action Plan, there was therefore a much richer and more nuanced conversation about what mattered most and where change could be facilitated. In both locations there were still some participants who stuck with their original views and voted for 'tackling traffic jams' or 'opening a 24/7 A&E', but for most people something had shifted - a recognition of what would really make a difference to the quality of their lives and their sense of place and a more realistic view of what their MP could achieve.

As a result, constituents developed a stronger understanding of the balance between ambition and feasibility. This directly shaped how participants approached voting within the process, encouraging them to prioritise areas where meaningful progress and tangible outcomes were considered achievable.

Evaluation data shows that after the three sessions, participants left with a better understanding of what their MP does. Prior to participation, 37% of participants either strongly or somewhat agreed that they understood what their MP does.¹⁷ After session three, this rose to 64% of participants.

¹⁷ Four responses were not included here, as these were people who only completed the pre survey but did not attend the subsequent sessions

PRINCIPLE 3

BUILDING RECIPROCITY

At the heart of the democratic system is the relationship between the MP and their constituents. As the elected representative, the responsibility to interact with constituents fundamentally lies with the MP. Yet, how successful such interactions are in building a working relationship depends on various factors, foremost amongst which is how constituents engage. Too often, engagement practices such as surgeries and coffee mornings treat constituents as passive actors in their local area. The model required restructuring the way MPs approached their engagement with their constituents. Instead of one-way listening exercises, the model facilitates mutual conversation in which the MP promises to engage as an equal with constituents, and to deliver on the final actions that are co-decided.

The central aim of this work has been to generate a shift in how constituents interact with the democratic process, bringing people into a generative process that focusses on co-creating solutions to local issues. Demos' model of engagement rethinks this role of the constituent by building reciprocity into the MP-constituent working relationship.

DESIGN FEATURES OF THE MODEL TO ENCOURAGE RECIPROCITY

The two constituent-focused features of the model that aimed to bring the principle of reciprocity to life were that:

- The seed group were encouraged to become ambassadors for the process and to bring people into it:
 - They were asked to speak with their friends and family throughout the process - bringing their views in and sharing back highlights from the discussions.
 - Immediately after the first session participants were asked to share a short questionnaire with those in their social circle, to crowdsource ideas for issues in their local area that should be under discussion.

- Participants were asked to invite one or more people along to the third session.
- Participants were asked to share the link to the Polis with their friends and family.
- 9 participants in the sample met additional 'friendly face' criteria in the recruitment process - measures that identified them as people with large and active social networks in their community. The idea was that including some of these people in the seed group would help to boost the overall ripple effect¹⁸ and the principle of reciprocity.
- Participants were asked to consider and make actions for themselves, as well as the MP, to contribute to the outcomes they would like to see. By giving constituents more responsibilities than they would in a usual focus group or coffee morning, they are encouraged to take a more active role in their civic life and therefore are given more reasons to proactively engage with their local representatives and improve the quality of democracy.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The key measures of success in this principle are:

- The extent to which participant activity was successfully prompted to contribute to the success of the model - attending sessions themselves and bringing in friends and family to the process
- The extent to which constituent focussed actions were a part of conversation and fed into the final Action Plan

There is a latent interest in doing work to support the community but it's not always easy for constituents to know how best to do this or how to prioritise it

Amongst the seed participants, stated interest in taking part in some kind of community focussed activity was high to start with, with 83% saying they are somewhat or very interested in 'helping to tackle local issues' and 83% saying somewhat or very interested in 'supporting their community'. It's worth noting that this was not significantly higher than the control group, of which 80% and 83% agreed with these respective statements, indicating that the sample had not self-selected on this basis, but was likely fairly representative of the local population in this regard.

It was interesting to note though that despite a high stated interest in community work the seed participants were not particularly plugged into other community or civil society organisations. Indeed they talked about wanting to do more or find out more, but not being sure where to start or simply 'never quite getting round to it'. The analysis would be that for many people in places such as South Derbyshire and Weston-super-Mare there is a much weakened civic habit. If there is activity ongoing, participants in the sample were unaware of it and unsure how to make inroads.

So the opportunity to get involved in this process and the idea of contributing to the community was clearly appealing to participants. Even though they may not have proactively sought it out, they had clearly responded with enthusiasm when they spotted the invitation.

¹⁸ Criteria included identifying with characteristics/behaviours such as: regularly post on an online local group; have organised a community event; know most of their neighbours personally. For full details of the friendly face recruitment criteria please see the Appendix.

'I've moved to South Derbyshire recently and wanted a way to get to know people around me. These sessions have been such a great way for me to meet residents different from me as well as hear their opinions on the local area'

- Participant in South Derbyshire

'I love these sorts of things and want to get involved. Nothing until this felt like it could actually make a difference though'

- Participant in South Derbyshire

This initial energy that participants brought to the process does evidence the principle of reciprocity - the fact they turned up and engaged in good faith are simple but powerful measures. By that same measure then it must be acknowledged that the attrition rate across the process saw a reduction in that willingness and ability to engage. A committed group of 18 people (59% of the total seed sample) attended and engaged in every session, embodied that reciprocal relationship but it could not be nurtured with all participants.

There was also an uptick in the number of people in the seed sample who expressed an interest in their community from 83% prior to the process to 86% after Session 3. These figures should be taken lightly - the control group recorded a similar uptick which may reflect a research effect as much as anything - but it is also possible that taking part in group discussions did help that sense of community-mindedness to grow. And this spark of interest was felt by at least one person who had been brought into the process by a seed participant, who could see the potential value ordinary residents could generate, simply by working together:

'I can imagine [in this group of people] there is a wealth of expertise. If we took the time to share our experiences with the youth, it would make a hell of a difference. I know that I could do more.'

- Family member in Session 3

The model was really successful at 'activating' seed participants to draw other people into the process, with some indication that women were more likely to do so

The numbers here may be small, but the principle is well proven - it is possible, with relatively little effort, to ask people to share messages or an invitation to participate, amongst their social networks.

The first moment in the process where this form of reciprocity was tested was after the first online meeting, when people were asked ahead of the second session, to canvas the views of others in the community on the issues that should be the focus of the Action Plan. It was encouraging that from this initial ask, 42% of participants shared the scoping questionnaire with friends and family, bringing a total of 60 additional people into the conversation.

It was also testament to their commitment to the process that participants took action to bring new people into the third session. 11 of the original 31 participants invited at least one person to the third session, boosting the total numbers of participants who took part in a deliberative discussion to 44.

In terms of what was learned about *who* in the sample was more likely to act in the spirit of reciprocity, there is some evidence that friendly face participants displayed a greater tendency to do so, as the hypothesis of this research had hoped they would. For example, the friendly face recruits slightly over-indexed on their likelihood to share the survey with friends and family and the person who shared it with the largest number of people was a friendly face recruit.

A slight skew towards female participants being better at drawing additional participants into the process can also be seen - either via the survey circulation or physically bringing someone to Session 3:

- The 'prize-winners' for most completed surveys in each location were both women
- It was a woman who brought the highest number of additional people (3) into Session 3
- It was mostly women who had concrete examples of the conversations they'd had with friends, family members and neighbours - talking about the process and getting their views to feed in

The model prompted participants to consider their own role in the community but there is limited evidence that this effected a more permanent shift in mindset vis a vis the MP

The idea of MPs working hand in glove with constituents to achieve change was a new one for participants. Their starting point was typically to assume that all the power and ability to make change happen would come from the MP. Of course, the process ultimately designed ran counter to these assumptions, putting the participants in the driving seat in terms of the direction of the conversation and highlighting the importance of their role and support in making change happen.

It was evident in the comments and feedback interviews that participants had started to internalise this new power dynamic between them as constituents and their MP. The quotes selected below for instance, illustrate how participants were beginning to appreciate the value of their knowledge, ideas and opinions to their MP and their community:

"If people in the community don't get involved, those issues won't be addressed."

- Participant follow-up interview

"It felt like if I couldn't be bothered to give a bit of my time on a Saturday to try and make some changes, then actually nothing will happen. We all have to do it together. [The MP] can't do it on [their] own."

- Participant follow-up interview

"I was able to voice my ideas for the action plan. Everyone at the table thought some of them were good ideas, and you could tell [the MP] liked them too."

- Participant follow-up interview

"[This] provides an opportunity to influence initiatives that matter to the local community... it feels worthwhile if it leads to real change."

- Participant follow-up interview

Despite this shift in mindset, it remained a struggle to imagine what exactly they as constituents could do to help create change in their area. For example, in the third session when constituents were tasked with creating the longlist of actions for their Action Plan, the conversation more naturally focussed on things the MP could do. With prompting from facilitators, participants were increasingly able to develop actions for the local community to take and imagined themselves playing an active or reciprocal role, for example:

1. Using their network to spread the word and lend support to MP initiatives e.g. talking to their employers about setting up work experience opportunities.
2. Attending initiatives that the MP sets up and bringing along friends and family, e.g. joining community pop-ups or local interest groups.
3. Taking small actions themselves e.g. putting stickers in their windows showing support for an initiative.

PRINCIPLE 4

ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY

Discussions with constituents in the first paper made it clear that accountability would be one of the critical elements by which the model would be judged by participants. Starting as they did from a position of low awareness and low trust in their MP, the model functions on the hypothesis that the MP listening and taking action would be a powerful first step in rebuilding trust. Indeed in the opening session, where participants were asked for their thoughts and feelings about being invited to take part in the process, the words and phrases people used were remarkably similar - 'intrigued', 'curious', 'cautiously optimistic' but also that 'the proof will be in the pudding'. The real measure for participants was whether anything would actually change as a result of this. The more skeptical one was, the stronger this sentiment was expressed. Failing to deliver on this risked damaging constituent trust more than if they hadn't taken part at all.

"What we don't want is false promises but a clear plan that can be used"

- Participant

"Well, the proof is in the pudding. It's all well and good to make [an] action plan, but will it actually happen?"

- Participant

My opinion will improve further if I see real outcomes from the discussions - it needs to feel worthwhile.

- Participant follow-up interview

DESIGN FEATURES OF OUR MODEL TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

The two main features of the process which were designed specifically to ensure accountability were:

- Developing an Action Plan that would spell out some simple, tangible, achievable actions for the MP to undertake.
- Setting up a Whatsapp 'Community Group' for participants in each constituency to create a feedback loop with the MPs office.¹⁹
 - The idea was to create a direct line of communication about what the MP has been up to in the weeks and months following the initial co-creation sessions and see how their contributions are turning into meaningful action in their constituencies.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

In terms of the measures of success, these are:

- Mostly about the feelings and perceptions of participants - to what extent do they feel that action and/or change has resulted from the process.
- The extent to which an effective feedback loop was established with participants and the MP was able to deliver on the Action Plan

The co-creation of the Action Plan was effective at setting up accountability and giving the MPs a good opportunity to deliver against it

The facilitated process between the MP and constituents was effective at pulling together an Action Plan that everyone involved felt was realistic and would make a difference.

