

Rapid Review: The Feasibility of an Online Citizens' Assembly to support Devon's Transition to Net Zero

A Rapid Review of Evidence and Best Practice Prepared for the
Devon Climate Emergency Response Group and the
Devon Net Zero Task Force

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1. Executive Summary

Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency by Devon County Council in 2019, a Devon Net Zero Citizens' Assembly was planned for 2020 to discuss and generate recommendations to feed into the Devon Carbon Plan which will set the course of action across Devon for reducing carbon emissions to net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. The process began in late 2019/ 2020, with a Public Call for Evidence and a series of Expert Hearings having taken place to help generate evidence to put before a Citizens' Assembly. However, restrictions imposed during 2020 owing to Covid-19 meant that the face-to-face Assembly had to be re-thought if it was not too be delayed too far into the future. Devon County Council and the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group began to consider the feasibility of an online Citizens' Assembly as an alternative. This review of evidence has been commissioned by those parties to help feed into decision-making around this. The key questions the review considers are **a) whether an Online Citizens' Assembly could offer the quality of debate required to give policy makers confidence in its findings and recommendations; b) and if so, to consider what an online Citizens' Assembly might entail.** This second review should be read in conjunction with the first Rapid Review of Evidence (Devine-Wright and Moseley 2019) which provided a review of evidence and best practice on Citizens' Assemblies.

This review of evidence and practice on online deliberation finds high quality deliberation is possible online providing certain steps are taken. We outline in this report what these steps might include. Online deliberation is by nature slightly different to face to face deliberation but there is a growing understanding about how to conduct online deliberation well. Some adaptations have to be made as compared to a face to face assembly, as described below, but the basic processes that occur in person can also happen online: provision of information to participants, group discussions and quizzing of those who present information, and arriving at recommendations and findings through a voting or issue prioritisation process. Our review provides an assessment of both the benefits and challenges of an online assembly, as well as counter-measures to ameliorate challenges. We then make some suggestions about assembly design and format including issues associated with recruitment, design, session formats, facilitation and moderation, information provision, decision-making and outcomes, inclusivity and wellbeing. Our review draws on research evidence as well as recent practitioner guidance on online deliberation.

Key benefits of an Online Citizens' Assembly include the following (section 3 of the report):

- (i) Inclusivity and access benefits – greater convenience for some participants and speakers to fit around other commitments, logistically easier than running an Assembly in a dispersed rural County in multiple locations
- (ii) A wide range of formats for learning, deliberation and decision making available online supported by digital technologies, with innovative approaches evolving all the time
- (iii) Potential cost savings associated with reduced travel, catering and accommodation, and a lower carbon footprint

- (iv) Good evidence that learning and knowledge development can occur online and that opinion change is possible
- (v) Additional political/ civic engagement benefits

There are also some specific challenges, which can be mitigated with certain counter-measures (section 4 of the report):

- (i) Ensuring Access to Technologies of Online Participation: achieved through provision of equipment, digital skills training and technical support during the assembly, with potential cost increases associated with these
- (ii) Ensuring Deliberative Quality:
 - a) Ensuring civility and equal participation: Achieved through facilitation and moderation as well as appropriate group size
 - b) Embedding learning and quality of discussion: Achieved through a mix of synchronous and asynchronous sessions

There are further considerations that should be taken account of when developing an online Citizens' Assembly (section 5 of the report):

- (i) Procuring the Sample: Use similar approach to recruiting for a face to face assembly (i.e. stratified random sampling for inclusiveness and diversity), collect data on frequency of internet use & consider stratifying to ensure no over-representation of digitally engaged individuals; consider whether total number of participants may need to be adjusted downwards in view of online participation
- (ii) Design: Platforms, Digital Skills and Equipment: ensure participants are trained up in using the digital equipment, make use of digital tools, attention to platform design
- (iii) Session Formats: shorter and possibly more frequent meetings; simplicity of sessions; mix of whole group and small group meetings; mix of synchronous and asynchronous activity
- (iv) Facilitation and moderation: make use of available facilitation tools and techniques to enhance deliberative quality; adapt norms and rules of discussion to online format
- (v) Providing information to Assembly members: provide short, easily digestible information in a range of formats; recognise differences in learning and reading preferences as well as accessibility needs
- (vi) Decision making and Outcomes: make use of available online group decision-making and voting tools
- (vii) Ensuring Inclusivity: recognise digital exclusion and take steps to mitigate this; build trust amongst participants; support confidence in digital skills and developing an online voice for participation
- (viii) Wellbeing of participants and safeguarding: creating a safe and welcoming space; support where needed; privacy and safeguarding issues; recognition of potential challenges of participating from a home environment

2. Introduction

Over the past few years there has been growing interest in the UK and elsewhere of nationally led deliberative democratic processes of public engagement, notably Citizens' Assemblies⁴. In particular Citizens' Assemblies have been seen as way to explore how we take steps towards Net Zero after the widespread declarations of a climate emergency across the UK in 2019. A recent example of a nationally-led Citizens' Assembly focused on the climate emergency was the 2020 UK Climate Assembly that had 108 assembly members and was held initially in London and Birmingham over three weekends before switching to online deliberation for the fourth and final weekend (see Appendix 1: fig 1). The Scottish Climate Assembly held its first online meeting with assembly members on 7th November 2020 (see Appendix 1: fig 2), and takes place across 6 weekends over 5 months. However Citizens' Assemblies are not only becoming a popular means for deliberating complex issues at a national level. Local authorities, cities and regions in the UK are also commissioning Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Juries focused on climate change and pathways to Net Zero. Examples include the Leeds Citizens' Jury on Climate Change held over 9 sessions in 2019, the online Kendal Climate Jury which took place over 9 sessions over 4 months in 2020⁵, and the Online Climate Assembly for Ardur and Worthing taking place over five Saturdays from Sept-Dec 2020⁶ (see Appendix 1: figs 3 and 4).

Deliberative Democracy, which lies at the heart of Citizens' and Climate Assemblies and Juries is understood as a process that involves bringing people closer to the decision making processes of government. These processes encourage people to critically assess and explore issues from a range of perspectives. Through a sustained process over time, deliberative democratic approaches aim to bring forth informed and meaningful outputs (MosaicLab⁷). Inclusiveness and civility of discussion, according to Smith et al (2013) are important conditions for the effective operation of deliberative democracy.

Carson and Elstub 2019:2 explain that:

'Deliberation requires that participants: (a) become well informed about the topic, (b) consider different perspectives, in order to (c) arrive at a public judgement (not opinion) about "what can we strongly agree on?"'

With the current uncertainties of covid-19 and the resulting impacts on social interactions, the momentum that had been building around deliberative processes might be lost by the time face-to-face meetings are possible again. Organisations such as Involve, Shared Future, Democratic Society and others have been exploring how to maintain the momentum of interest in deliberative democracy using online processes. They have produced a range of resources to support councils and others to successfully conduct online Citizens' Assemblies

⁴ Recent examples of Citizens' assemblies include countries such as Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the UK (Fournier et al. 2011; Flinders et al. 2016; Renwick et al. 2017; Farrell et al. 2019) – See Devine-Wright & Moseley Rapid Review 2019.

