



Power Inquiry Sheffield

Event

Political Inclusion & Participation

“Have your say”

at

**Sheffield Hallam University,
The Stoddart Building, Arundel Gate, Sheffield S1**

Sunday 18th September 2005

Power Inquiry Sheffield Working Group

Nikki Ashworth,

Paul Lowen,

Wendy Stern, M.Sc.

Sarah Weyman

Email: sheffieldpowerinquiry@gmail.com

Copyright, 23 October 2005, All rights reserved, Power Inquiry Sheffield Working Group

Dedication and acknowledgements to our late Chairman, Paul Lowen

We are dedicating this, our first report, to our late Chairman, Paul Lowen, who passed away on 23rd March 2006, having been critically ill for a considerable while during 2005.

With great vision, Paul anticipated the Power Inquiry would continue as a major pressure group to encourage political involvement and participation. Our guiding light, Paul played a significant part in developing our strategy and thinking.

We were most fortunate to enjoy the benefit of his professional expertise to develop our survey questionnaire with co-author of 18 years, Wendy Stern. Together, they were instrumental in producing this report of our Event in September 2005 and set the standard for future publications.

Paul will be very sadly missed by us all with condolences to his family.

Contents

Page

Acknowledgements

5 PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7 PART II: EVENT FRAMEWORK

- Terms of Reference
- Focus
- Purpose
- Methods Used

9 PART III: ISSUES RAISED BY SPEAKERS

- Monitoring and Control of Inward Community; *Ruggie Johnson, Civil Rights Activist & Managing Director of The Monitoring Group North*
- Disability at Work; *Helen Greer, formerly a Higher Executive Officer with the DFES*
- Speech Impairment; *read by Helen Greer for Wendy Stern*
- Media, Politicians & Political Apathy *Jack Scott, Labour Party Activist*
- On-line Community & Single Issue Democracy Movements; *Joe Pritchard: IT Consultant*

16 PART IV: DEMOCRACY – OUR DEBATE

- Survey Analysis
- Issues and Concerns
- Potential Remedies
- Conclusion

20 **PART IV: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS;** *Paul Lowen & Wendy Stern*

Appendices

- 28 About the Power Inquiry Sheffield Event Organisers
29 Bibliography and Other References

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to everyone who helped us to make our Event and report possible, particularly:

- Alex Hudson for essential technical support
- Awards for All for active efforts in trying to fund our Event for £1600, Nat West Bank for exceptional speed in opening an account within 3 working days and not least Pam Giddy, Power Inquiry Director for having fully supported our funding application.
- Bano Murtuja, a Power Inquiry Commissioner for her helpful inputs on various planning issues and referrals in the early stages
- Community centres and Wha'agwan for promoting our Event
- Karen Kerr for very generously volunteering and arranging colleagues so we could offer a non-chargeable crèche.
- Sue Collett, Market Development Manager, Conference 21 of Sheffield Hallam University and her colleagues

We are also profusely grateful to our speakers Ruggie Johnson, Helen Greer, Jack Scott and Joe Pritchard as well as our participants for having generously given of their time, shared expertise and discussed concerns with us.

Helen Greer deserves particular mention for so very kindly being Wendy Stern's speaker and as kindly agreeing to stand in, on short notice, for a speaker unable to attend.

PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spirit of the Power Inquiry, our Event gave people the right to discuss their concerns on the issues affecting political participation and inclusion. Our report and findings are a synthesis of such discussions which we consider represents the essence of issues raised.

Submitting our report to the Power Inquiry, however, does not endorse political opinions or parties whether or not invited to speak.

Our speakers led the way and like our participants did not shirk contentious, often disregarded issues affecting the relevance of politicians and politics to everyday life.

Concerns raised a diversity of issues in particular the inability of MPs to control and manage the Public Sector's pre-set agenda. The remarkable synergy between our debate and questionnaire also reflected the speakers outlined and considered in our report as follows:

- Access, accessibility and invisible disabilities;
- Tick-box mentality to ethnic minorities and disability;
- Ability of umbrella organisations to avoid accountability of public funds
- Virtual imagery which does not exist in reality
- Seeming apathy to politics and increasingly poor election turnouts
- Lack of debate affecting, for example, the Iraq war and Education
- Poor practices in regulatory frameworks and bodies with particular regard to:
 - financial services
 - housing
 - freedom of information
 - data protection
 - information technology, software licensing and piracy
 - pharmaceutical industry
 - medical and legal profession
- Endemic breakdown of regulatory, compliance and enforcement systems intended to protect us from poor business practices.

Much of this was ascribed to the failure of the governors to involve or inform the governed in the why's or wherefore's of decisions before enactment.