"It's easy for people in positions like me to get lost in a kind of existential dread about the future of democracy... but [this was about] actually bringing it back down to what you can control and what you can deliver."

- Participating MP

As discussed in some length in the section on Principle 2: Participation, that discursive, co-creative approach enabled the process to move constituents away from really big, strategic, long-term, multi-stakeholder type problems (e.g. resolving local traffic problems or re-opening a 24/7 A&E department) and towards more specific, tactical actions. This was an essential way in which the process gave the MP a good chance of being able to demonstrate progress. It also helped people to understand how change might be brought about and how the Action Plan would be part of that - laddering up to something noticeable.

¹⁹ The specific type of group that was set up was a Whatsapp Community group. Constituents received an invitation to join the group where the action plan was shared. The Community Group includes an announcements section where the MP and their team (as community administrators) can post updates on the actions being taken. Constituents can react to announcements, but only the MP and their team can post in this part of the groupchat.

FIGURE 4
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE'S ACTION PLAN

South Derbyshire Action Plan *to strengthen the community*

- Your MP Samantha Niblett will work with South Derbyshire District Council to organise and promote **community events in local parks and green spaces**, helping people connect face to face.
- You as constituents will support this by **attending the events, bringing friends and family**.
- Your MP Samantha Niblett will highlight **local employers** offering work experience, apprenticeships, or mentoring, and encourage others to share **practical opportunities for young people**.
- Your MP Samantha Niblett will **work with schools** to involve young people in local projects and help them understand how they can improve their community.
- Your MP Samantha Niblett will map and **promote volunteer groups** seeking new members.
- You as **constituents will join groups** that match your interests to discover local opportunities.
- Your MP Samantha Niblett will promote **work experience opportunities for young people** in South Derbyshire.
- You as constituents will **encourage your employers to offer opportunities**.

FIGURE 5
WESTON'S ACTION PLAN



Probably the best thing I heard from [the MP] was that [they] can't go and change all the big things immediately. [They'll] keep trying, but [they] can't fix them quickly. I appreciated that honesty. It made me feel like the smaller changes we can make locally might add up to bigger things

- Participant in follow up interview

For example in one of the constituencies, participants had expressed concerns about the number of vacant commercial spaces along a stretch of road in the town. In the group session it was apparent that both participants and the MP were aware that one landlord in particular owned a large number of these properties and had left them un-let and in a state of disrepair. This discussion led to the drafting of the actions directing the MP to 'work with stakeholders such as landlords' to explore opportunities to make use of vacant lots. The MP wrote directly to the landlord in question and to a local councillor on the issue, publishing both letters online and also on the Whatsapp group - relatively low lift actions that demonstrated to participants and a wider audience that their concerns were being taken forward.

FIGURE 6
LETTER FROM DAN ALDRIDGE MP



Daniel Aldridge MP
Member of Parliament for Weston-super-Mare
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
daniel.aldridge.mp@parliament.uk

Richard Nightingale
Weston-super-Mare

30 March 2026

Dear Mr Nightingale,

Re: Revitalisation of Vacant Shop Spaces in Weston-super-Mare

I am writing on behalf of my constituents in Weston-super-Mare regarding the status of several vacant shop units under your ownership. In recent weeks, I have been in discussion with local entrepreneurs, small business owners, and community groups who have expressed a strong and immediate interest in occupying these spaces.

As you will appreciate, the prolonged vacancy of retail units is having a visible and increasingly concerning impact on the local high street and wider economy. Empty premises not only reduce footfall but also undermine confidence in the town centre and its future prospects. At a time when there is clear demand from businesses ready to invest and operate locally, it is important that these opportunities are not left unrealised.

There is a strong expectation within the community that these spaces should be brought back into active and productive use without unnecessary delay. I would therefore welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how this can be progressed, including exploring practical and commercially viable options to ensure these units contribute positively to the town centre.

I believe that, through collaboration, we can identify solutions that support both your interests as a property owner and the wider needs of the Weston-super-Mare's community to deliver clearer outcomes that benefit visitors, stores, and our local economy.

I am keen to move this discussion forward, working together constructively and at pace. Please let me know your availability in the coming weeks so that my office can arrange a suitable time to meet.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Aldridge MP
MP for Weston-super-Mare



FIGURE 7
LETTER FROM DAN ALDRIDGE MP



Daniel Aldridge MP
Member of Parliament for Weston-super-Mare
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
daniel.aldridge.mp@parliament.uk

Mike Bell
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-Super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

Dear Cllr Bell,

As I'm sure you are aware, there are currently a large number of commercial properties that lie vacant in Weston-super-Mare, particularly along the high street and in the Sovereign shopping centre.

Following engagement with several constituents as part of the Demos project, an initiative that focuses on including the voices of previously disengaged constituents in Weston, tackling empty shops and supporting small businesses were two of the primary goals identified. Residents expressed significant concern over the number of empty shops that currently litter the centre of Weston-super-Mare, despite a surge in appetite to rent commercial properties in the area.

Furthermore, this concern is not only expressed by constituents and myself, but has been an issue nationwide. The Government have attempted to tackle the issue of empty shops, with the High Street Rental Auctions scheme in December 2024, a scheme that North Somerset Council has secured powers to enact recently. I am aware that engagement with local communities is due to launch imminently to deduce which areas specifically should apply this scheme however please would you be able to provide any further detail on the status of this activity in Weston-super-Mare?

We are keen to act now to support local businesses, considering the volume of concern flagged during the Demos project. As we look for innovative ways to boost economic growth and fill vacant commercial units, our office would like to invite North Somerset Council to meet with us to discuss a 'Local Business launchpad' competition. The core of this proposal is to offer a promising small local business owner a period of rent-free occupancy within a prominent unit at The Sovereign shopping centre.

The high street is the heartbeat of our community, yet many talented local creators are priced out of physical retail spaces. By providing a "stepping stone" opportunity, we can:

- **Reduce Vacancy Rates:** Transform empty shops into vibrant hubs of activity.
- **Encourage Innovation:** Give a platform to unique, local brands that differ from national chains.
- **Drive Footfall:** Generate public interest and media coverage through a community-led competition.

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The other feature of the way the Action Plan was created was that some of the actions that made it to the final list were things that could be considered 'low hanging fruit' or things already in motion, that the MP merely needed to push along, shout about more or undertake a relatively simple action to 'tick off'. These included actions such as promoting local initiatives and events, championing local people or drawing on their ability to see across the whole constituency. For example, one of the actions was 'mapping and promoting local volunteer groups seeking new members'. Again, it was relatively low life to post this type of content in the Whatsapp group, to fulfil that specific action:

FIGURE 8

LEAFLET FOR A VOLUNTEER FAIR IN SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

VOL
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE CVS
**VOLUNTEER FAIR
2026**

**COME AND SPEAK TO ORGANISATIONS
TO LEARN THE VALUE OF
VOLUNTEERING AND THE IMPACT IT
HAS ON YOUR COMMUNITY.**

Tuesday 2 June 2026
 10.00 AM - 2.00 PM
 **Greenbank Leisure Centre, Main Hall,
Civic Way, Swadlincote, DE11 0AD**

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT US

01283 219761
 volunteer@sd cvs.org.uk
 www.volunteersouthderbyshire.org

**COMMUNITY
VOLUNTARY
SUPPORT**
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

SDVolunteerForce sd cvs.volunteerforce

Momentum was lost between the final session and the Whatsapp group which undermined the sense of accountability

The transition of participants from the discussion sessions to the Community Whatsapp Group ended up resulting in a loss of energy and momentum in the process. This had a notable impact on the feeling of accountability, because the cause-and-effect relationship between what was decided in the in-depth discussions and the MP action, was somewhat weakened in participants' minds.

In review, the key issues were:

- There was too much 'downtime' between the final discussion session and being invited to the Whatsapp Group:
 - It took a few weeks to sign off of the Action Plan with the MPs office and get the Community Groups set up, meaning that even some of those committed participants had started to drift and forget the detail of the process and Action Plan they had co-created
- It was hard to get participants to re-engage following the extended period of downtime:
 - The intrinsic motivation that was ignited somewhat dissipated by the time participants received invitations to join the group and additional requests for participants to invite friends and family remained unfulfilled. The group managed to get 13 participants signed up, a reduction of just over a quarter of participants from Session 3.
- Staffers found it difficult to prioritise communicating on this channel:
 - MPs staff manage and post content across a number of online platforms and an additional channel to remember and adapt content to, proved too difficult.

The net result was that participant numbers stayed low and dwindled over time, and there was little continuous content coming through from the MPs' offices.

PRINCIPLE 5

BEING PRAGMATIC

Whilst the model had ambitious aims, for it to have any chance of being a long term and sustainable rewiring of the MP/Constituent relationship, it must be deliverable by MPs and their offices. This is why 'being pragmatic' was one of the key design principles - both in terms of the time and energy required to run it and the direct costs associated with the model.

DESIGN FEATURES OF THE MODEL TO ENSURE PRAGMATISM

As part of the terms of involvement in the pilot, Demos covered all direct costs associated with running the process. Demos took every measure to spend money carefully and to take note of what spending had the most impact. Otherwise, direct costs were kept to a minimum, mindful that the cost for any future activity would need to come from the MP's Constituency Office budget.

However, pre-existing office budgets and networks were used where possible. For instance, the South Derbyshire team had prepaid stamps and so were able to afford letter outreach by themselves. Also, constituency offices used their existing relationships to host conversations in venues they had previously used.

THE DIRECT COSTS OF RUNNING THE PROCESS WERE ON AVERAGE £2,445.50 MAKING IT A RELATIVELY LOW COST INTERVENTION

The key direct costs associated with running the process were:

ITEM	TOTAL AVERAGE COST
Recruitment: letters sent from MP's office	£1,000, (£143 per head*)
Recruitment: market research recruiters	£1,168, (£73 per head)
Participant incentives	£2,573, (£83 per head)
Venue hire and refreshments	£50

**In South Derbyshire, the team were able to use pre-paid letters and stamps for this outreach activity, meaning the cost to this project was £0. But in the table above costs from Weston have been used to give an indication of what this would be if the office did need to pay. In Weston, the team sent 1000 letters at the cost of £1 per letter, successfully recruited 7 participants and meaning the per head cost of this method was £143.*

MPs staff were able to contribute the time required to deliver the main touchpoints of the process, but it was hard to prioritise some of the actions, especially towards the end of the process

Demos took on the bulk of the administrative and logistical work involved in running the process, handling participant recruitment, payment and comms. The MPs' offices were responsible for making venue enquiries and hiring, posting social media messages to aid recruitment and to circulate the link to the Polis exercise. MP staff were also responsible for handling the mail out of paper-letter invitations to prospective participants.