⁵ <https://www.kendalclimatejury.org/jury-sessions-overview/>

⁶ <https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/climate-assembly/>

⁷ MosaicLab website – What is Deliberative Engagement available at <https://www.mosaiclab.com.au/what-is-deliberative-democracy> accessed 02/11/2020

and Juries. Involve report that there is an appetite amongst local authorities to accelerate the move to online deliberations as the impacts of covid-19 have heightened the urgency to progress climate change policies and actions (Lansdell 2020⁸).

‘...overwhelmingly people’s attention is now turning to how to bring these processes online. Despite challenging circumstances there is energy to explore new ways of doing things; online platforms, tools and skills; and work is being reformulated, adjusted and getting underway.’ Lansdell 2020

Since March 2020 we have been learning to conduct our businesses, meetings and even social lives via online platforms. However, transferring large, intensive processes such as Citizens’ Assemblies to an online format raises many questions that need addressing. This rapid review will set out the latest academic and practitioner thought on the opportunities and challenges of holding online public deliberation in order to inform the decision about whether and how to move the Devon Net Zero Citizens’ Assembly online. It will explore two related key questions: ‘Can an online deliberation offer the quality of debate required to give policy makers confidence in its findings/recommendations; if so, what does that deliberation look like?’

Online Deliberation has been a focus of academic studies for the past few decades, initially focused on digital public engagement, e-government and considering the impacts of web 2.0 on people’s abilities to discuss views online (See Appendix 2 for examples of digital democracy). We will draw on a selection of these older papers to ground our review in the history of this topic. However in order to provide key insights and recommendations for DCERG we will predominantly explore findings from more recent academic studies, where available, as well as practitioner guidelines. Much of the existing academic research literature on online deliberative engagement relates to text-based approaches to online deliberation (e.g. chat rooms, discussion forums and bulletin boards) as only recently have ‘face to face online’ tools such as zoom and MS Teams been widely available. As online deliberation in the form of Citizens’ Assemblies is an emerging area of research there are limited academic studies on this specifically. However academics are working closely with practitioners and commissioning bodies to learn more about how best to run online Citizens’ Assemblies, using a range of technologies of participation including ‘face to face online’ tools. The growing wealth of resources produced by practitioner organisations are therefore also referred to here.

⁸ Lansdell 2020 - Catching a New Wave? Latest Deliberative Democracy Opportunities & Challenges for Local Authorities, Involve <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/catching-new-wave-latest-deliberative-democracy-opportunities-challenges> accessed 20/10/20

3. Review of research on the benefits of online deliberation in terms of learning, quality of discussion, inclusivity and other key factors

The central message of the research literature on online deliberation is that online deliberation is achievable and there are even some unique benefits of online deliberation, but for these benefits to be realised and for genuine deliberation to occur, important design issues must be addressed. Therefore when considering an online deliberation model it is important to underline that “the key ingredients of good deliberation, like respectful listening, clearly communicated information and a well-designed deliberation process remain as important as ever” (Ward 2020)⁹. This will help ensure that the process meets the definition of deliberation provided by Carson and Elstub (2019) quoted above, of participants becoming informed, considering other perspectives and reaching an agreed judgement or set of judgments (see Appendix 3 for practitioners’ perspectives on [setting standards for Citizens Assemblies both face to face and online](#)).

Scholars claim that running citizen deliberations online is entirely feasible (Strandberg & Grönlund 2018, Fishkin 2009, 29; Manosevitch 2010; Price 2009), whilst practitioners highlight that the shared newness of the online deliberation experience provides a level playing field for assembly members (Ellis 2020)¹⁰. A systematic review of research on online deliberation (Friess and Eilders 2015) notes that certain design issues are critical to the quality of online debates and the extent of deliberation achieved. These include issues related to moderation and facilitation amongst others. These themes, along with other important factors identified in the wider academic and practitioner literature, are discussed in the sections below.

3.1 Possibility for enhancing inclusivity and access:

The online deliberation process has advantages such as providing flexibility in its format and operation, along with the potential for lower running costs (see below). In particular there are logistical benefits linked to the geographies of participation such as transport issues.

‘...a major benefit of online discussion boards is that they essentially erode physical obstacles and allow people to engage in political conversations regardless of where they live and when they can find the time to participate.’ Grönlund et al. 2009: 189

Reduced travel would be a significant advantage for a dispersed county like Devon, where the face to face Citizens’ Assembly would have had enormous logistical challenges. In particular with the call for Devon Net Zero Assembly sessions to take place across the county, the logistical impact on transport would have been significant, together with a potential negative impact on members’ participation due to the time implications of a

⁹ Ward 2020 - Experiences of facilitating online: Innovating, adjusting and keeping things the same, Involve <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/experiences-facilitating-online-innovating-adjusting-and-keeping-things-same> accessed 06/10/20

¹⁰ Democratic Society Oct 2020 - Can we recreate the magic of a Citizens’ Assembly - online? - <https://www.demsoc.org/blog/creating-the-magic-an-online-citizens-assembly> accessed 13/10/20

dispersed multi-venue format. A reduction in the physical constraints of running an assembly, and constraints associated with participants', expert speakers' and facilitators' access and time could be a significant benefit for a large, rural county such as Devon (Grönlund et al. 2009, Strandberg & Grönlund 2018, Fishkin 2009, Manosevitch 2010, Price 2009). These findings are supported by the latest practitioner experiences of online deliberation that highlight its benefit in terms of the recruitment of expert witnesses and presenters (Involve 2020). Price (2009) affirms that engaging in online deliberation is more convenient and less costly, which may increase the participation of socially disadvantaged groups, who are less likely to own a car, for example.

Although issues of digital divides are important (discussed below in section 4.1) and a frequently cited concern with online democratic engagement is that existing inequalities in offline civic and political engagement may simply be replicated online (see Smith et al. 2013), there is also a school of thought that online participation may lead to more egalitarian discussions, with the semi-anonymous and online nature of encounters making those with less confidence more able to contribute and reducing the dominance of the most vocal individuals (Price 2006). This is something which is reflected in our own recent experiences of online teaching, with some students reporting that they feel less inhibited to speak out than in face to face contexts.

3.2 Flexible formats for covid-19 context:

The context of covid-19 has resulted in many individuals, community groups and other organisations developing a range of skills in using online conferencing technologies. Local authorities, businesses, event organisers and others are developing flexible formats for running online events, engagement processes and more. The flexibility of using synchronous (live) or asynchronous (e.g. pre-recorded, information or discussion based) approaches is enabling organisations to innovate in their engagement, consultation and deliberative processes. The jury is still out on the widespread development of digital skills in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic. Whilst some recent practitioner experiences point to the continued existence of a skills divide in digital technologies (Involve 2020), others refer to community groups developing online engagement skills and becoming more comfortable with digital technologies who had previously avoided online engagement processes (Lansdell 2020).