Poor relations between politicians and media were seen to add little value with regard to the compelling need to find long-term solutions rather than a quick fix particularly regarding the major consideration of constitutional reform.

Solutions mooted by our Participants were only seen to be achievable if politicians accepted that transparency and accountability are essential to medical, legal or administrative systems, which must be seen to be fair, just and equitable. As it stood, deep concern was raised over the relationships between the Public, Private and Corporate Sectors.

It is therefore entirely fitting to consider the invaluable contribution, which the internet has made to politics and single issue politics.

Although our report is anecdotal in its nature, the anger on issues raised could not be ignored by all of those present during the debate.

PART II: EVENT FRAMEWORK

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Provide a forum for Sheffield's residents to have their say regarding political participation and inclusion for the Power Inquiry's investigations.

FOCUS

We asked our Event participants to consider the issues focused upon:

- those who control the lives we live and
- whether we care who these people are who control our lives?

PURPOSE

We held this Event to give people space to discuss issues affecting their political involvement, participation and inclusion for us to feed in to the Power Inquiry investigations.

Accordingly we have taken great pains to ensure our report represents the views expressed accurately without regard to political stance. Therefore our report is not to be construed as endorsing any political opinions or parties in attendance whether or not invited to speak at our Event.

On the contrary our report is a composition of ideas and issues discussed at our Event and focused on the survey questionnaire designed by our co-organisers, Paul Lowen and Wendy Stern.

This report, which is based upon issues raised by speakers and in debate when we opened up our Event to participants, therefore falls in to 4 main parts as follows:

- Part I: Executive Summary, Purpose, Methods and Focus
- Part II: Event Framework
- Part III: Issues Raised by Speakers
- Part IV: Democracy – Our Debate
- Part V Quantitative Analysis

METHODS USED

The basis of this report relies upon the inputs of our speakers and issues raised by our participants during the debate. We did not ask to see documentary evidence and all of the qualitative material is anecdotal.

In order to ensure a balanced political outlook we trawled widely for speakers and approached all of the local MPs; in the Sheffield area political representation is predominantly Labour with a strong representation of Cabinet Ministers.

We contacted all the main political parties: Conservatives, Lib Dems, Respect Party, Council Departments and Sheffield First Partnership for Regeneration. The Lib-Dem's enthusiastic response was unmatched by major parties or indeed any other organisations.

Speakers represented political views representing New Labour, Lib-Dems. We also had attendees from the Conservative Party, Respect Party and BNP, which led to a stimulating debate.

Wendy Stern's speech impairment prevented her contributing to the lively debate of our participants. We therefore add concerns, issues and potential solutions she wished to make in her statement on speech impairment (see p9-10) to identify the basis of her political disaffection.

Guest speakers represented various political views and parties but we stress they do not necessarily represent the policies of those political parties. The synopses of their talks are intended to give a flavour of the issues raised and are not complete transcripts. Conclusions may not be reached from any synopses for our speakers.

PART III: ISSUES RAISED BY SPEAKERS *(in order of appearance)*

Monitoring and Control of Inward Community;

Ruggie Johnson, Civil Rights Activist & Managing Director of The Monitoring Group North

Political disaffection is a major issue; we need to query the reason for our voting for politicians to elect them to Parliament because the outcome and their related activities has very little to do with the reality of people's lives.

In fact, politics is distant and invisible.

A particular concern is the way minority groups are excluded from funding and services delivered by umbrella organisations in Sheffield, indeed countrywide. Communities are becoming increasingly vocal over the poor standard of service and lack of delivery provided by the community umbrella organisations.

As fundamentally the Council and organisations recommend and allocate funding on a "tick box basis" for minorities. These organisations and groups have their own specific needs. The lack of accountability of £millions being put down without any real development plans is a serious issue that raises more questions than answers. The crucial question is how to free communications of umbrella organisations is also as problematical.

Minority ethnic communities feel excluded and the wider electoral system prevents them from playing an active part; the main perception is that ethnic minority communities are the afterthought with everyone and everything going back to normal after the elections.

Disability at Work

Helen Greer, Former DFES Higher Executive Officer on Disability at Work

My observation is that people get out what they put in. Society does not see me as relevant and the fact is I feel I am yet just another invisible statistic. Since developing M.E., I have had to fight for my rights; I do not feel I am of any use to an employer. This has not done anything for my self-esteem. My employer was not interested and did not care. As a disability, ME is the same as any other disability. I have had to work and have worked very hard to try to overcome difficulties. Disability is part of life for many people.

I feel that the Government needs to listen to the audience rather than having a pre-set agenda of how they want things to be. Although they are making the rights sounds in fact the images they push don't exist in reality.