- Found it hard to manage on top of urgent case work and other elements of their role
- Managing an additional social media platform was also too much

"The thing is, it's really hard to prioritise this when you're faced with someone who's got in touch because they're at a crisis point"

- MP Constituency staff

Constituency staff had brilliant ideas for how to take the participants forward into further work - reconvening them as a sounding board for the MP (almost as an 'Advisory Committee', finding ways to elevate and champion their community work or simply inviting them into coffee mornings to further swell attendance at these. However, it was really hard to take any of these forward.

IMPACT ON TRUST

The evaluation demonstrates that this model of engagement strengthens the relationship between MPs and their constituents. The evaluation collected data from participants, their friends and family and from a control group. Sample numbers are small for quantitative analysis, so this paper exercises caution in drawing definitive population-level conclusions from its figures and only reports on big shifts in the numbers. But the overall story is strong and clear, especially the impact that involvement had on the participants themselves.

Across the three surveys, participants became more trusting of their MP, less distrustful of their intentions and actions, and more confident in their own ability to participate in politics. These improvements were consistently larger than changes observed in the control group, indicating that they were driven by participation in the model rather than wider events.

Furthermore, the impact extended beyond those who participated directly. Friends and family of participants showed measurable but modest improvements across several questions on trust suggesting that the benefits from this form of political engagement can be spread through the wider social networks of participants.

However, the evaluation also highlights an important challenge. Although most improvements remained evident three months after the sessions ended, there was also some decline. The data shows that building political trust cannot be a 'once and done' approach. Meaningful engagement must be sustained over the longer term if such improvements are to endure.

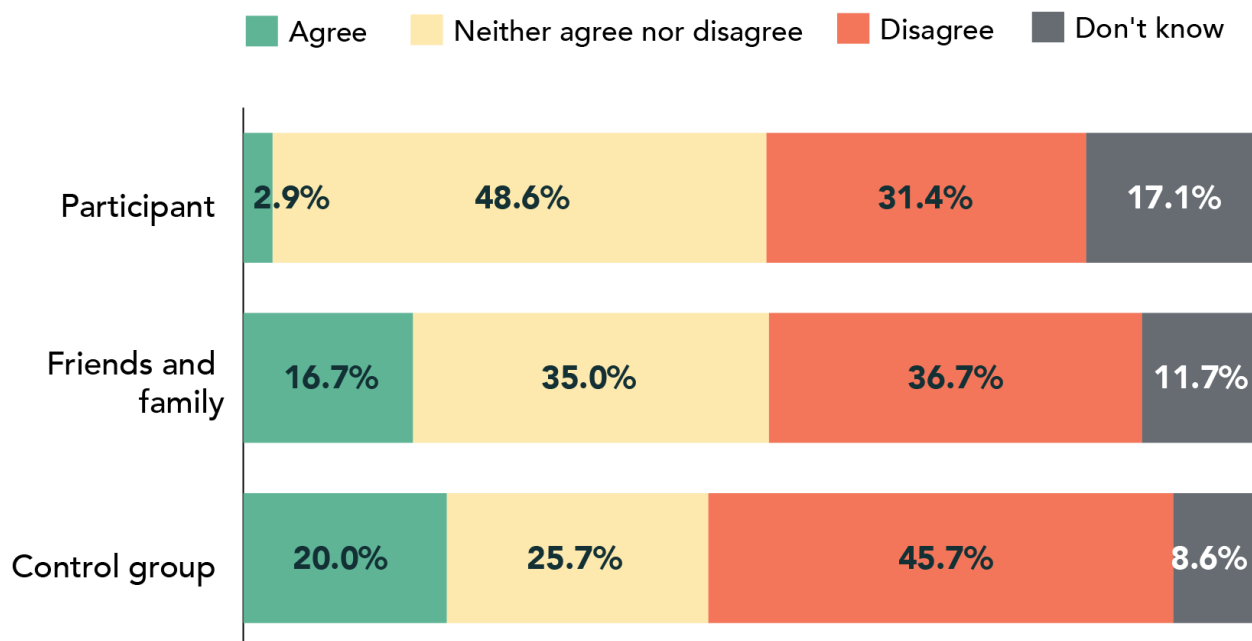
BASELINE LEVELS

Overall, the baseline data indicates that participants began the process from a position of 'cautious neutrality' leaning towards positivity. For instance, participants are the least likely of the three groups to actively agree with distrust statements. Only between 3-9% agree their MP ignores them, disrespects them, or is incompetent, which is by far the lowest of the three groups. A tendency towards trust can also be seen, illustrated in a figure of 44% agreeing their MP 'represents their community's interests'.

The control group was the most distinct from the participant sample in their starting position. They leaned much more towards stronger distrust, especially their views on MP competence. For example, a fifth (21%) of the control group agreed that their MP is incompetent, compared to only 3% of the participant sample. This group also shows the highest agreement with distrust statements (22% average) of the three groups.

CHART 1

BAR CHART SHOWING THE PERCENTAGE EACH GROUP ANSWERED AGREE, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE OR DON'T KNOW AGREED THEIR 'MP IS OFTEN INCOMPETENT AND INEFFECTIVE'

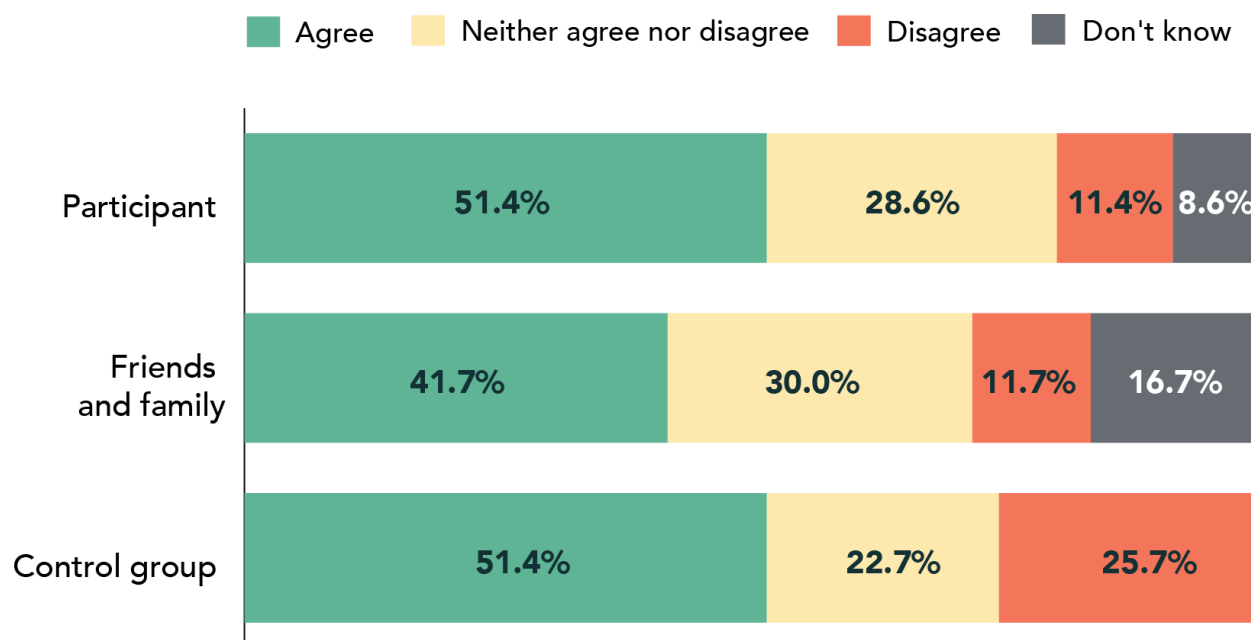


The friends and family group is consistently the 'in-between' group, being less distrustful than the control group but less trusting than the participants group. Agreement with distrust statements averages around 16% (vs. 6% for participants, 23% for control). This position is therefore characterised as being one of soft trust/distrust.

The one other data point worth pulling out, because it indicates an area of alignment across all three groups is the response to the statement 'my MP has good intentions', where levels of agreement were relatively high across the board, ranging from 42%-53%. The lean towards scepticism in the control group is still evident, with 26% actively disagreeing with the statement compared with just 9% of participants. But overall, these figures suggest that where scepticism exists, it is directed more at MPs' effectiveness and responsiveness - and at the wider political system - than at their character or motives, a distinction that may be significant for how future engagement with them is framed.

CHART 2

BAR CHART SHOWING THE PERCENTAGE EACH GROUP ANSWERED AGREE, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE OR DON'T KNOW AGREED THEIR 'MP HAS GOOD INTENTIONS'



The more squarely negative starting positions relate to views on one's personal ability to influence the system, and views of the political system more broadly:

- On the ability to influence local decisions, only 18% of participants and 25% of friends and family agreed they can influence decisions affecting their local area, against 35% and 45% respectively who disagreed; the control group was more negative still, with just 15% agreeing and 56% disagreeing.
- Views on whether 'my MP listen to constituents and makes decisions based on what they say' followed a similar, if less pronounced, pattern with under a third of agreeing with this - participants, 29%; friends and family 30% and the control group 24%. Still a large share of both participants (47%) and friends and family (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

The sharpest negative view of all was reserved for the political system itself: a majority in every group disagreed that the UK is a well-functioning democracy, rising from 55% among friends and family, to 59% among participants, to 67% among the control group.