With this in mind we can begin to consider potential formats for an online Devon Net Zero Citizens' Assembly.

Synchronous live sessions could include:

- Live online presentations with Q&A sessions
- Live online debates between panels of experts
- Live online testimony from service users, members of the public or experts by experience
- Live online group discussions
(all delivered on Zoom or MS Teams, with chat function enabled and other digital tools used for interactivity, and professional facilitation of the discussions)

Asynchronous activities could include:

- Pre-recorded lectures, presentations
- Discussion forums for participants and between participants and expert witnesses
- Bulletin boards with information to view in advance
- Short films or documentaries
- Use of collaboration platforms/ microsites
- Microgroups meeting online (e.g. Zoom) to discuss their learning between main sessions

Expert facilitation would be essential to ensure all these tools are deployed in a civil manner and with assembly members' equal ability to have their voices heard. All of the above (synchronous or asynchronous activities) can be enhanced by the use of interactive digital tools such as whiteboards, word clouds and online voting (see section 5.2), although digital tool overload is something which should be avoided.

3.3 Encouraging Learning and Political Engagement:

Knowledge gained and opinion changes have been observed in online deliberations which underscores the importance of exploring new knowledges during the deliberation process. Successful online deliberations have been shown to extend 'participants' repertoire of arguments, introduce them to new perspectives and lead to shifts in preferences' (Coleman & Moss 2012:9). Based on a Deliberative Polling research project Iyengar et al 2005 found that online deliberation has the potential to make participants significantly more informed and knowledgeable. Their study simulated making participants more knowledgeable about US presidential election nomination candidates via online deliberation. The process involved participants reading briefing materials and having 5 hours of online deliberation spread over a few weeks. Findings included participants becoming more knowledgeable about candidates and evaluating material on election policy issues to a significantly greater degree. These findings are supported by Grönlund et al. (2009) who found that participants' opinions changed as a result high quality online deliberation in their experimental online Citizens' Assembly that considered whether there should be another nuclear power station in Norway. On the other hand, a large scale experimental study of asynchronous online discussion forums in the UK by Smith et al. (2013) found less evidence of opinion change, with only weak shifts in preferences. A key finding in this study was that those who do not engage in discussions (i.e. 'lurkers' who watch but do not post) are even less likely to change their opinions. The authors conclude that for any preference shift to occur (even a weak one) "active engagement appears to be critical".

Other scholars have found that online deliberation appears to develop political engagement, increase social trust, community engagement, and voting (Price & Cappella 2002). Their research highlighted that by engaging in online deliberations on political issues in the US, participants were more likely to take part in community activities, such joining a community association, doing jury service and to vote. These academic findings on online deliberation are supported by latest practitioner thinking that see well run online citizens' assemblies enabling high quality deliberation that extend participants' knowledge (Involve 2020).

3.4 Cost savings & environmental benefits:

Research has suggested that online deliberations can be conducted at lower cost in comparison to face to face events (Rhee and Kim, 2009, Strandberg & Grönlund 2018, Gerwin 2020)¹¹. In contrast, latest practitioner evidence highlights that significant costs remain and should not be under-estimated (Involve 2020). Savings can be made on travel costs and potential overnight accommodation for participants and guest speakers, venue hire and catering. However, honorariums for participants would still need to be provided to compensate their time and potential loss of earnings, and the costs of facilitating the deliberative events and processes are not likely to be reduced. Indeed, there will be additional costs associated with online engagement such as providing equipment or training to participants, or for specialist software and hardware for those running or designing the events, and it is likely that even more work will have to be undertaken in the design phase to ensure that technologies, resources and activities maximise quality of learning, discussion and inclusion.

One of the limitations of deliberative public engagement exercises more generally is that they are considered expensive and resource intensive compared to some other forms of democratic engagement, which limits their institutionalisation and wider use by central government, local councils and other public bodies. In the long term *online* deliberation may represent a more affordable means of conducting public deliberation which could be continued in a post-covid environment should it prove to work well. Purchases of technical equipment such as hardware and software are one off costs as the items can be re-used in future deliberation events, and updated as needed and according to budgets, or could potentially be hired/ borrowed and returned.

The environmental footprint of an online assembly is likely to be much lower than that of a traditional face to face event due to the lack of travel to and from venues, with the majority of activity being conducted in people's own homes or in local office premises such as workplaces or community halls.

Summary of benefits:

In summary, there are several benefits associated with online deliberative public engagement activities that have been reported in research and in practitioner reports: (i) Online formats can have inclusivity benefits and facilitate access for a wider range of participants; (ii) they may encourage experimentation with innovative and creative methods of communication, information provision and platforms for debate; (iii) they have been shown to facilitate learning of participants, improve knowledge and are capable of producing shifts in opinion; (iv) they may have some cost benefits in comparison to face to face deliberation events and are likely to have environmental benefits; (v) online deliberation can lead to greater civic and political involvement and the development of social trust.

Involve network of deliberative democracy practitioners concluded in October 2020 that:

¹¹ Gerwin 2020 - Designing an online citizens' assembly, Participo <https://medium.com/participo/designing-an-online-citizens-assembly-a-practitioner-perspective-2c87122e1af2> accessed 06/10/20

‘Online platforms have had a positive impact on participant experiences, allowing continued engagement between sessions. This has been really successful at keeping momentum going and gaining a rich level of detailed data from participants. It has also brought participants closer together as they use the portal to share photos and stories.’

Whilst running an online deliberation process presents a number of challenges (which will be explored in depth below) this section has set out the benefits it poses for The Devon Net Zero Citizens’ assembly. For The Devon Net Zero Citizens’ Assembly a prime benefit is a very practical one: an online format solves the logistical challenge of running geographically dispersed, multi-venue, face to face assembly meetings which would be required to ensure the inclusivity of different parts of Devon.

4. Review of research on the challenges of online deliberation:

There are some acknowledged challenges in running online deliberative processes, however scholars and practitioners are increasingly identifying counter-measures to reduce the constraints to running effective deliberative processes online. In the sections below we discuss some of the challenges involved and specify counter-measures that can help mitigate these in order to obtain maximum value from online deliberation.