In my case the Dept of Work & Pensions sent me to their Medical Centre to assess whether I can work after my GP certified that I am not fit to work. Since I had to finish work, I sit at home all day. I do not feel I am a safe driver because I have dizzy spells and am constantly exhausted. At home I use my laptop periodically and need regular breaks. I have highly irregular sleeping patterns and I can not manage the 9-5 existence of most people which most employers require.

The Government needs to create a working environment where people will listen and understand individual needs and provide 24 hour access so we have a more open, flexible system which will enable people to work in ways that best suits their needs. Most people do not want to be excluded from Society it is just the way that society, particularly at work, is structured thereby creating artificial barriers to prevent people from making an effective contribution.

Barriers only exist because they are put there. In many cases it seems to be a case of survival of the fittest, but that is not how today's society should operate; in order to be fully inclusive, everyone should have access to whatever they need to contribute to society as a whole.

Speech impairment: Mystery Shopping and Organisational Behaviour;

Statement by Wendy Stern and read by Helen Greer

As Wendy was unable to contribute in our Debate we have added her concerns to the end of this statement and attach an update of her recently published article regarding the legal system, legal advice and support (see Legal Aid: Debate or Debacle (pp 19-20)).

I have been very interested to hear Ruggie Johnson discuss the invisible exclusion of Sheffield's minority communities, Sheffield's black communities in particular.

As interesting is Helen Greer's report on disability in the workplace, which reflects my concerns over the handling of disability issues. For me it includes difficulties such as speech impairment. As one of an estimated 2,500,000 speech impaired people in the UK, I believe we are all treated in a similar manner.

In light of Sheffield First Regeneration recent statement at the Sheffield Forum 100 meeting in July 2005 which, in association with the City's major players, confirms its commitment to:

“Sheffield becoming a successful, distinctive city of European significance, with opportunities for all”. (*Sheffield Forum 100, July 2005*)

My report, “Legal Aid – Debate or Debacle” states my key concern. As a speech impaired person, I would be remiss if I failed to comment on the lack of access and accessibility for speech impaired people.

a) Speech impairment

I will therefore consider a few pertinent needs of speech-impaired people, which the Public Sector and Council have seemingly overlooked. Although some 2,500,000 people suffer with communications disorders in the UK I do not know of others with this condition; it is necessarily a personal account. At a personal level I receive much abuse.

From dealings with many Public and Private Sectors bodies over the past 2 years it seems hard not to conclude that they gloss over and sweep under the carpet the inherent problems of speech impairment.

Specifically, people in organisations treat me as an imbecile or act as if I contrive my disability; other parties seem to think this entitles them to abuse me further. They ignore letters and expect me to phone after I submit confirmed medical voice care advice not to use the phone. I therefore write often just to elicit a response; I am often expected to reply to complex matters within 7 or 14 days without regard for my availability and workloads.

Despite my legal entitlement to reasonable adjustments, many Public, Private and Corporate bodies I communicate with regularly do not comply. Facilities are rarely provided for effective meetings. Where this may sometimes now happen, it took 6-12 months tough negotiations with little medical support. Speakers reading my statements interpret what I write, say what they want; not what I wrote. In formal presentations such as Court Hearings, I am not granted enough time to draft statements for my speakers to read who are then also not allowed enough time to read for me.

Therefore although the Council paints an impressive vision for our City, as yet the major organisations have to make suitable adjustments for speech impaired people to participate, get involved and have their say. We can therefore conclude that no provision exists for people with conditions such as mine.

b) Potential Systemic Breakdown

The issue that led me to co-organise this Event resulted from issues in my report “Legal Aid – Debate or Debacle” as submitted to the Power Inquiry.

Essentially, I consider a breakdown exists in systems intended to protect the public against fraudulent trading of unlicensed software sold on finance. In my case, the agreement was unenforceable and non-executable which I think could be far less uncommon than we are led to believe. My difficulty in securing good legal advice was reinforced by poor practices of enforcers, regulators, legal and administrative systems which failed to challenge undesirable practices of global business.

I am therefore interested in the lively debate over the wholesale mal-feasance and corruption in political systems, their infrastructures, inadequate self-policing of customer services, complaints procedures and Government activities.

In my report to the Power Inquiry, I maintain Public Sector systems fail to achieve objectives due to poor practices, methods and controls when investigating reports: evidence is mishandled; documentation destroyed, misquoted, misinterpreted, disregarded, and glossed over; facts are misrepresented and reconstructed. Although my experience primarily concerns consumer credit and software piracy it does seem such practices seem endemic in Public and Private Sectors alike. I believe these Sectors have developed cosy relationships to the detriment of individuals affected by software piracy bought on consumer credit.

Parliamentary case and advocacy work is supposed to deal with such matters. However, MPs appointed to Cabinet then find they are unable to act for their constituents because of conflicts with Government policy.