CHART 3
 BAR CHART SHOWING HOW EACH GROUP ANSWERED 'I CAN INFLUENCE DECISIONS AFFECTING MY LOCAL AREA'

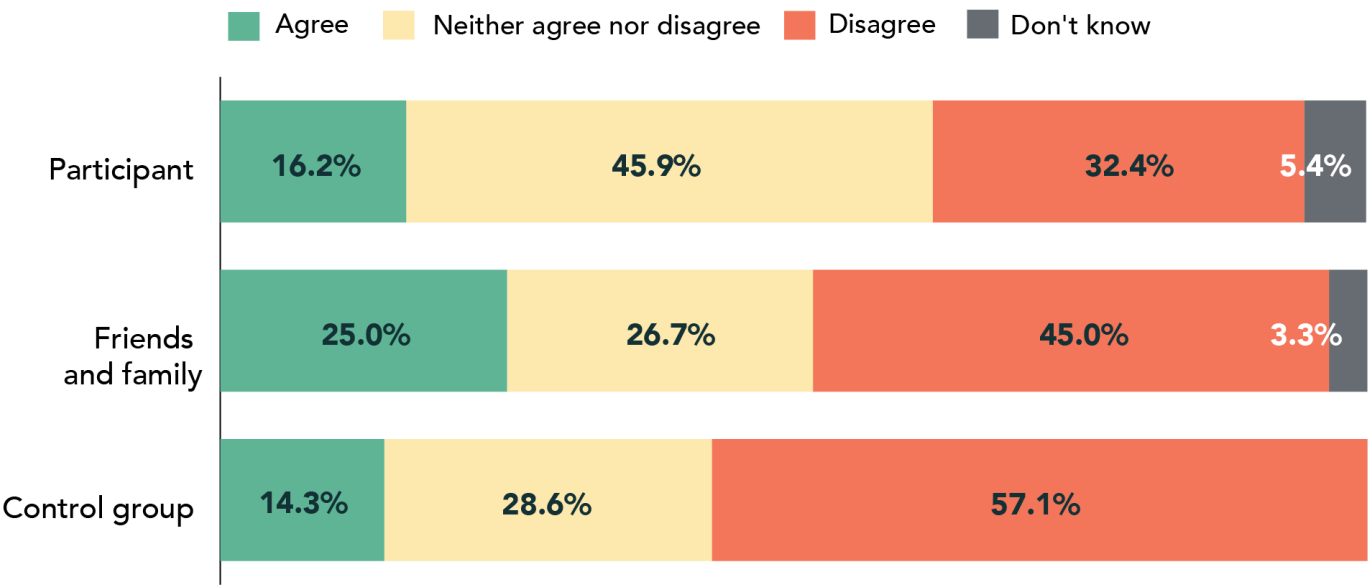


CHART 4
 BAR CHART SHOWING HOW EACH GROUP ANSWERED 'MY MP LISTENS TO CONSTITUENTS AND MAKES DECISIONS BASED ON WHAT THEY SAY'

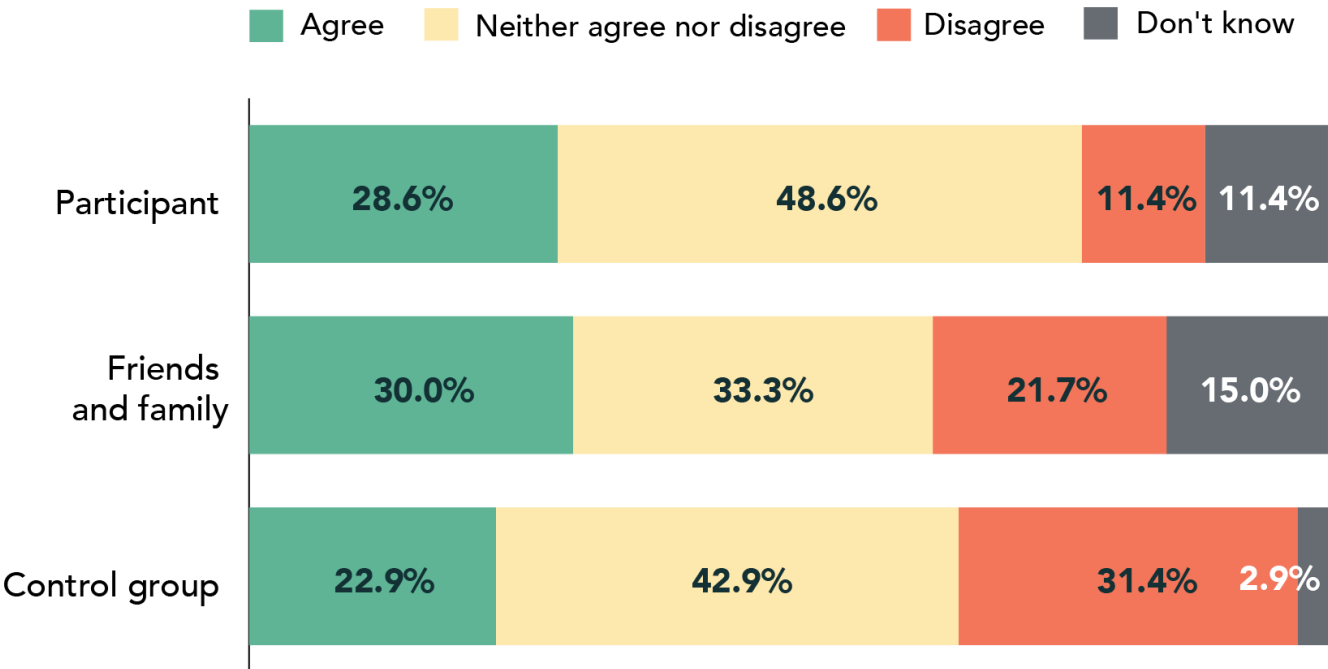
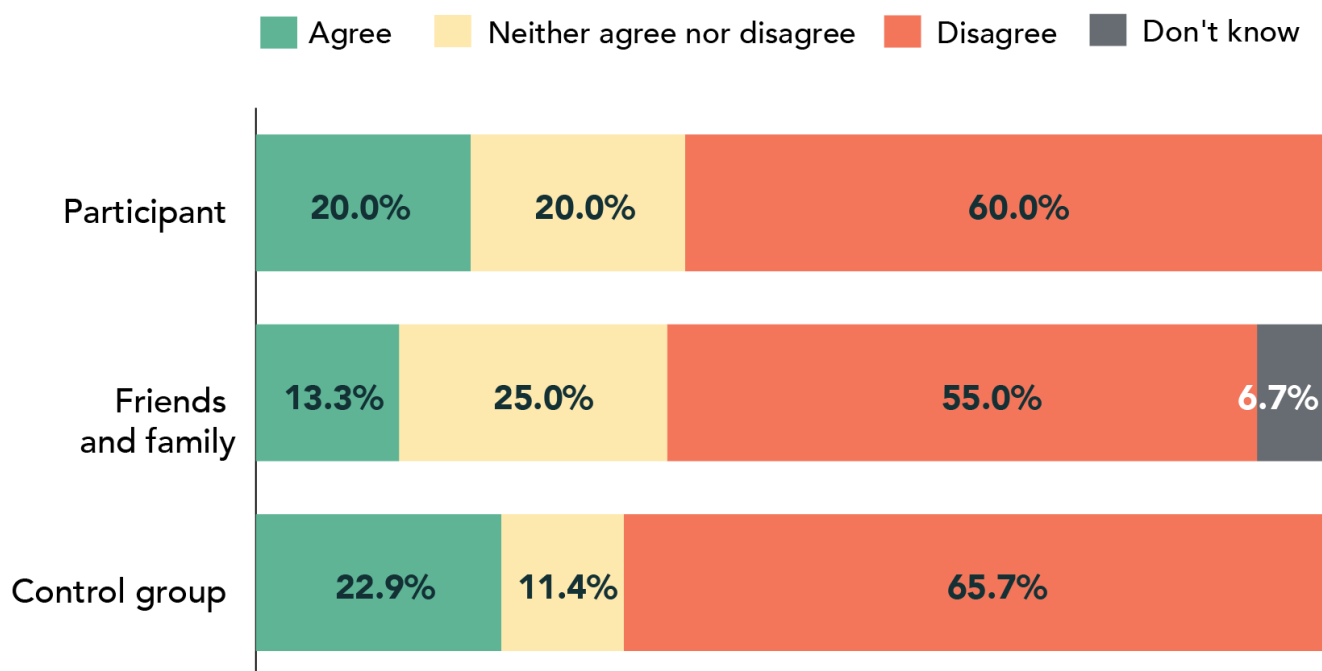


CHART 5

BAR CHART SHOWING HOW EACH GROUP ANSWERED 'THE UK IS A WELL-FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY'



But the standout story from the baseline surveys - especially with the participants' sample, and to a lesser degree with the friends and family - was the lack of a strong opinion on the measures of trust and distrust.²⁰ This expressed itself in high numbers of participants selecting the neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' option, or the 'don't know' option. For participants themselves, an average of 57% selected 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' across the four core distrust and mistrust questions at baseline, ranging from 56% to 65% depending on the measure. The seed group of participants were recruited specifically to be politically unengaged, but rather than expressing entrenched cynicism towards politics, they appeared unsure or lacking in confidence in how to evaluate their MP.

This is interesting when looking across to the control group data, of whom an average of 33% selected the neutral option on the same set of four questions. They were more likely to select the stronger 'agree' or 'disagree' options, especially on questions measuring distrust. For example, 65% of the control group gave a definite agree or disagree answer on whether their MP is often incompetent and ineffective, compared with just 35% of participants who did so.

All this indicates that the participant sample was to some extent self-selecting - that despite being non-politically engaged they were not overtly hostile to their MP specifically or the MP role in general. In this sense they present as being at least curious and willing to engage with the process, and potentially more open to having their views influenced than their demographic counterparts in the control group.

20 "My MP usually ignores my community" (Distrust)
 "Doesn't respect people like me" (Distrust)
 "My MP is often incompetent" (Distrust)
 "Unsure whether to believe my MP" (Mistrust)
 "My MP usually ignores my community" (Distrust)
 "Doesn't respect people like me" (Distrust)
 "My MP is often incompetent" (Distrust)
 "Unsure whether to believe my MP" (Mistrust)