4:1 Access to Technologies of Online Deliberation:

The ease of participants' access to technologies is essential to consider, such as their access to hardware and differing abilities in computer skills, which can impact on their abilities and willingness to engage in an online deliberation. There are three main issues to consider when working to ensure assembly members can participate in online deliberation:

i- Technologies: smart phones, computers, tablets

Participants in online deliberation processes such as Citizens' assemblies need to be able to join in asynchronous and synchronous sessions via digital technologies such as smart phones, laptops or computers with audio-visual capabilities (cameras, microphones either inbuilt, plug-in or bluetooth). In the 2020 UK Climate Assembly online sessions some participants joined video conferencing meetings through a telephone based, dial-in process. There is no evidence as yet on whether those dialling in (and cannot experience the full audio-visual experience) are at a disadvantage or participate less than those participants using laptops, computers or smart phones to join. Practitioners are concerned about these disparities of participation and are recommending or implementing online Citizens' Assemblies and Juries where all participants are loaned digital technologies to provide a level playing field of participation (see counter measures below). Grönlund et al. (2009) assert that tackling technical access to digital technologies lies at the heart of running a successful online deliberation process.

ii- Skills/capabilities to use them (plus Tech support)

When considering access to online deliberation it is also essential to consider participants' differing computer skills or media habits that can affect their abilities to engage in online deliberation (Strandberg & Grönlund 2018). Despite the recent need to conduct our lives online in response to the covid-19 pandemic, a digital divide in terms of skills and experience with digital technologies, remains (Involve 2020). This can impact on who responds to an invitation to take part, which in turn the demographic spread of assembly members could form a bias towards younger populations, although this has not been a feature of recent research¹²:

‘...“computer-savvy” citizens could dominate online deliberations, violating the normative ideal of communicative inclusion.’ Strandberg & Grönlund 2018:3

¹² Within acceptable boundaries, this would be a counter measure against the prevalence of older age groups who engage with public policy consultations.

iii- Infrastructures: wifi/broadband signal quality

It is well known that households experience variable speeds and quality in access to broadband and mobile coverage in the UK and that this is exacerbated in rural communities such as Devon, creating a digital divide:

‘There can be no denying the enhanced challenges of rural connectivity delivery. With broadband, there is an inherent geographical challenge. Often, more difficult terrain and spread-out populations mean greater engineering challenges to overcome compared to those in densely populated, more commercially viable, urban areas.’ Carmichael 2020¹³

Tackling technical access to digital technologies is central to running a successful online deliberation process. In Grönlund et al.’s (2009) study that compared face to face vs online deliberation processes considering whether Norway should build a new nuclear power plant found that reliable digital technologies were essential for online deliberation. When the technology fails, trust can be lost amongst participants which can erode trust in the whole process. In Grönlund et al.’s (2009) study participants left the process due to lack of effective digital technologies, including access to broadband. Therefore, functioning digital technologies with effective backup and technical support is of utmost importance for online experiments.

Counter-measures to challenges of accessing digital technologies for Online Deliberation:

Practitioners running current online Citizens’ Assemblies and Juries recommend that participants are equipped with internet accessing technologies and equipment such as tablets with LTE internet (‘Long Term Evolution’ - providing 4G wireless broadband), so that participants’ will not need to have a router at home (Shared Future 2020, Involve 2020). In addition, providing members with webcams and headsets could help provide a level playing field for engagement. Practitioners recommend making equipment available for all who need them. However if a standardised approach to the technologies of participation is taken, i.e. all members use the same technologies, equipment and digital platforms, it will be simpler to provide training for members to use these resources, as well as easing the technical support process whilst the assembly is in progress. Whilst this would be a significant up front cost, this equipment could be re-used in multiple online public participation processes.

4.2 Quality of deliberation

One of the challenges posed by online formats for public deliberation is to ensure that the quality of debate and deliberation meets the standards of face to face deliberation, and the criteria for genuine deliberation, e.g. those identified by Elstub and Carson (2019:2) of (a)

¹³ Carmichael 2020 - The UK’s digital story of unequal outcomes has been laid bare by the pandemic, Politics Home, available at <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/the-uks-digital-story-of-unequal-outcomes-has-been-laid-bare-by-the-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR1T7FAe2JaeaOD8C1k9dY9Eifl131rNdHwX5XopcG0nTMc9aBh6GGEtilf4> accessed 02/11/20

becoming well informed about the topic, (b) considering different perspectives, in order to (c) arrive at a public judgement (not opinion) about "what can we strongly agree on?"

Strandberg & Grönlund (2018: 6) assert that 'there are still rather few studies actually measuring discursive quality in online deliberation'. They also note that there is disagreement amongst scholars about: 'which indicators... best gauge the deliberative quality of online deliberations'. However, they note that 'some common denominators do appear to exist...rationality, equality, reciprocity, reasoned justifications, civility are often used.' An outstanding and important question is, can these ideals be achieved online, and how best can this be done?

We have seen in section 3.3 that there is good evidence that participants in online deliberation can and do learn and gain knowledge; but what is the evidence on whether people listen to the opinions of others, act with civility and provide reasoned justifications in order to reach conclusions? From the empirical research we have reviewed, it appears to be possible for quality deliberation to occur online, providing certain conditions are met. Key amongst these are facilitation and moderation.

Ensuring civility and equal participation: Facilitation and moderation

Facilitators can play several roles in online deliberations such as supporting participants' learning journey and in maintaining the quality and civility of discussions through moderation (Strandberg & Grönlund 2018, Grönlund et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2013). Strandberg & Grönlund 2018 found that facilitated discussions prevent opinion polarization whereas a lack of facilitation results in examples of severe opinion polarization. Facilitation is crucial for ensuring that everyone has an equal say and that individuals are not dominating discussion.

Scholars see moderation practices as having significant positive impacts on the quality of online deliberative discussion. Moderation practices can range from a form of pre-moderation (where written contributions are screened and some are prohibited) or post-moderation (where written posts are removed) (Coleman & Moss 2012). In addition, a skilled moderator can police the tone of discussion and facilitate the discussion by inviting contributions:

'They can recruit new participants to join deliberation, introduce new topics, encourage alternate viewpoints, and respond to participants' questions and complaints. As such, moderators may be viewed as important "democratic intermediaries," in Edwards's (2002) terms, which promote and enhance the deliberative quality of discussion.' Coleman & Moss 2012:8

One concern that is sometimes raised with online deliberation as compared to face to face deliberation is the greater possibility of participants making offensive remarks or engaging in uncivil behaviour. However this risk can be mitigated with careful design and moderation. Smith et al. (2013) found very little evidence of 'flaming' or inflammatory comments being made in an asynchronous discussion forum where controversial topics were discussed, which they put down partly to the use of a moderator, clear rules of engagement, and also

to the fact that the forum was introduced by a Secretary of State, which would have set a tone of seriousness and importance.