Ministerial conflicts can be resolved very easily; affected MPs could be required to allow such cases to be referred to another MP of the constituent’s choice; to date no initiative of this nature has been taken.

In my view a major design fault lies in the systems intended to protect us. I have formed this view based on the poor practices in which Public and Private Sector personnel alike have mis-handled matters arising out of the software piracy and consumer credit issues that arose in my case over the years.

However it has impacted negatively on my perception of the political arena. I no longer believe voting systems be this First Past The Post (FPTP), Proportional Representation (PR) can remedy matters unless and until greater transparency and a higher standard of governance exists within the systems designed to protect us. I remain as sceptical of single-issue politics as discussed during our Event.

Media, Politicians & Political Apathy, Jack Scott, Labour Party Activist

Having been involved in some 20 campaigns at the last Election, it is Jack Scott's belief that most MPs enter into politics to help. The adversarial relationship between politicians and media is in danger of permanently jeopardizing the electorate to the extent that no-one now therefore believes Blair any longer. The relationship between the 2 sides is boom or bust.

Matters are not helped by the media's failure to report ideas accurately; it will lead to politicians losing interest if they perceive the media's raison d'etre is to create media novelty to spice up the next issue to show that politics is a quick fix.

Media is generally out for novelty rather than anything substantive. Long-term solutions to societal issues do not equate with a quick fix such as the dramatic long term abolition of youth unemployment which was not seen as newsworthy.

Another major concern is media obsession with personalities such as the Blair/Brown debacle which simply reinforces the growing perception that the "Elector is reduced to a spectator rather than an active stakeholder". A MORI poll found that a sterile relationship exists between the elector and politicians thereby reducing trust in the entire democratic process, which is seen as boring and patronising, soap-opera reporting.

A compelling need also exists for constitutional reform to undergo radical change, particularly centrally, to ensure everything falls in to place and meets the need for rebalanced relations.

Political change has moved in to slow gear; interest in political activities has reduced by 50 per cent. Politics is in danger of reinforcing the glass ceiling although it is supposed to create equality. Democracy needs to be broadened and move towards people's need to be actively involved rather than passive onlookers as is often the case.

**On-line Communities & Single Issue Democracy Movements, Joe Pritchard,
IT Consultant (see bibliography for full on-line reference)**

Information Technology (I.T.) is uniquely placed to stimulate “single issue politics” by allowing people to comment and stimulate discussion between people who use the systems available to suit their diverse needs. People therefore submit agendas to representatives or take a far more direct role in activities to participate in the process.

New groups often raise new issue-based matters and form communities rather than trying to be all things to all people. Unlike national parties these issue-based groups can have highly flexible guidelines without the need to provide answers for everything. Such groups do not need to provide an immediate opinion on the war in Iraq. They also adapt easily to the internet because they do not need permission to start a project or raise their voice.

Important to the Internet is that nobody is a gatekeeper. Internet users are better able to offer a more transparent and geographically unlimited communications model. However, turnover both in terms of participation and content is often high. People tend to get bored quickly leaving a vast organisational trail, which has given people a voice.

A brief review of the internet’s phenomenal growth since the 1980s shows this happened due to cheap IT kits and modems. For the first time people in remote places felt connected to other communities and the wider world.

By the 1990s fax bulletin boards and cheap networks were in place. Technical people found ways to route news to prevent or counter revolutionary activities and at the same time enabled civil rights, a case in point being the demise of the Comecon ethos in 1991. The G8 and world trade activities were put together with mobile phones, email and the internet to confound the authorities with how to anticipate subsequent events.

From about 2000 the internet can be seen the good, bad and ugly with far wider accessibility. Cyberspace is filled with many legitimate organisations although its resources are also used to conduct illegal activities of terrorism, crime and fraud.

Television can now have a voting button but it is a medium, not a means for voting, and as such it would be most unwise to use in such a manner.

In a cost-benefit analysis of the internet for email, 1-1 mailing lists it offers a flexible, easy and accessible way for people and organizations world-wide to

communicate. Information can be put in place quickly and removed as easily as it is set up, making the internet highly cost-effective.

The internet's versatility is only limited by creative use of its features including:

- BLOGS get strong interactive world-wide video and audio footage.
- Messaging is a valuable voice for those who don't have one.
- On-line meetings are an invaluable aid for international meetings
- Usenet present alternative consumer views on Monsanto or McDonalds.
- Web-sites in bad way against local communities phone sites fuel protesters, petition, phone
- Mindbombs, media snippets are put on websites to use in wider broadcast.

Computers and the internet make it possible to transfer data in to the real world and are an excellent means to channel information to change hearts and minds.

Politicians by-pass the media and feed data direct to current social communities; information can then feed in to online discussion forums like Sheffield Forum.