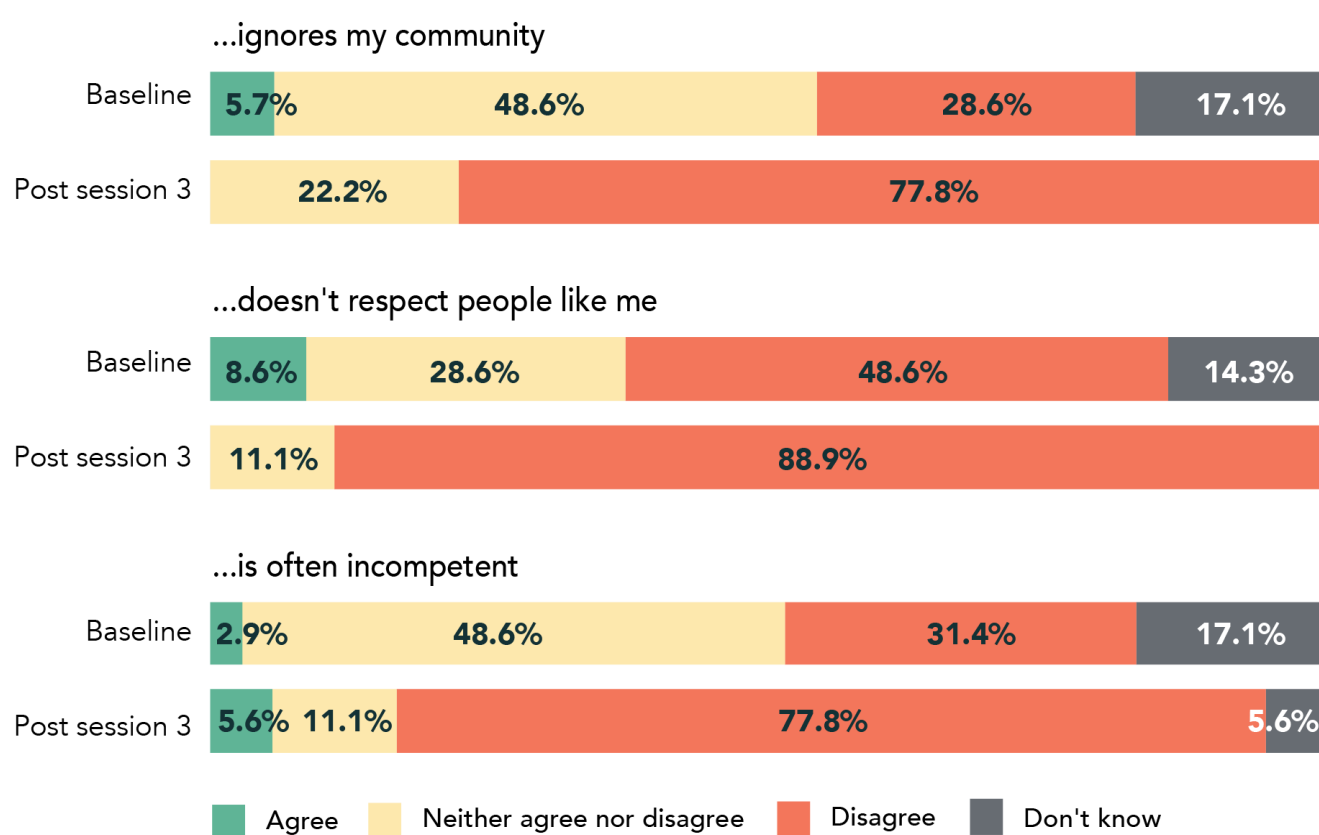
TRUST AFTER THE THREE SESSIONS

Participation produced substantial improvements across almost every measure of trust. This displays a conversion of the participants registering a neutral position or saying they 'don't know' towards answering favourably, alongside a decrease in the strongest negative responses.

The greatest changes occurred in attitudes towards participants' own MP. Following the three engagement sessions, participants had much stronger positive attitudes on the distrust measures - saying they were less likely to believe that their MP ignores their community, fails to respect people like them or is ineffective in their role. For example, when compared to the pre-survey, there is an increase of 49% of participants who disagree that their MP ignores their community. The equivalent increase was 10% for the control group.

CHART 6

PARTICIPANT BASELINE AND POST-SESSION 3 ANSWERS IN RESPONSE TO "MY MP..."

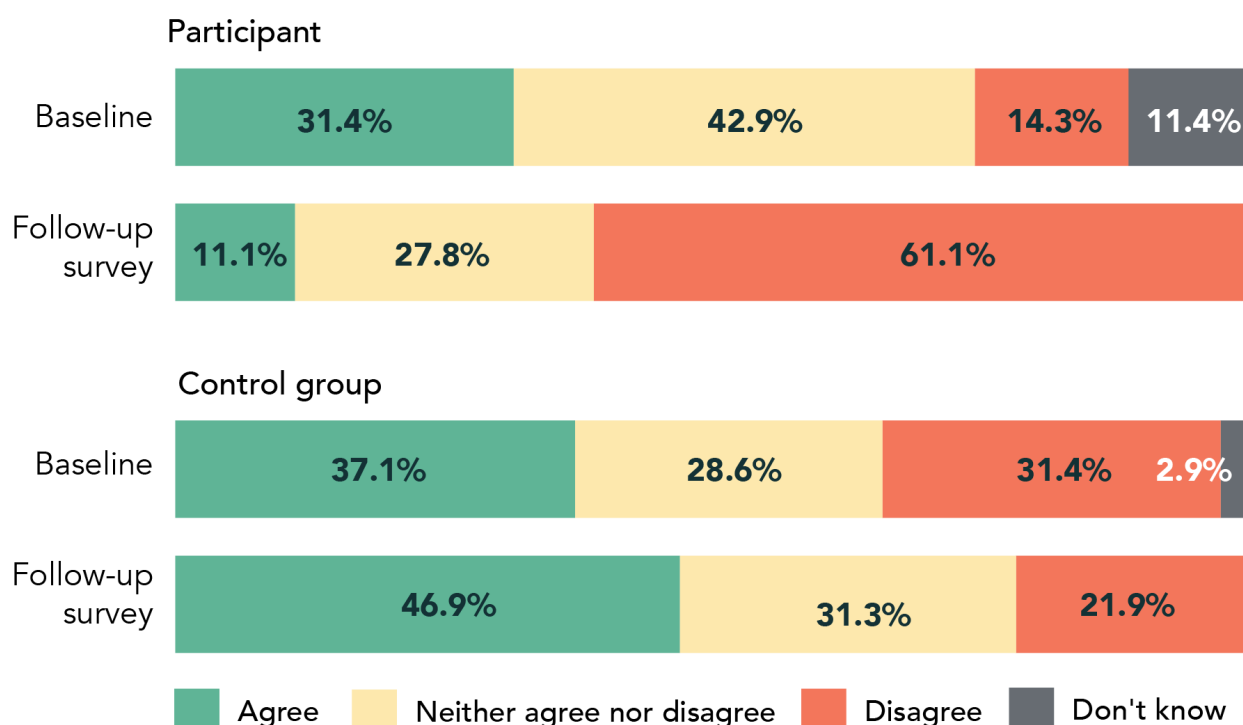


Importantly, these changes reflected not only more positive views but more strongly held ones. The proportion of participants who strongly disagreed that their MP does not respect people like them increased by 47%. The equivalent figure for friends and family increased by 27%. In contrast, in the control group, strong disagreement actually fell by 9%, with overall levels of disagreement staying the same. Similarly, there was an increase of 50% in participants who strongly disagreed that their MP is often incompetent whilst the change in the control group was statistically insignificant (2% decrease). Friends and family also became more positive by 36%, although most shifted into the 'somewhat disagree' category rather than expressing strong disagreement, reflecting their more limited engagement with the model. Both these examples provide evidence that exposure to the model was the driving factor of change and that whilst direct participation had the bigger impact on views, there is a ripple effect amongst friends and family too.

Mistrust also declined substantially. Following participation, 47% more participants disagreed that they are unsure whether to believe their MP whilst the control group saw a decrease of 10%.

CHART 7

BASELINE AND POST-SESSION 3 ANSWERS OF PARTICIPANTS AND CONTROL GROUP IN RESPONSE TO 'I AM UNSURE WHETHER TO BELIEVE MY MP'



"I've come away very enthusiastic and credit [the MP] with engaging the community"

- Participant after Session 2

"MPs have earned the reputation they have but talking to [my MP] first hand you actually get to learn [they are] actually quite a nice person."

- Participant in follow up interview

"I didn't know him before, but [they] came across as a genuine, normal person."

- Participant in follow up interview

Trust increased just as strongly on positive measures. After the final session, 94% of participants and 100% of friends and family agreed that their MP has good intentions. By contrast, only 47% of the control group agreed.

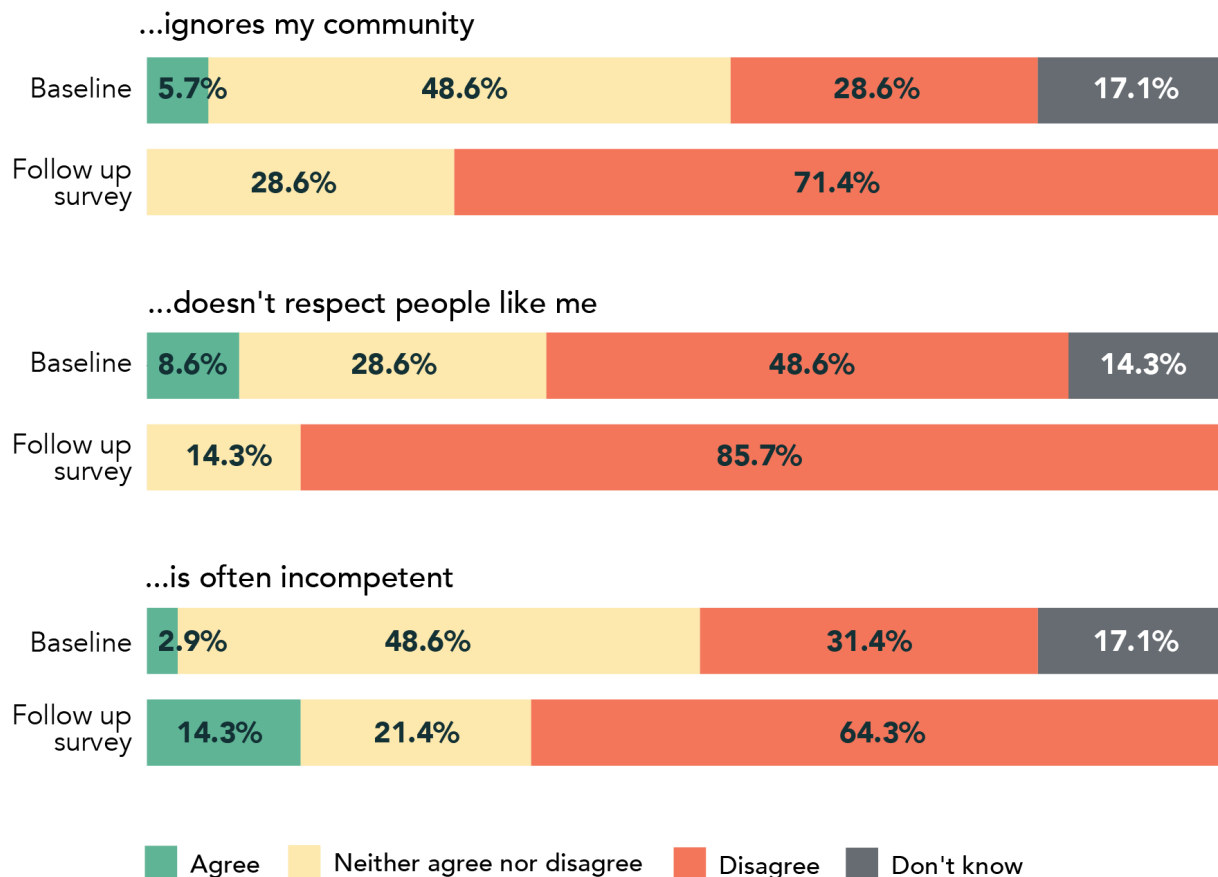
Similarly, 83% of participants and 91% of their friends and family were left feeling that their MP represents the interests of their community. Agreement that MPs listen to constituents and make decisions based on what they hear increased by 38% among participants and by 25% among

friends and family. This suggests the model not only improved how people evaluate their MP but also how they perceive their motivations.