Embedding learning and quality of discussion: Synchronous and asynchronous sessions

There is debate amongst scholars around whether synchronous or asynchronous online sessions are better for stimulating quality deliberative discussions. Synchronous sessions take place in 'real time' whereas asynchronous sessions occur over a period of time, allowing participants to dip in and out of debates and discussion. Overall, evidence points towards asynchronous activity as promoting better quality deliberation, as highlighted in Friess & Eilders' (2015) systematic review of online deliberation and research by Strandberg & Grönlund 2018:4 who argue that 'online deliberation is more likely to be of a higher discussion quality when conducted in an asynchronous way.' One reason, as Janssen and Kies (2005) note, may be that synchronous discussion forums can result in 'small talk' and jokes at the expense of deliberation. Other scholars affirm that asynchronous sessions allow participants more time to reflect and have time to justify their contributions (Janssen & Kies, 2005, p. 321). A further benefit of asynchronous activity is that participants have more options about *when* to participate (Janssen & Kies, 2005; Coleman & Moss 2012), which can have major inclusivity benefits for those with work or caring responsibilities. This could apply both to the citizen participants and those who are invited to give presentations or contributions. Practitioner guidance has noted how 'microsites' (online engagement platforms) provide a good opportunity for asynchronous engagement to take place between live sessions (Involve 2020).

However, it should be noted that many of the research studies which explore asynchronous versus synchronous online activity were conducted at a time when predominantly text-based approaches were used, i.e. asynchronous online bulletin boards and discussion forums vs synchronous chat rooms. Synchronous activity online now includes face to face engagement via platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams. These forums are very different in nature to chat rooms that have a text only format, and with cameras turned on, participants can see each other's visual cues and body language which brings them closer to an offline experience, while the lack of anonymity and face to face element may increase civility and listening, and encourage debate.

Furthermore, despite the noted benefits of asynchronous learning activity and debate in terms of deliberative quality, there are also many benefits of 'live' synchronous sessions, particularly for promoting a sense of community, excitement and energy in discussions, as well as real time opportunities to quiz experts and discuss materials that have been viewed asynchronously. Practitioners have suggested that activities which promote a sense of shared experience and belonging, such as sharing mugs or snacks can help create a sense of occasion (Involve 2020). Live, online activity of this nature where participants engage simultaneously in a shared experience may provide important mutual learning and bonding benefits.

Overall, a mix of methods of online engagement is now possible and synchronous and asynchronous methods may complement one another quite well. For an online Citizens' Assembly, small group sessions are likely to be an important part of the online deliberation phase, as suggested by Gerwin (2020):

“Small group conversations are essential for the online deliberation phase. Facilitators have an important role to play, such as collecting insights from small-group breakouts and sharing them between groups. The aim here is to ensure that knowledge spreads evenly amongst participants”.

However asynchronous activity between sessions can be used by participants to follow up on the discussions from the online sessions, ask further questions to other participants, thus deepening and embedding their understanding, and potentially also sustaining interest and the momentum of the learning and deliberation process.

Measures to ensure deliberative quality

Several measures have been identified promote the deliberative quality of discussion. These include expert facilitation, appropriate group size to ensure everyone has a chance to speak and be heard (i.e. not too big), moderation to police the tone of discussions and check on uncivil content, use of asynchronous activities that allow participants the time to reflect and adjust their opinions in response to learning new information or hearing different views but also the use of live face to face online discussions to provide a different type of discussion and debate.

Summary of Challenges and Risks:

Some of the main challenges of online deliberation are technical and these issues are rapidly being addressed by practitioners working in the field. Whilst a digital divide is still a reality in rural Devon, online Citizens’ Assemblies and Juries taking place elsewhere are deploying digital technological equipment and technical support to create inclusive processes. With a clear strategy in place for addressing these issues, the Devon Net Zero Citizens’ Assembly will be able operate effectively via an online format.

Ensuring quality of deliberation is another key challenge. However there is nothing inherent about the online medium that makes high quality deliberation unattainable. What is critical are the conditions of the discussion. Quality deliberation can occur when discussion spaces are well organised and facilitated, carefully moderated, and designed to ensure inclusiveness, civility and learning. It must however be acknowledged that in online environments the naturalistic flow of conversation that occur in face to face settings is hard to replicate. However, using face to face online formats moves a step close to this and these formats can be used fruitfully alongside other asynchronous formats which can generate good learning outcomes and facilitate reflection.

5. Other important considerations

5:1 Procuring the Sample:

In face to face and online Citizens' assemblies alike, a random sample of people are brought together to represent a microcosm of the whole population. Other measures in the procurement process are also taken to ensure that a diversity of views is represented in the mini-public. From face to face to online Citizens' Assemblies, there is little divergence of approaches. Therefore, points made in our 2019 Rapid review still stand:

'An important principle of Citizens' assemblies is the use of randomisation in sample procurement. Ideally, everyone should have an equal chance of participating, with a random sample selected from the entire population of interest (e.g. all adult citizens of a County or District, depending on the geographical unit of interest). Those who are randomly selected are then approached to take part on a voluntary basis. Of those who respond positively to the invitation, a subsample of the desired size is then selected with stratification conducted as appropriate.' (Devine-Wright & Moseley, 2019:15)

However there are specific challenges of recruiting for an online Citizens' assembly. Grönlund et al. (2009) found that they had a low take up of invitations to join the online Citizens' assembly '...In the online mode, only 2.5 percent volunteered initially'. The digital technologies used for recruitment may be a factor shaping this lower take up as:

'Each person had to log on to our website manually. This requires technical skills and motivation and could result in skewed distributions, both demographically and in terms of political interest.' Grönlund et al. 2009: 193

This can result in a skewing of the sample towards younger, male and more technically competent assembly members. The authors found that sending out reminders to sign up for the online citizens' assembly did result in a higher take up. It should be noted that this experiment was conducted over a decade ago and competency in digital skills has improved in recent times, particularly during the covid-19 crisis.

A central issue to consider when setting up The Devon Net Zero Citizens' Assembly is legitimacy which is often established via representativeness. Therefore the numbers of assembly members, along with demographic indicators, such as where they live, is extremely important (Tarling, Devine-Wright & Williams 2018). Carson 2017 considers these issues for deliberative mini-publics and asserts that stratified random sampling as a method of recruitment is important in order to create as inclusive and diverse an assembly as possible. Recruitment to the assembly is essentially voluntary and therefore whilst principles of inclusion and diversity must be established in the process of sample procurement, the actual composition of assembly members may waver from an absolute representation of Devon publics.

For recruiting to the Devon Citizens' Assembly, we recommend that invitations are sent by post to a random sample of using the Royal Mail postal directory, seeking expressions of interest. Those interested should be provided with a range of means to register their

interest (e.g. email, phone, online). Reminder invitations may be necessary. A short survey of those interested can be created to collect basic demographic data to ensure a broadly representative sample of the key characteristics considered important to be reflected in a Devon Citizens' Assembly (see our previous Rapid Review, Devine-Wright and Moseley 2019 for more details). Frequency of internet usage should be considered as an additional screening variable, to ensure that the sample is not dominated by those who are more frequent internet users.

It should be noted that online processes may not work so well with a large number of participants (the face to face Devon Assembly originally envisaged up to 100 participants). This may well be an unmanageable number to take part in an online Citizens' Assembly, depending on how it is organised. The Adur and Worthing Online Citizens' Assembly will involve 45 participants (note that this area had a total of approximately 800,000 residents in 2011, Census data¹⁴), while recent online Citizen's Juries have tended to include around 20 members (e.g. Leeds and Kendal). The UK Climate Assembly had over 100 participants, but this Assembly began as a face to face process before Covid, and moved online part way through (see Appendix 1: figs 1 - 4).