The internet's power enables people to overcome perceived inability to pool ideas and share concerns on topical issues in world events. It can be used as an "honest broker" between individuals and the State, governed and governors; to overcome the feeling of perceived irrelevance. As crucially the internet can create links between people on issues of concern to them.

PART IV: DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR

Summary of Survey Findings

Our Event focused on the Power Inquiry's qualitative questions. We extrapolated these in to a quantitative survey, see Part VI for our analysis. Our Event was very well attended by 38 people representing an excellent cross-section of politically-active people from all age groups.

Survey responses reflected the debate we had at our Event after we opened up the issues for discussion. Of those who completed our questionnaire, results provided few surprises. We are delighted to report that 82% of participants are interested in attending further events of this nature.

An estimated 35% of our participants had invisible disabilities, 2 of whom are on our Event's working group. We had 2 people from minority communities; we would have liked a wider constitution. As Ruggie Johnson said, this demonstrates the lack of relevance of politics and politicians for minority communities; needs are not considered even when providing community initiatives.

Conversely, we had an excellent mix of people ranging from the politically active or disaffected, New Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem, Respect and Labour activists. A BNP representative attended to listen and gauge opinion.

Participants raised many burning issues including the failure of the Council's Chief Executive to be audited. It was agreed this fell outside the Power Inquiry's scope and the issues were better suited for a separate single-issue event.

To stimulate meaningful discussion we, the group, defined democracy as being governed by people elected to do a job of governing our lives although we accepted that there are constraints in the true sense of the term.

Mounting concern for increasing levels of voter apathy and the growing need to increase participation is reflected in debates across the political spectrum and which includes the platform provided by the Power Inquiry.

People believe their views are ignored and equate it to mean their votes do not count. Interest in voting for political parties has declined over the last 10 years; voters are seemingly more apathetic and less political than in the past. Public apathy for Parliamentary processes and politicians is widespread evidently stemming from disillusionment with politics, politicians, Westminster and Parliament.

Matters are not helped because regardless of political spectrum there is little difference in the offerings of any major political parties which all raised similar messages borne out by analysis of policies for the key parties on immigration, terrorism and health. New Liberal has a tinge of Margaret Thatcher's inheritance.

Government skirts around issues: extending private sector is seen as good, public sector being seen as "bad". Too much red tape exists: employers bully workers.

Although some hoped the Government's Education Policy would result in a back-bench Labour revolt this failed to materialize.

Concern was voiced that to date we have not yet had a valid debate on funding our education system. Paying for education is a major disincentive to those who cannot afford to pay with annual top up fees of £3000 creating a £9,000 graduation debt. Attempts have been made to stimulate debates in the House on, for example, reducing the military or education cuts apparently without success.

As individuals we are quite unable to influence debate on such crucial issues. It is the same principle across the board. Political parties such as Respect have emerged on the political landscape in an attempt to offer new, different policies on issues that people feel may be in touch with the grassroots

Key Issues

An important question raised is how do we, or can we, reduce the requirement for so much Government? It was noted that many people seem to be involved in government without effecting any realistic change in practices.

Discussions emphasised great concern for the need for security. All participants were concerned by this issue; therefore our debate on such matters could be considered to be representative of all age groups, regardless of political allegiance.

Surprisingly, our survey revealed that a major concern is the evident lack of security surrounding the various proposals for voting; a very high proportion still wanted to go to a polling station for security reasons.

All participants emphasised worry regarding the need for security, reflected by all age groups, regardless of political allegiance. Politically disaffected

participants vociferously opposed newer voting methods because of their deep-seated mistrust of systems to prevent fraudulent practices.

Voting methods and existing systems were contentious. It was stated that only 50 constituency seats determined the outcome of elections thereby creating a closed shop system, which does not reflect the overall outcome of votes cast at elections.

Proportional Representation (PR) was not seen to equate to an increase in voter turnout although it was mooted that if it was the “national sport” as is the case in Italy the situation could be different.

First Past the Post (FPTP) was dismissed as not leading to a “healthy” democracy notably if Local Authorities are involved, a view endorsed by the late Robin Cook at the Power Inquiry Witness session in February 2005. Wendy Stern attended that Event and raised the question. She considers the response to Public Sector corruption failed to address Central Government’s equally poor practice. Broadly speaking, disaffection revolved around the inadequate controls to prevent corruption within complaints procedures, which were reported as being biased in favour of the Public Sector, Professions (eg medical and legal professions) and Corporate Sectors.

A chance input on Public Sector corruption triggered a lively debate. All present (ranging from political activists to totally disaffected) did not hesitate to discuss their grievances with supporting arguments based on anecdotal hearsay evidence regarding wholesale corruption within the political systems and infrastructures.