The model had less impact on broader attitudes towards democracy. Participants remained sceptical about whether the UK political system functions well and responses show no impact on the likelihood of voting.

CHART 8

PARTICIPANT BASELINE AND FOLLOW-UP SURVEY ANSWERS IN RESPONSE TO "MY MP..."



TRUST THREE MONTHS AFTER THE FINAL SESSION

Months after their participation ended, trust remained substantially higher than before participation across almost every measure. However, the follow-up survey also revealed some erosion of the gains recorded in the post-sessions survey.

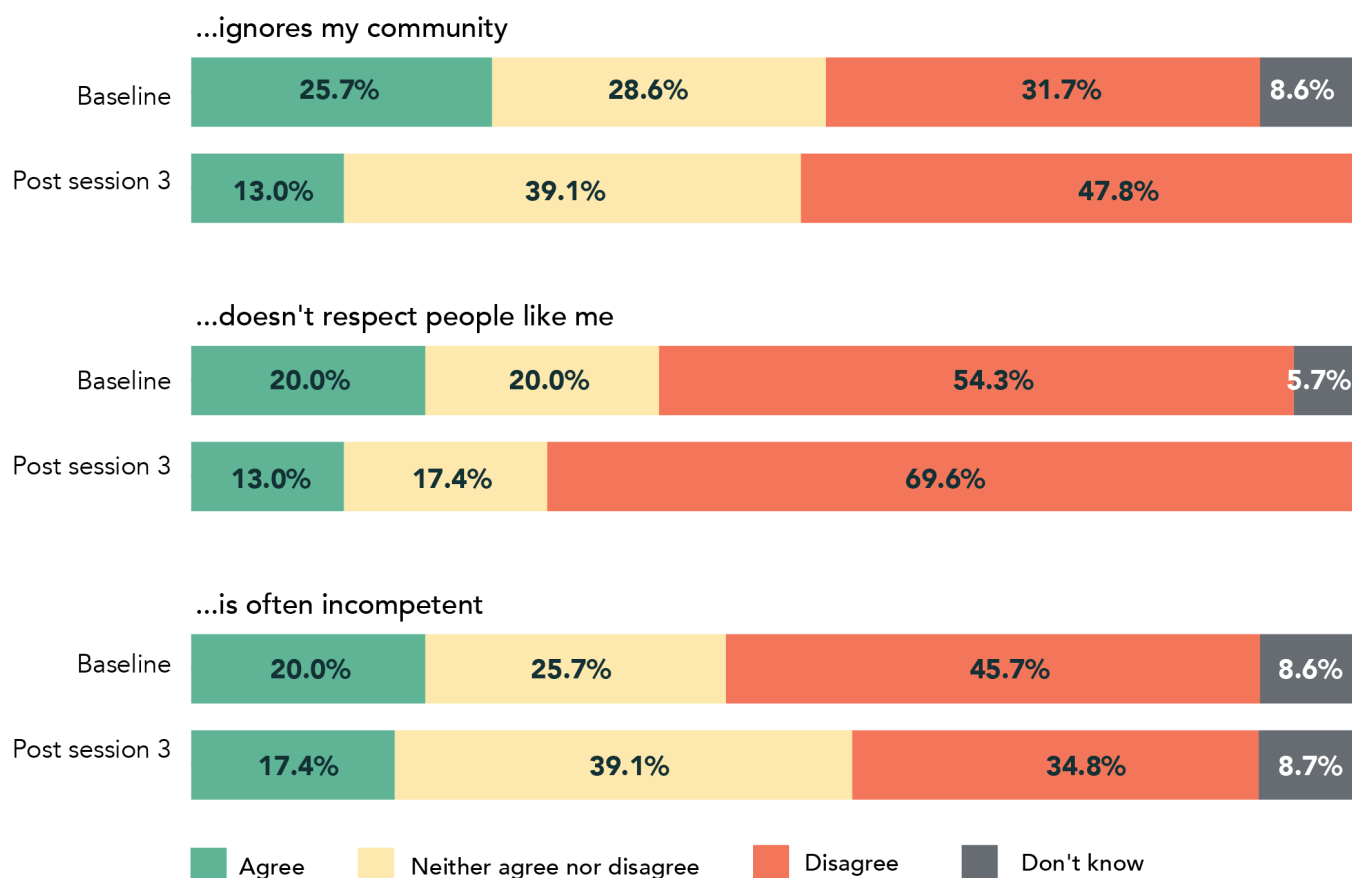
Compared with baseline trust, even months on from the final session participants were less distrustful:

- 43% more participants disagreed that their MP ignores their community
- 37% more participants disagreed that their MP doesn't respect people like them
- 33% more participants disagreed that their MP is often incompetent.

These improvements remained considerably larger than those observed within the control group which showed the changes of an 11% increase, 15% increase and 11% decrease in the control group's disagreement for the same questions. This demonstrates the impact of the model persisted beyond the immediate experience of participation.

CHART 9

CONTROL GROUP BASELINE AND FOLLOW-UP SURVEY ANSWERS IN RESPONSE TO "MY MP..."

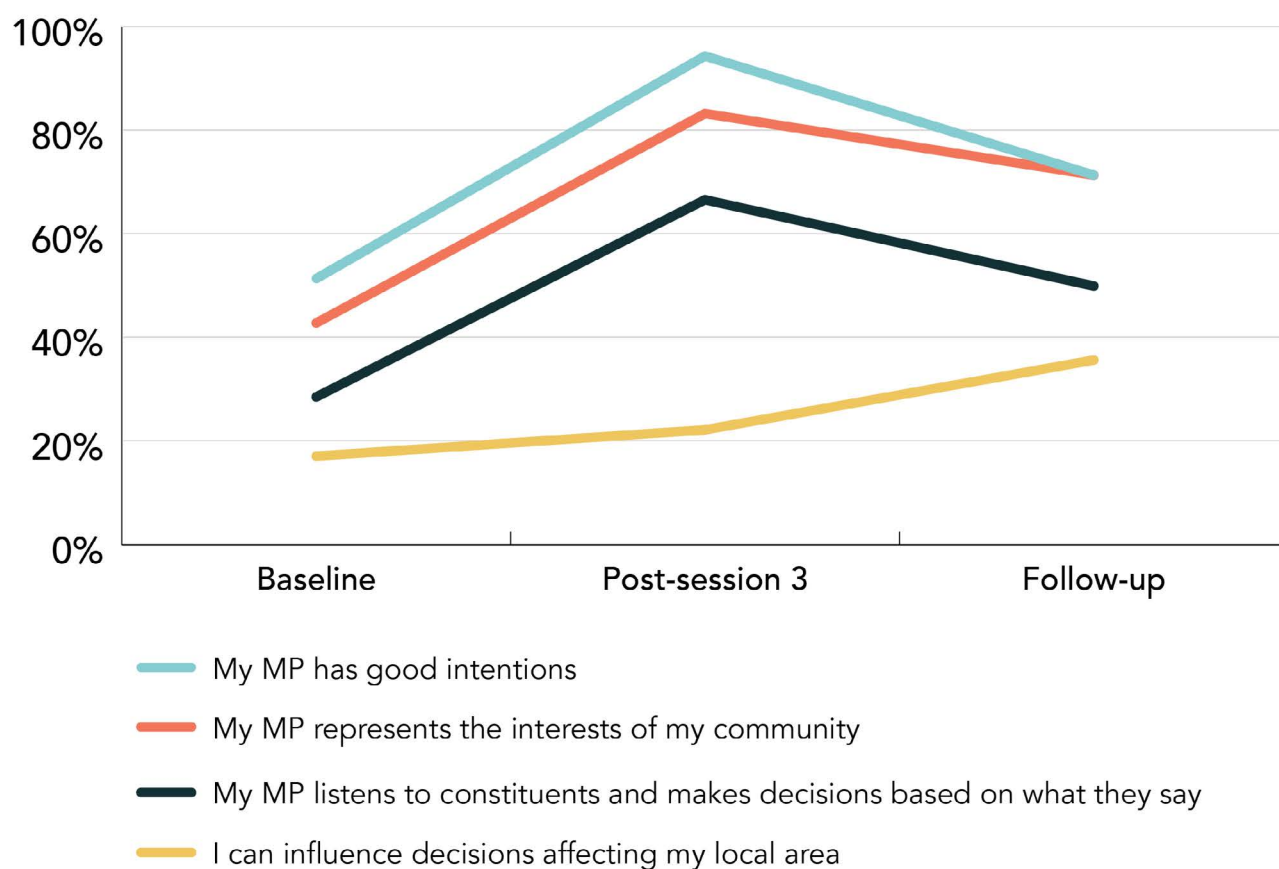


However, changes from the post-sessions survey to the follow up survey reflect slight but noteworthy dips. For example, 14% of participants agreed that their MP is often incompetent in the follow up survey compared to 6% in the post-sessions survey. For the same question disagreement dropped by 14%. On whether participants feel like the MP ignores their community, 6% more participants agreed and 6% less participants disagreed in the follow-up compared to the post-sessions survey. A similar pattern can be observed on the question of mistrust. 43% more participants disagree in the follow-up survey that they are unsure whether to believe their MP compared to the answer in the pre-survey. However, there was also an increase of 10% in the percentage of participants who agree with the same question in between the follow-up survey and the post-sessions survey.

Importantly, trust remained overall strengthened for participants in the follow-up survey. However, as with distrust, levels of trust did dip in between the post-sessions survey and the follow-up survey.

CHART 10

PERCENTAGE CHANGES IN AGREE FOR PARTICIPANTS ACROSS THE BASELINE, POST-SESSION 3 AND FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS



Measures of trust showed the same pattern. 23% less participants agreed that their MP has good intentions, 12% less agreed that their MP represents the interests of their community and 17% less agreed that their MP listens to constituents to make decisions.

Despite these reductions, all three measures remained substantially above their baseline levels. The model, therefore, produced durable improvements, even if some of its immediate effect diminished over time. One explanation is that the relationships developed during the programme were not consistently maintained afterwards. Participants had intensive opportunities for direct dialogue with MPs and their staff whilst the sessions were on-going, however post-session communication weakened due to delays and competing priorities. These findings therefore suggest that trust is sustained through continued engagement rather than one-off programmes.