Working out the optimum number of participants in the Devon Citizens' Assembly is challenging. There are several issues to take into account: the number and complexity of topics that the assembly will be asked to address; the budget available; the minimum regarded to be a legitimate number of participants from certain geographical areas; and the quality of facilitation brought to bear during the Assembly. Taking all of these factors into consideration, we would tentatively recommend as a minimum 60 assembly members with sufficient number of trained facilitators to operate as 7/8 small groups who each consider all of the topics put to the assembly. In terms of geographical representativeness, one option could be to recruit a total of 70 participants, comprising 10 assembly members from each area of Devon (i.e. Plymouth, Torbay, Exeter, plus the 7 other district councils). Whilst this would over-represent rural areas in terms of statistics, it may satisfy concerns that rural areas will not be adequately represented and ensure that the principle of inclusion is fully met, particularly given that the Assembly members will spend considerable time working in small groups of 7-8 individuals. Added to a consideration of geography, ensuring inclusion of Devon citizens from lower socio-economic grades is also strongly recommended as these members of society are often under-represented in conventional policy engagement processes, yet potentially are the most impacted by large scale changes such as energy infrastructure siting or added costs to transport/food production/ electricity supply etc.

5:2 Design: Platforms, Digital Skills and Equipment:

Models for conducting online deliberation have until recently copied the format of face to face processes. However Strandberg & Grönlund 2018 assert that experimentation with formats and models is required to explore further the optimal online process. It is clear that this is already beginning to happen, and significant learning and practice wisdom has been generated and accumulated since Covid.

¹⁴ <https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/media/Media,104778,smxx.pdf>

Digital Skills training: A pre-assembly process to deliver Digital Skills training and review participants' access to equipment is becoming a common feature of online Citizens' assemblies and juries (see The Kendal Climate Jury⁵). It is recommended by practitioners to have a two week programme of digital skills training. This will encourage a level playing field in terms of participants' knowledge of digital technologies, equipment and software. Basic features of this training should include: how to access the internet, how to download online conferencing software, how to join a meeting, how to mute and unmute and to share screens etc. In conjunction, this training phase is also an opportunity for participants to get to know each other and to begin to share their experiences of being an assembly member. The training and familiarisation phase will help less digitally experienced participants to become comfortable with speaking and interacting online. Volunteers or staff can work directly with assembly members to assist the training phase and then provide ongoing technical support (Gerwin 2020).

Making use of digital tools:

There are a range of tools available for assisting with engagement of participants and information sharing during online deliberative processes. Involve have collated information on 52 digital tools for collaboration. Their resource includes an exploration of digital tools based on a categorisation according to 12 different uses or functions¹⁵:

- Argument visualisation
- Co-drafting
- Commenting / feedback
- Crowd-mapping
- Decision-making
- Discussion forum
- Ideas generation
- Interactive Q&A
- Interactive whiteboard
- Knowledgebase
- Video-conferencing
- Voting / prioritisation

(See Appendix 4)

Whilst there are many tools available, these should be used sparingly so as not to overwhelm participants, many of whom may be inexperienced with them. We suggest choosing 1 or 2 tools maximum that require participant use for each phase of the process (e.g. learning, discussion, decision-making). Trained facilitators, however, may be able to make use of a wider range of these to provide summaries of information, argument visualisation, results of votes etc.

Design of platforms:

Research on online deliberation has identified a number of online practices and architectures, which include social as well as technical features, that make deliberation

¹⁵ For definitions, see: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/digital-tools-participation-where-start>

more likely to work. The formatting of platforms is important to encode visual cues and assist the flow of deliberation. Words and visual elements can help ‘to “configure” a particular form of the use of the technology. For example, they can encourage participants to adopt forms of civility and perhaps even restraint that are consistent with common understandings of deliberation (Coleman & Moss 2012). Grönlund et al. (2009:193) in an experimental online deliberation process that explored views on a new nuclear power plant in Norway, specifically avoided the over use of text-dominated approaches which could reduce the civility of engagements. Their approach involved: "using video images, sound and moderators" ..."we aimed at improving deliberative quality and making the online mode more comparable with the face-to-face mode." Grönlund et al. (2009:193)"

New directions on the design of online deliberation are focusing on how innovation in argument mapping and visualisation can improve the deliberation process and avoid potential ‘cognitive overload’:

‘Maps that can visualize the logic of the various positions and arguments within a deliberative exchange. These maps make it supposedly easier for interlocutors to understand and chart their way through large and complex public discussions.’
Coleman & Moss 2012:9

These argument visualisation mapping tools allow participants and facilitators to see how arguments and evidence are interlinked, and where there may be areas of agreement and divergence (Parsons 2019; Hughes 2020). Various tools are available, some more complex than others but simple online mapping style tools and whiteboards can be used to serve a similar function.

5:3 Session formats:

When running an online deliberative process and considering the potential to deploy a mix of live and pre-recorded sessions, there is great versatility in session formats.

Practitioners also advise that all sessions should be kept relatively short. Guidance varies but most guidance suggest online sessions could be 1-2 hours long. Longer sessions such as half days could be used, providing there are sufficient breaks. These sessions, which can be organised in small groups, will be essential for the learning and deliberation phases, and may be related to participants’ discussion of material. These discussion sessions could occur at regular intervals over several weeks or months. Gerwin (2020), for instance, suggests sessions taking place 2–4 times a week over a two month period. Other, national, online Citizens’ Assemblies (e.g. in Scotland and England) have taken place over longer periods but meeting less frequently (e.g. 6 weekends over 5 months in Scotland). In comparison to face to face Citizens’ Assemblies, online assemblies are likely to have shorter meetings but meet more often, to ensure sufficient time for coverage of the core themes (see Appendix 1: fig 4).

Keeping session formats simple helps increase the accessibility of the process. To support these aims, it has been suggested that digital tools such as virtual whiteboards should only

be used if all participants can see them, access them and are comfortable in using them (Allan 2020).

Live whole-group sessions are useful for question-and-answer with experts and stakeholders. During these Q&A sessions participants can break into small groups to discuss the material before reconvening in the whole-group plenary. When running small groups online, it is important to follow the same good practices that take place in face to face assemblies. It has been recommended that small groups/break groups should have around 7–8 people per group, plus a lead facilitator and a co-facilitator to ensure the quality of debate is maintained and everyone’s voice is heard (Gerwin 2020).

As discussed in sections 3.2 and 4.2, there are benefits to both synchronous asynchronous activity; a mix of both is likely to support effective learning, reflection and deliberation, whilst also allowing some flexibility for participants to view some of the online material in their own time. This suggestion for a mixed approach is echoed in recent practitioner thinking (e.g. Hughes 2020).