Other concerns in this regard included abuse of power, unreasonable behaviour, unfair and unrealistic deadlines without regard to the needs of the service users.

Some 82% of respondents, considered political parties, New Labour in particular, do not see “the big picture” and see us, “The Public”, as “cannon fodder” to achieve favourable election results. Disillusionment with central political parties is substantial; our BNP participant made a point of stating he left the Labour Party because it offered little of relevance to him.

Exceptionally one of our older participants, an elderly woman did not derive any satisfaction from voting but rather considered it a civic duty to vote because that is what they were brought up to believe. It was therefore mooted that women nearer in time to the struggles were more aware of the

struggles involved in being allowed to vote and therefore more likely to feel deeply about the issue of voting.

However this is the exception. Broadly we agreed elections are to “get punters through the door to vote [for MPs and Councillors]” and it “does not matter whether one belongs to a political party because political leaders do as they please regardless of the wishes of the membership”.

“Career politicians” and “package politics” is a major source of disenchantment. Much concern was expressed over the inability to “pick and mix” political party policies: to vote for a political party one had to take on board all of their policies whether or not one agreed with such views.

Substantial concerns were also raised over the high funding costs involved for those wishing to stand for elections with the lack of resources to do the job and antagonistic media relations. Although our Labour Party speaker and political activists sought to persuade otherwise, this did nothing to dispel the genuine grievances of the politically disaffected.

Given such high levels of dissatisfaction it was unsurprising that only 8% trusted the judgment of their MP or Councillor; 55% did not consider it necessary. Many of those attending our Event believed that MPs are only interested in their careers and that the Party Whips maintain tight discipline to prevent rebellions.

We therefore discussed the role and scope of MPs and their jobs. Helen Greer’s talk helped clarify the difficulty MPs face in meeting responsibilities because of many competing demands and interests.

Helen Greer stressed that MPs allowances must cover all costs for constituency office, casework, advocacy duties and parliamentary responsibilities with a very small office staff.

Concern was also raised about MPs in Cabinet finding themselves unable to act for constituents because the issues conflict with Government Policy. Local government politicians were seen to be a source of far greater dissatisfaction due to poor performance of local councils to meet the needs of local authority users.

Participants were deeply concerned by the abuse of power, lack of transparency and any adequate controls over the medical profession and the way in which medications, surgery and related support services are managed.

Grave concern was expressed over the Government's failure to take account of public opinion on matters such as the start of the Iraq War and relations with the United States President.

Potential Remedies

In an attempt to explore ways to remedy these concerns we therefore considered the election of officials. It was generally agreed that the existing top-down system is feudal and has to change to create a more accountable system of democracy more responsive to the needs of people being represented.

Substantial concern was expressed about the implementation costs needed to create a more accountable system. It was therefore deemed essential to focus on principles rather than details, which must include properly managed regulation and enforcement arrangements, presently noticeable for their absence.

Participants expressed great dissatisfaction with poor customer service departments, equally poor practices in complaints procedures and regulators usually deciding in favour of the Public Sector and Corporate Sector regardless of merit.

Compliance and governance were yet again key concerns with a great worry being the damaging role of business, particularly in view of the ever-increasing acquisitions, mergers and globalisation of the Corporate Sector.

Punishment for corruption was seen as negligible, done for show and failing to match the abuse. It was felt that where elected officers are involved, the public should be consulted; responsibilities are shifted without public knowledge, the police forces and Other Government Departments being cited as examples.

Corruption and inadequate policing of complaints procedures were also key issues. PR was again raised as an issue; the prevailing view was that it would not be introduced; and that the power-brokers would not relinquish their power. Therefore it was considered unlikely that the power-brokers would authorise any variation on the existing system of FPTP.

Conclusion

Our raison d'être throughout has been to facilitate open debate of issues affecting political inclusion and participation regardless of how controversial such opinions might be for us to then report back to the Power Inquiry.

However, although the issues discussed at our Event are contentious and we enjoyed very lively debates, there was surprising congruence amongst the Event participants across the entire political spectrum.

All participants were unhappy with the many substantial and substantiated issues raised leading to the abuse of power and corruption in the political system, which also pervades the regulatory framework.

Importantly, we therefore reached consensus on the need to define the level and scope of political responsibilities to allocate sufficient resources for political representatives to satisfy our concerns.

Despite the wide disparity of political beliefs the most noteworthy concern is that our Event participants were in agreement that all of the issues raised are a serious matter and must be addressed to the satisfaction of the public.

Of those who attended it is quite clear that disconnection with politics and political parties is not due to apathy.

People want to vote and care but perceive that little option exists for greater involvement because they believed that the existing systems do not seem to offer any remedy for the abuse of power in systems intended to protect the public.

Without greater public involvement in a more transparent manner we considered it would be most unlikely that there will be much change in the current political scenario of non-participation.