Interestingly, some broader democratic attitudes improved over the longer term. Compared with the baseline data more participants felt that UK democracy was functioning well, more felt able to influence decisions affecting their local area, and more participants felt people in their local area could be trusted. Although these changes were smaller than those relating directly to MPs, they suggest that strengthening the MP-constituent relationship can gradually contribute to wider democratic confidence.

Taken together, the survey data shows the model was meaningfully able to rebuild political trust. It reduced distrust, strengthened confidence in MPs and improved perceptions of their role and responsiveness. Whilst the follow-up survey shows some gains diminishing, it underlines that overall improvements remain substantial months later. This evidence suggests rebuilding trust is possible and with continued meaningful opportunities can be sustained.

MP PERSPECTIVES

The evaluation above is built primarily on what participants told us. But the reflections of the two MPs who took part in the pilot add an important layer to the findings - on why the model worked when it did, on what it revealed about the state of MP–Constituent relationships, and on what could improve the model in future iterations. It also prompted some reflection on the very role of the MP and how to make more space for community focussed work.

"We haven't got a real understanding of the role of an MP for the next generation... but democracy has to flex, it has to move with the times. It has to be responsive to the needs of people."

- Participating MP

Four themes ran through their feedback:

1. GENERATING A SHIFT FROM POWERLESSNESS TO AGENCY

Both MPs described the wider backdrop to this work in stark terms. National-level distrust in politics is not simply low, in their account, but experienced by constituents as a persistent sense of powerlessness. As one MP put it, people "feel very 'done to' and don't necessarily feel they have power or agency". Left unaddressed, that low-grade frustration was felt to have the potential to fuel deeper anger towards democratic values and institutions:

"It's a feeling of dissatisfaction... over time that becomes a crisis because it's a constant feeling ...it crystallises into something more sinister, I think, and more problematic."

- Participating MP

Being able to take what can feel like an abstract crisis of democracy to a concrete, deliverable process, designed to build a relationship with a specific group of constituents, was part of the model's central value. It does not need to fix trust in politics nationally to be worth doing:

"We can get lost in a kind of existential dread about the future of democracy... but [this was about] actually bringing it back down to what you can control and what you can deliver."

- Participating MP

"[It's worth fighting for] every single individual that can score a little bit higher on their trust in the system and recognising that they have a place."

- Participating MP

2. MOVING FROM BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS TO A DIALOGUE

MPs contrasted this model sharply with their existing channels of constituent engagement, which they described as typically one-directional and leaving little space for nuance or constructive debate. This process helped create a safe space for debate and a two-way conversation:

"The biggest way constituents feel that they engage with me is through a broadcast method... It's not that back and forth. This format allows you to have a meaningful conversation, which is really, really powerful."

- Participating MP

The comparison extended to more traditional in-person formats too. Asked how the model differed from something like a constituency coffee morning, the depth of conversation and, crucially, the sense of shared endeavour were picked out:

"You just tend to have less in-depth conversations at a coffee morning... The big difference [with this model] was the people were committed to doing things themselves. It was a collective endeavour."

- Participating MP

Underpinning this was a shift in how MPs saw their own role in the relationship. Rather than a constituency service to be delivered, the sessions were built deliberately as an exchange and around the principle of reciprocity:

"There is an assumption that I am the giver of something and people are the receivers. But it was definitely inbuilt to this process - that recognition that it is a two-way street."

- Participating MP

"I loved the community champion idea. That's something we can really get on board with supporting."

- Participating MP

"My job only functions if people engage on it with me. And so it was a real shot in the arm to be able to have those conversations with people."

- Participating MP

What was sometimes more of a challenge for the MP - especially in the second session which was all about surfacing issues in the local area - was being in a listening role rather than a reassuring or action-focussed role.

"It felt weird not to be in my usual role - positive and reassuring"

- Participating MP

3. BEING ABLE TO FIND CONSENSUS RATHER THAN BE DRAWN TO DIVISION

MPs drew a link between the format and the substance of what got discussed. In-person, structured deliberation surfaced points of agreement rather than conflict - a marked contrast with the more adversarial tenor of debate conducted online or through the media:

"Those in-person exercises allow you to focus on the commonality rather than the division."

- Participating MP

One MP linked this directly to a broader diagnosis of what has gone wrong in local democratic culture in this country:

"We've retreated in a way that is really unhelpful and unhealthy. It's unhealthy for a democracy and it's unhealthy for communities. We don't deliberate, we don't discuss. We've retreated."

- Participating MP

4. HOW TO SCALE THE MODEL AND BRING IN CERTAIN UNDER-REPRESENTED DEMOGRAPHICS

The MPs' held similar concerns to their staff about deliverability of the model. For instance, MPs backed the model in principle but were unsure how it would work beyond a small pilot:

"The question I have is how we — how we do something like that at scale."

- Participating MP

"It was difficult to keep people engaged - how would you keep people coming back?"

- Participating MP

They also pointed to one underlying structural pressure shaping how much capacity they had to give in the first place: the amount of pressing casework meant that it was often found it challenging to prioritise work on the model. The limited ability of local government to be that first port of call for people in crisis was suggested as one reason why the casework load had increased. It was felt to leave little space to undertake proactive community outreach or spend the time building deeper relationships with constituents.

"The decimation of local government has meant that MPs have taken on a huge amount of things like casework. Seventy to eighty per cent of the stuff that comes through my doors as casework should be done at a local government level, but it just isn't. There is a multi-point democratic deficit."

- Participating MP

Despite these constraints, there was an interest in repeating the process. MPs already had ideas about how to sharpen its focus in a future iteration, for example targeting specific groups (such as younger people, older people and parents), specific neighbourhoods or using it to discuss topical issues:

"I would love to run it again. Maybe we could try and focus it more hyperlocally — finding some of those groups where people are working, and being like, well, actually, how do we support as the MP — and then some discrete stuff around maybe older populations and younger populations."

- Participating MP

"Could you focus on a specific topic - like the under-16s social media ban?"

- Participating MP

CONCLUSION



This was a great idea to set-up this demo Live Big Chat with our local MP for the South Derbyshire area where I was able to learn from others opinions to see how we can all improve the areas especially by welcoming new residents into the area so they don't feel alienated from communities. I think more of these meetings should take place for local communities to connect and focus on how we can help, support and encourage all generations from diverse backgrounds to be involved in improving the area!"

- Participant in follow up interview

Delivering a model that performed well on key measures of reaching *beyond the usual suspects*, being *participatory* and encouraging *reciprocity* has been shown to have a positive and lasting impact on levels of trust in the MP at a local level. The model successfully recruited a group of participants from within the constituency population who were both politically disengaged but also sufficiently interested in their community and meeting their MP to accept our invitation and to maintain engagement throughout the process. And the evidence indicates success in proving the concept that people can be sufficiently motivated, in a relatively short period of time, to become advocates in their social circles, even going as far as bringing friends and family into the process. Participants who took part in all three sessions experienced an increase in their levels of trust in their MP as a result of their involvement and the data showed a visible ripple effect of positivity towards the MP too.

There were also indications of other positive side-effects - exposure to diverse views in a respectful setting and meeting others in person - helped people to understand some of the complexity and balance required in making 'real world' decisions in the best interests of the community at large. In future iterations of the model, these elements could be dialled up to help defuse local hot button issues and further tackle polarisation. Demos is already trialling another form of the model in which a specific topic - in this case cohesion and integration - is established from the outset and testing whether this iteration has the same or even greater impact on trust.

Where the model performed less well - on the counts of demonstrating accountability to participants and being truly deliverable by the MP office - there is clearly some headroom for improvement. Maintaining momentum following the sessions to close the feedback loop between the launch of the Action Plan and delivery would be a key area to target in future iterations. This would help to boost trust-building considerably. And ensuring that the model is as low lift and as low cost as possible will be critical to enable more MPs to run these, potentially many times a year.

The other limitation of these pilots is one of scale - the total number of participants engaged was small compared to constituency populations overall. This was in part a consideration of budget and of design - it was important to create relatively small and intimate spaces for relationship building between MPs and their constituents so they could go deeper on the issues and do justice to the trade-offs. But even the elements where the model intended to go wide reached only a tiny fraction of the wider community. Demos' other work in the democratic innovation space, namely the Waves programme that uses a public participation model that oscillates between mass digital engagement and smaller scale deliberative engagement - has proven that open-to-all digital voting exercises can capture 1000+ respondents from the local area. Achieving those types of numbers involved direct mail outs and texts from the partner councils using their own database of resident contacts and paid for advertising, including posters in bus stops and online ads. This higher level comms operation should therefore be considered an important add-on in future versions of this model.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE DESIGN OF THE MODEL

These are the five key things that can be learned about running a new model of engagement:

1. Payment can buy insight and local intelligence, but it isn't a route to genuine, long-term engagement.

- Offering a financial incentive is a great way to grab the attention of a politically disengaged group and overcome an initial lack of intrinsic motivation i.e. if the MP wanted to gather local people together for a series of online focus groups to crowdsource the main issues in the area.
- Payment, if it is used, should focus on removing barriers rather than incentivising attendance e.g. enabling childcare provision or covering transport costs.
- But creating space for conversations on issues that people care about is the key to stimulate ongoing intrinsic motivation. A potential iteration of the model would be to explicitly frame the process around a known local issue and draw people in that way.

2. The model should focus on identifying constituents with potential and finding ways to energise them in the short term and activate them in the long term.

- By the end of the process the degree of self-selection was seen as a feature, not a flaw of the process. As long as there was confidence the process was drawing in a new audience into contact with their MP, there was less concern about losing people along the way who were at a more fundamental level, less interested in being involved in discussions about their community. Having people with a latent interest in supporting their community is an asset to the process.
- To that end, it would be preferable to over-recruit and expecting some drop-off to be supplemented by new people being brought into the process

- Low cost methods of recruitment through the MP's office are successful, rather than needing to pay professional recruiters
- 3. Participatory approaches are more effective at surfacing broad issues affecting large numbers of people that might otherwise fly under the MP's radar, rather than at addressing "hot-button" issues, which tend to be harder to solve, and ones the MP is usually already aware of.**
- There is clearly value in working through a range of issues to find where there is consensus about what matters to everyone. The issue and subsequent Action Plan emerging from this process have the greatest chance of making a difference to a large number and broad range of people in any given constituency.
 - What this approach didn't necessarily address though were specific challenges being experienced by specific groups. So an alternative approach could be to deploy an iterated model that works with a particular demographic to understand and target an issue affecting them directly (e.g. parents and SEN provision).
- 4. Making the sessions feel special and enjoyable helps draw people in and keeps them coming back.**
- Running at least one session in-person was seen as an exciting and memorable feature of the model/
 - For some (though not all!) meeting the MP was a draw in itself, and was seen as a valuable opportunity. And even for those not especially interested in meeting their MP, giving them the opportunity to do so still contributed to building rapport and trust.
 - Meeting other people from the local area and socialising was also an important draw, making the experience enjoyable and enriching.
- 5. It's best to keep ongoing participant comms as simple and streamlined as possible - both for the MPs' staff who are managing this and to ensure maximum engagement from participants.**
- The model used a dedicated WhatsApp group for ongoing participant comms, but it was hard for staff to manage yet another social media channel and take-up and ongoing engagement from the participant perspective was low.
 - In its place either targeted and direct comms to individuals may be better suited e.g. emails or texts addressed to them or directing them to existing public and social media channels and encouraging them to join the wider online discussion.