5:4 Facilitation and Moderation:

The importance of facilitation and moderation has already been highlighted as necessary to ensure deliberative quality. However facilitators can also use a number of tools or techniques to encourage the learning phase of the processes. This may include providing offline or gamified tasks, such as creating lists or voting on what information the participants’ most enjoyed or found most interesting. They can also facilitate a study group call where participants can share their learnings (Gerwin 2020).

Group discussions online may require a slightly different forms of facilitation as compared to face to face facilitation. Ward (2020) notes a tendency in online group deliberation for participants to direct their comments at the facilitator rather than each other. He suggests one way to overcome this is to invite participants themselves to start off discussion topics and to ask them to invite someone else to speak after they have. He also notes the importance of allowing room for silence between participants, since they seem to have a greater tendency to wait longer to speak so as to avoid cutting other people off.

5:5 Providing information to Assembly members:

For online Citizens’ Assemblies and Juries, many practitioners emphasise the importance of having a bespoke website for members that functions as an easily accessible space to host all online material for consideration, private and moderated discussion forums and more. Hosting all material in one place is an important step in taking a systematic and standardised approach to the assembly process. Kendal Climate Jury is using a facebook page for this, whilst Adur and Worthing have a bespoke microsite which is part of the council’s website^{5,6}.

Within an online deliberative setting there is some evidence that just reading material on the topic under discussion is not sufficient to alter participants’ viewpoints (Smith et al.

2009). To achieve the effective embedding of information a variety of techniques are required such as watching recorded videos of experts debating issues, being able to pose questions to an expert panel and more. An increase in knowledge amongst online assembly members has been observed but has not been rigorously studied (Strandberg & Grönlund 2018). Therefore information should be presented in a range of formats. It should also be recognised that people have different reading preferences and for longer documents, some people may prefer a physical copy to an electronic copy. Draft recommendations and their supporting analysis could be printed as a booklet by the organisers and delivered to participants for personal reflection before decision making (Gerwin 2020). Overall, however, it is recommended that material for the learning process should be short and easily digestible and this would apply to both synchronous and asynchronously provided information (Gerwin 2020, Allan 2020, Ward 2020¹⁶).

Issues such as literacy and language factors, visual and hearing impairments should also be taken into consideration. For some participants, electronic screen readers, braille, captions, BSL or interpreters for instance may be required (Involve 2020). These should be available to all who need them.

5:6 Ensuring Inclusivity:

(Also see sections 4:1; 5:2)

Digital participation requires sustained engagement work and processes of building trust and the development of good relationships amongst assembly members, facilitators, and organisers. Linked to this, commissioners and organisers need to understand who is, and who is not, participating, and to take steps to understand clearly the reasons for this (McBride & Zacharzewski 2020)¹⁷.

“In Scotland, following in the steps of a Digital Participation Charter and Scottish Government funding that has supported projects to tackle digital exclusion since 2014, COVID-19 ramped up a response from cross-sector collaborators to organise support for those most at risk and digitally excluded, coordinated through the No One Left Behind Digital Scotland programme.”

Mitigating digital exclusion will be important in a rural county such as Devon. Steps should be taken to ensure that it is clear to anyone who wants to participate that they will be provided with the training and equipment needed to allow them to participate fully. Once recruited, all participants should be supported to ensure they can play a full part and are supported with any technical glitches that occur which impact on their participation.

Once people are recruited, there are many further steps that can be taken to promote inclusion. Involve (2020) in their Inclusion and Wellbeing checklist outline some key

¹⁶ Allen 2020 - How we moved climate assembly UK online
<https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/project-update/how-we-moved-climate-assembly-uk-online>
accessed 06/10/20

¹⁷ McBride & Zacharzewski 2020 - Digital solutions can complement real world participation — but mustn't exclude, Participo Series <https://medium.com/participo/digital-solutions-can-complement-real-world-participation-but-mustnt-exclude-b52403793797> accessed 07/10/20

principles for inclusion in online deliberative engagement. These include measures to make people feel welcome and included (e.g. opportunities to build trust through more informal online interactions, e.g. a virtual coffee break), assistance with digital confidence and the building of confidence in participants' 'online voices', noting down who is missing from online sessions and following up on this, agreeing on conversation guidelines to ensure that group discussions are not dominated by certain individuals, technical support during online sessions, and ensuring diversity in the support and facilitation team. They also note the importance of recognising that people will be logging in from home and may have other home-based responsibilities and that they may have differing working space limitations at home. Finally, they suggest designing the sessions with mental health and wellbeing in mind, acknowledging that online participation can be draining and that sessions should be short enough with sufficient breaks and opportunities for informal interactions.

5:7 Wellbeing of participants and safeguarding:

Detailed discussion of and learning about climate change can sometimes create anxiety or even what is sometimes labelled 'climate grief'. For this reason, public deliberation events often include spaces or rooms for quiet reflection, time out or even support, should participants need this. However, it is very difficult to create such a safe or quiet space in an online environment. The UK Climate Assembly when it moved online provided an online quiet room but have reported that little use was made of this by participants. It is important to consider how, in an online environment, support can be provided if participants feel overwhelmed or unsettled by any aspect of the process. This could perhaps be via a buddy system, facilitators who are designated with de-briefing roles, or a whiteboard or discussion forum where participants can express feelings of through text, or even pictures or sound.

Allan (2020), reflecting on the move to online of the UK Climate Assembly, has outlined safeguarding issues that are important in the online environment, firstly, protecting the full identity of participants through using first names only (eg 'Joe 'or 'Joe B'); secondly, conducting due diligence over data protection issues associated with different platforms; and third, safeguarding measures for any participants who are under 18, such as specifying a minimum number of people that should be present in a virtual break out room.

Involve's (2020) online inclusion and wellbeing checklist suggests some other important safeguarding issues relevant to online face to face formats such as Zoom. These include disabling private chat features for public participants, disabling recording, reviewing password access and the security of platforms, and asking participants not to take pictures of their screen. They also note that DBS checks should be used for any facilitators moderating small groups with participants aged under 18. To enhance wellbeing, they suggest including opportunities for physical movement, flagging up of relevant support lines, and a contact for facilitators who may feel a participant is in need of support as well as creating a welcoming online space.

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APPENDICES:

1.

Recruitment Case Study: [Climate Assembly UK](#)

In the UK 2020 Climate Assembly the 108 members were selected through a process known as 'sortition' or a 'civic lottery' in order to be representative of the UK population.