Critically we consider we met the challenges presented by our task evidenced by 82% of survey respondents wanting us to organise further events of this nature.

As crucially, we therefore consider we provided a successful forum for people to have their say on burning issues affecting their political involvement and, as sadly, exclusion.

PART VI: ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Although 38 people attended our Event, we only received 24 completed registrations and 22 returned survey questionnaires (92%). As a result of this very good response we have been able to provide the following additional information:

Geographically

| | |
|-------------|----------|
| Local | 24 (83%) |
| Other areas | 2 (17%) |

Age

| | |
|-------|---------|
| 0-18 | 0 |
| 19-25 | 8 (33%) |
| 26-35 | 4 (67%) |
| 36-50 | 6 (25%) |
| 51-65 | 5 (21%) |
| 65+ | 1 (4%) |

Gender

| | |
|---------|-----|
| Female: | 46% |
| Male: | 54% |

Respondents were asked to circle ONE response to each question and return their completed form to the Event Organisers before leaving.

1. Do you believe a form of democracy is the way to run a society at local level?

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 22 (100%) | Yes |
| 0 | No |
| 0 | Does not matter |

2. Do you believe a form of democracy is the way to run a society at national level?

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 22 (100%) | Yes |
| 0 | No |
| 0 | Does not matter |

3. Do you belong to a political party?

| | |
|----------|----------------|
| 8 (36%) | Yes |
| 13 (54%) | No |
| 1 (5%) | Not interested |

4. If you belong to a political party are you an active member?

| | |
|---------|-----------------|
| 6 (27%) | Yes |
| 3 (14%) | No |
| 4 (18%) | Does not matter |

5. Do you believe everybody has a right to choose their representatives?

| | |
|----------|-----------------|
| 19 (86%) | Yes |
| 2 (9%) | No |
| 0 (0%) | Does not matter |

6. What sort of voting system would you like?

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| a. First past the post | 1 (4%) |
| b. Full proportional representation | 7 (32%) |
| c. A mixture of the above | 11 (50%) |
| d. Other (please describe) | 3 (14%) |

7. Do you trust the judgment of your
- | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| a. MP | 8 (36%) | Yes |
| | 12 (55%) | No |
| | 1 (5%) | Does not matter |
| b. Councillor | 8 (36%) | Yes |
| | 11 (50%) | No |
| | 1 (5%) | Does not matter |
8. Do you feel that you have any influence in how you are governed?
- | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| a. Nationally | 5 (23%) | Yes |
| | 15 (73%) | No |
| | 1 (5%) | Does not matter |
| b. Locally | 8 (36%) | Yes |
| | 11 (50%) | No |
| | 1 (5%) | Does not matter |
9. Do you feel that the Public Sector is transparent in their dealings with you?
- | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| a. Nationally | 5 (23%) | Yes |
| | 17 (77%) | No |
| | 0 (0%) | Does not matter |
| b. Locally | 8 (36%) | Yes |
| | 14 (64%) | No |
| | 0 (0%) | Does not matter |
10. Do you feel Public Sector staff are accountable in dealings with you?
- | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| a. Nationally | 7 (32%) | Yes |
| | 15 (68%) | No |
| | 0 (0%) | Does not matter |
| b. Locally | 10 (45%) | Yes |
| | 12 (55%) | No |
| | 0 (0%) | Does not matter |
11. Do you feel Public Sector staff act responsibly in dealings with you?
- | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| a. Nationally | 7 (32%) | Yes |
| | 15 (68%) | No |
| | 0 (0%) | Does not matter |
| b. Locally | 7 (32%) | Yes |

| | |
|----------|-----------------|
| 15 (68%) | No |
| 0 (0%) | Does not matter |

12. Would you like to elect the following officials and list any other official posts you can think of?

| | | | |
|----|-------|----------|-------------|
| a. | Mayor | 11 (50%) | Yes |
| | | 4 (18%) | No |
| | | 3 (13%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----------|-------------|
| b. | Head of Council Services | | |
| | | 9 (41%) | Yes |
| | | 10 (45%) | No |
| | | 1 (4%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|-------------------|----------|-------------|
| c. | Head of Transport | | |
| | | 10 (45%) | Yes |
| | | 9 (41%) | No |
| | | 1 (5%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|-------------------------|----------|-------------|
| d. | Head of Health Services | | |
| | | 10 (45%) | Yes |
| | | 9 (41%) | No |
| | | 1 (5%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| e. | Head of Educational Services | | |
| | | 10 (45%) | Yes |
| | | 9 (41%) | No |
| | | 1 (5%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|----------------|----------|-------------|
| f. | Head of Police | | |
| | | 10 (45%) | Yes |
| | | 9 (41%) | No |
| | | 1 (5%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------|----------|-------------|
| g. | Head of Fire Services | | |
| | | 7 (32%) | Yes |
| | | 12 (55%) | No |
| | | 1 (4%) | Do not care |

| | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----------|-------------|
| h. | Head of Local Healthcare | | |
| | | 9 (41%) | Yes |
| | | 10 (45%) | No |
| | | 1 (5%) | Do not care |