Through these pilots, there are a lot of learnings about what works and doesn't in running a new model of engagement with politically disengaged constituents. The evaluation data indicates that this group can be reached and that this type of model can and does have an impact on trust. But now the model needs to go from proof of concept to a next stage of iteration and scaling, so that it runs in multiple constituencies across the country and multiple times within constituencies. This depends on decisions that sit with the government, with Parliament, and with the bodies that regulate and resource MPs' work.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are **three recommendations** set out below to aid scale up and roll out of the model: a national review to address the casework pressures that constrain it, a funding stream to scale the model and a package of endorsement and practical support for MPs who want to run it:

1. A NATIONAL AUDIT AND REVIEW OF THE MP ROLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The House of Commons should lead a review on the MP role, focussing on how the role is currently working and where the tensions and challenges lie that point to the need for an upgrade. There isn't otherwise a single body or committee whose remit really grasps the entirety of the MP role. However, the Modernisation Committee, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) and the Speaker's Conference are all relevant bodies that may wish to have a role in or oversee this workstream, in support of the House of Commons as the sponsor.

One part of this review would be to commission a national-level citizens' jury on the role of the MP - a representative panel of the public, deliberating over several sittings with evidence from MPs, experts and the public themselves, on what they want and expect from their parliamentary representative. The jury should explore the big constitutional questions about how the role of the MP should change to meet the challenges we face as a country and where community-focussed work fits in their remit. No recent UK citizens' jury or assembly has put the role of the MP itself to a national public panel. This would provide a much needed set of insights and a timely debate in an era of declining trust.

Alongside the public engagement, UK Parliament should undertake a separate workstream comprising a national audit and analysis of the MP role in practice, with a specific focus on casework load. The institutional review should examine:

- How best to upgrade casework management systems, funded through IPSA and delivered with the Parliamentary Digital Service, to increase the productivity of existing staff rather than only adding headcount.²¹
- A resourcing trigger, allowing MPs to request additional staffing from IPSA once casework exceeds a defined threshold of staff time.
- A triage layer between local authorities and MPs' offices, to intercept high-volume casework that properly belongs to local government before it defaults to the MP's office as the point of last resort. This should be developed jointly with MHCLG and local authorities.
- An investigation into the proliferation and impact of AI on the quality and quantity of incoming communications to MP offices and recommendations on how this should best be managed.

21 For a fuller set of recommendations about how MPs' offices can increase efficiency and productivity please see this report published by Demos in Feb 2026: <https://demos.co.uk/research/democracy-on-default-settings-how-outdated-systems-undermine-the-day-to-day-work-of-members-of-parliament/>

2. GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR NON-PARTISAN DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION AT SCALE, BUILT AROUND A TEST, LEARN AND GROW APPROACH

No.10 North's mandate to oversee "the biggest rebalancing of power" in the country has, so far, been framed around economic devolution.²² Demos' model of MP-constituent engagement is a citizen-facing counterpart to that same agenda: rebalancing power is not only a question of which tier of government holds it, but of how directly the citizenry are connected to the people representing them. No.10 North should announce and champion this funding stream as an explicit extension of its rebalancing-power agenda into the relationship between MPs and constituents.

IPSA should be the administering body, establishing a multi-year Democratic Innovation Fund, available to all MPs and their offices if they wish to apply. The funding would cover the costs of running a participatory engagement model in-year, a package of support to aid delivery and evaluation activity.

This can draw inspiration from the Democratic Engagement Fund,²³ established by MHCLG in June 2026 and now closed to applications. The fund was open to civil society organisations with an aim to: "generate evidence on what works to increase democratic participation, informing future policy and practice".²⁴ The reason we are suggesting IPSA be the sponsor body rather than MHCLG in this case is in order to be able to navigate the potential political complexities of routing funding to MPs offices.

The funding should be structured as successive rounds of funded piloting rather than a single fixed programme to enable a test, learn and grow model of evolution and scale up. Embedded and independently run evaluation at each round would measure performance and impact - providing a feedback loop for MPs themselves as well as feeding into higher level strategic decisions about the direction of the programme.

In order to ensure the fund is not used for political gain (nor seen to be) guidelines around how the money can and can't be spent should be developed with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) and informed by their regulatory principles. Spot checks should be built in and standard prompts in the evaluation materials would enable capture and monitor perceptions of impartiality from participants.

²² www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/100941-burnham-reveals-plans-for-biggest-rebalancing-of-power-our-country-has-seen

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/democratic-engagement-fund-prospectus/democratic-engagement-fund-prospectus>

²⁴ *ibid.*

3. ENDORSEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT FOR MPS WHO WANT TO RUN PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES

The House of Commons should formally endorse participatory and deliberative approaches to MP–constituent relationship-building. And IPSA should confirm that this kind of engagement work is fundable from MPs’ existing Office Costs and Staffing budgets. Separately IPSA should work with organisations working in the participatory/deliberative ecosystem to commission:

- Training for MPs and their staff in deliberative approaches, recruitment methods, participant communication, the use of digital platforms and tools, and workshop facilitation.
- A digital toolkit and guidance, hosted by IPSA or the House of Commons, setting out what activity is eligible for funding under current rules or via the Democratic Innovation Fund, as well as how to run a process well.

Political parties can establish peer-learning networks between their own MPs’ offices, through existing party structures, to share what works and adapt it to local circumstances. Any such activity would be optional and in addition to the independently published and publicly available evaluation data referenced under Recommendation 1.

Demos is on a mission to **upgrade democracy** and rewire the relationship between the **state and its citizens**.

These pilots show that it’s possible to **reset the way MPs and constituents relate to one another**. The seeds of change have been sown - now they need to help to grow.



APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE

Overview - Participants

Recruit 10 constituents to engage in two sessions - one online, one in person in the constituency - plus short survey(s). Incentive of £90 to be paid after these sessions, and an extra £5 after the online survey in March (timing TBC). All participants to consent to being contacted by Demos/constituency staff to be invited to join the third session.

DETAILS	ACTIVITY
Wednesday 10th Dec, 6-7pm, Zoom	Session 1: Learning session
Saturday 13th December, 2-3.30pm, Swadlincote (venue TBC)	Session 2: Listening session
Saturday 10th January, 2-4pm, Swadlincote (venue TBC)	Session 3: Co-creation session
Online short survey, December (before session 1)	Pre-survey
Online short survey, March (timing TBC)	Follow up survey

Overview - Control group

Recruit 20 members of the public to complete 3 short surveys (but not participate in the sessions) - one before session 1, one after session 3, and one later on (March TBC). Participants will be paid a total of £15 - £5 after each survey. Recruitment criteria will match participant criteria in each location.

Political engagement criteria

CATEGORY	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE SAMPLE
Political engagement	All to have never been in touch with their MP, or know anyone working at the MPs' office All to have never taken part in a consultation, attended a local council meeting, or had any contact with local councillors before None to have taken up any political leadership positions: • Elected representative • Led a protest or campaign
Political trust	None to agree with the statement: "I trust MPs to make decisions in the best interests of their constituents"

'Friendly face' criteria

CATEGORY	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE SAMPLE
'Friendly face' constituents	Recruit min. 2 that meet at least 3 of the following (split between Q6 and Q13) - highlighted in purple: • Regularly posts on a local online group • Organised a community event • Knows most of their neighbours personally • Does not prefer to stay out of problems in their neighbourhood • People in their community often come to them for advice or support • On more than one occasion, they've connected up people in their community who didn't know each other

Demographics

CATEGORY	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE SAMPLE
Age	Min. 1 18-24 Min. 1 25-40 Min. 1 65+
Gender	Min. 4 Women Min. 4 Men
Ethnicity	Min. 1 Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
Socio-economic grade	Min. 2 DE
Rural/urban/suburban	Min. 4 rural

Additional Requirements

CATEGORY	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE SAMPLE
Market research	None to have taken part in market research in the last 12 months None to work in market research, media, politics None to personally know any other participant
Consent	All to consent to us storing their contact details & bank details until the end of the project All to consent to us using their contributions, data & anonymised quotes in the report which will be publicly available, and may feature on social media, in news articles, etc. All to be aware they can withdraw at any time for any reason by contacting a member of the research team.

CATEGORY	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE SAMPLE
	All to consent to the use of Dembrane to process and analyse their contributions All to consent to being contacted by Demos/the constituency office to invite them to take part in a final co-creation session with the MP

APPENDIX 2

EVALUATION SURVEY

1. What is your name?

.....

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW
My MP usually ignores my community						
My MP doesn't respect people like me						
I am unsure whether to believe my MP						
My MP is often incompetent and ineffective						
I know what my MP does						

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW
My MP has good intentions						
My MP represents the interests of my community						
My MP listens to constituents and makes decisions based on what they say.						
The UK is a well-functioning democracy						
Most people in my local area can be trusted						
I can influence decisions affecting my local area						

3. To what extent would you say you're interested in:

	VERY INTERESTED	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	NEITHER INTERESTED NOR DISINTERESTED	SOMEWHAT DISINTERESTED	VERY DISINTERESTED	DON'T KNOW
Helping to tackle local issues						
Supporting your community						

4. If there were a General Election tomorrow, how likely or unlikely would you be to vote?

Very likely	
Fairly likely	
Fairly unlikely	
Very unlikely	
Not sure/ don't know	

APPENDIX 3

Invitation to bring friends and family to the final session:

Hello!

Thank you for taking part in the second session. It was great to meet you in person, and we hope you enjoyed taking part in conversations with your fellow residents and MP.

We look forward to welcoming you to the third and final in-person session with your MP. More details on the venue will be shared in due course. In this final session, you will co-create an Action Plan for members of the community and your MP.

Ahead of the third and final session

We want the final session to be an exciting, community-driven event, led by yourselves as the participants. That is why we are asking you to bring 2-3 people with you to the third and final session. Friends and/or family who haven't engaged with the MP or local politics before. Remember to share any information we give you with them too.

Kind regards
XXX

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