- 30,000 letters were sent to people from across the country inviting them to take part in Climate Assembly UK.
- 80% of those receiving an invitation were randomly selected from every UK household address in Royal Mail's Postcode Address File.
- 20% were randomly selected from the most deprived areas within the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File, this was because response rates are estimated to be lower from these postcodes.
- Invitees were then asked to respond and stratified sampling was undertaken by a computer on this pool of respondents to select the 110 participants.
- This representative sampling was based the UK population aged 16 years and over in terms of:

Age – Gender - Educational qualification – Ethnicity - Where in the UK they live - Whether they live in an urban or rural area - Attitudes to climate change - The computer also ensured that a maximum of one person from any single household was selected to participate

Figure 1 Recruitment Case Study - Climate Assembly UK

Recruitment Case Study: Scottish Climate Assembly

- **Invited to join via a civic lottery:** Letters inviting people to register their interest in taking part were randomly sent to selected households. Anyone aged 16 or over living in a household that receives an invitation to apply then applied by telephone or online.
- Respondents then completed a form answering questions to ensure that the selection process is broadly representative of the wider Scottish population. This is based on 8 criteria to ensure that the assembly is composed of a diverse mix of individuals who can learn about, understand, and connect with people who have different backgrounds and experiences:

-Age – Gender - Household income – Ethnicity – Geography – Rurality – Disability - Attitude towards climate change

Figure 2 -Recruitment Case Study -Scottish Climate Assembly

Recruitment Case Study: [Kendal Climate Change Online Citizens' Jury](#)

The recruitment process for the Kendal Climate Change Online Citizens' Jury was agreed by the project oversight panel. The oversight panel agreed that the profile of the 20 people selected should intentionally reflect local diversity in terms of gender, age, geography, deprivation and attitude to climate change.

- Shared Futures worked with the [Sortition Foundation](#) to design the recruitment process. The Sortition Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that promotes the use of stratified, random selection in decision-making.
- Various sources were used to obtain the representative data, including [ONS 2011 Census](#) for age, gender and ethnicity, [IoD 2019](#) for indices of deprivation and [IPSOS Mori 2019](#) for attitudes to climate change.
- The Sortition Foundation randomly selected and invited 4,000 addresses from the Royal Mail's address database.
- The recruitment letter explained the Citizens' Jury and invited those interested to either complete a simple online form or use a freephone number to register their interest.
- 250 people applied to join the jury, which is a better than typical response rate for such processes.
- 20 people were recruited.

Figure 3 Recruitment Case Study –Kendal CJ

Online Citizens' Assembly Case Study: [Adur and Worthing Climate Assembly](#)

Recruitment:

Letters were sent out to 8,000 households in Adur & Worthing. The addresses were randomly selected through a process of sortition by Sortition Foundation.

Online Deliberation Process:

Over four months, from September to December 2020 45 residents will meet online to listen to evidence, deliberate, and make recommendations that will go to Adur & Worthing Councils in Spring 2021. Due to covid-19 and government socially distancing guidelines Adur & Worthing Councils did not want to delay important discussions about climate change, so they have decided to hold the Climate Assembly online.

Online Deliberation Format:

Assembly members will meet online over five Saturdays between September and December:

- Learning and discussion being facilitated in 'micro groups' outside of the Assembly's Saturday meetings.
- The Climate Assembly is an open and transparent process, and information (including the presentations by experts, data from a recent questionnaire and other lived experience insight) is being shared publicly via the Adur & Worthing Councils' website.
- An independent advisory group is overseeing the Assembly process.

Figure 4 -Online CA Case Study – Adur & Worthing CA

2. Examples of Digital Democracy (i.e. non-deliberative processes)

Nesta's 2017 Report on Digital Democracy explores the work of pioneering innovations in digital democracy in Europe and beyond. However the case studies, which fall into the e-government category of online deliberation, highlight how the rapid pace of innovation has changed online deliberation in the past few years:

- a) [Decide Madrid](#), a platform for public participation in decision making, was launched by Madrid city council. Decide Madrid has four main functions: proposals and votes for new local laws; debates; participatory budgeting; and consultations. Decide Madrid's participation platform has been in operation since September 2015. Since then it has registered tens of thousands of proposals and projects, two citizen consultations have been held (in February and October 2017) and two editions of participatory budgets in which citizens have decided on how to spend 160 million euros of municipal budgets.

Decide Madrid uses free software that other institutions can make use of. It's

citizen participation platform uses 'CONSUL', which is free, open source software. This means that anyone can use the code, copy it, modify it and redistribute it.

- b) [Parlement et Citoyens](#) is an initiative developed by civic tech group, Cap Collectif, working closely with a number of French parliament representatives, to involve the public more closely in the law-making process before bills are submitted to parliament.
- c) The [Icelandic Pirates](#) are part of the Icelandic parliament winning 10 out of 63 parliamentary seats in 2016. The Pirates stood on a platform promoting authenticity, transparency, open debate and participation in the creation of party policy by anyone. Their political stance forms a countermeasure to the financial crisis and political corruption in Iceland. The blending of offline and online methods of engagement plays an important part in the party's efforts to achieve these goals.
- d) The [vTaiwan](#) process was established by a civil society movement called g0v, at the invitation of the Taiwanese Minister for Digital Affairs. It followed g0v's major role in the 2014 Sunflower Movement protests; started over a controversial trade agreement with China. The process was designed as a neutral platform to engage experts and relevant members of the public in large-scale deliberation on specific topics.
- e) The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies' LabHacker and eDemocracia: The [e-Democracia](#) portal was set up in 2009 by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, the aim being to make legislation more transparent, to improve citizens' understanding of the legislative process, and to make the chamber more accessible and interactive. Many of the experiments for the e-Democracia portal are conducted within the chamber's own innovation lab – 'LabHacker' – which hosted hackathons and collaborative pilots with civil society and parliamentary staff.
- f) The UK Parliament Select Committee's [Evidence Checks](#) invited citizens to scrutinise the evidence which underpins Government policy in specific areas to determine how robust that evidence is and to highlight where the gaps are. Evidence Checks have also since been undertaken by a number of Select Committees. Using simple web forum technology, the forum acts as a basic way of capturing written submissions that are published instantly.

3. Citizens' Assembly standards

Resource created by Involve for [setting standards for Citizens Assemblies](#)

Summary: The standards are organised into "essential" and "desirable" features of ten criteria:

1. Clear purpose
2. Sufficient time
3. Representative
4. Inclusive
5. Independent
6. Open
7. Generative learning

8. Structured deliberation
9. Collective decision-making
10. Evaluated

These are the essential features that are fundamental to running a citizens' assembly. The absence of any one of these features when running a CA would require a detailed justification and would only be warranted in exceptional circumstances. The desirable criteria are the additional features that we consider to be current good practice.

A pdf version of the standards will be attached to the Rapid Review.

4. Digital Tools for Collaboration

Resource produced by [Involve](#) which is a database of [52 digital tools](#) and their uses for online deliberation.

A CSV version of the table will be attached to the Rapid Review

The [Involve post on Digital tools](#) includes an exploration of the tools based on a categorisation according to 12 different uses or functions:

- Argument visualisation - Co-drafting - Commenting / feedback - Crowd-mapping
- Decision-making - Discussion forum - Ideas generation - Interactive Q&A - Interactive whiteboard – Knowledgebase - Video-conferencing - Voting / prioritisation