- i. Head of Environmental Services
 - 7 (32%) Yes
 - 12 (55%) No
 - 1 (5%) Do not care
- j. Head of Housing Services
 - 9 (41%) Yes
 - 10 (45%) No
 - 1 (5%) Do not care
- k. Head of Social Services
 - 8 (36%) Yes
 - 11 (50%) No
 - 1 (5%) Do not care
- l. Head of Finance
 - 7 (33%) Yes
 - 12 (55%) No
 - 1 (5%) Do not care

13. Do you think electing any of these officers would create greater:

- a. Accountability
 - 14 (64%) Yes
 - 8 (36%) No
 - 0 (0%) Do not care
- b. Governance
 - 12 (65%) Yes
 - 8 (36%) No
 - 0 (0%) Do not care
- c. Transparency
 - 10 (45%) Yes
 - 10 (55%) No
 - 0 (0%) Do not care

14. How would you like to vote?

- a. Going to a polling station 14 (64%)
- b. Postal 5 (23%)
- c. Fax 0 (0%)
- d. Email 1 (4%)
- e. Other (please explain) 0 (0%)
- f. All 1 (4%)

15. Would you like National and local Government to take more notice of public opinion and use more referendums?

| | |
|----------|-------------|
| 18 (22%) | Yes |
| 4 (18%) | No |
| 0 (0%) | Do not care |

16. In 2-3 short sentences please tell us about the 1 burning issue which has had the greatest impact upon your views of Democracy?

We received 100% response rate summarised in 4 key themes as follows:

1. **Accountability, Compliance, Governance and Transparency**

The view is that the Public Sector accountability is limited but staff do try their best within tight controls. Local government, however, was felt to need a shake up with staff having clearly defined responsibilities. It was also felt that public sector staff fail to consider their law enforcement, compliance or regulatory duties to reflect best practice for the public which was considered noticeable by its absence. For example a shift from general consideration for people in society with nuisance impacts leaving many people feeling helpless.

2. **Voting and Voting Systems**

The main view expressed here is that the Government agenda on localism resists participative democracy. PR was thought to be the fairest way to hear all views and the existing system where a candidate must achieve 50% of the vote were strongly attacked. A suggested modification was that there should be a 2nd ballot of the highest 2 candidates where election victories resulted from a low percentage of vote. Other voting systems include multi-round presidential and citizen juries and use more citizen juries instead of referendums with elections required only for executives.

3. **Power, Inclusion, Media and Participative Democracy**

Politics seems increasingly controlled behind closed doors by unelected spin doctors who manipulate opinion on politics with media, public relations and marketing. Parliamentary systems do not deliver democracy with excessive power over decision-making vested in European Parliament. Richer, more highly educated people and celebrities are heard and rewarded with peerages, Bono, Geldoff and others. An unwillingness exists to involve people; poorer people particularly feel they are ignored and do not have a say.

4. **War and Terrorism**

As a highly controversial issue during our open debate, we had few specific comments on the war and occupation of Iraq. It was agreed this shows the lack of accountability and poor sense of democracy for those in the Prime Ministerial (Blair's) role. On a similar issue, it was felt

terrorism eroded civil liberty and created a need for new law to combat atrocities but the current legal framework does not provide the best way forward.

17. Would you like more Events such as today's centred on more specific topics?

18 (82%) Yes

2 (9%) No

Thank you for attending our Event and completing our questionnaire.

The Power Inquiry Sheffield Ambassadors & Event Organisers

POWER Inquiry Sheffield Working Group

In Sheffield, the POWER Inquiry is fortunate to have a strong team of dynamic, enthused Ambassadors who relate to and understand the issues of political disaffection affecting our local community.

We represent a wide range of expertise, skills and abilities. POWER Inquiry Sheffield is privileged to claim 2 members with lesser known invisible disabilities of chronic pain, M.E. and voice loss. This strengthens our position in relation to the political concerns of people affected by invisible disability.

Our team comprises:

- **Nikki Ashworth**, involved in the Labour Party elections and recently returned from Sri Lanka where she assisted with the Tsunami Relief Projects.
- **Paul Lowen** a retired civil servant in the former DfEE who in his career drafted Ministerial Briefings, managed £3.5 million IT budget and Europe's largest employment databases.
- **Wendy Stern**, M.Sc. alumni of Sheffield Hallam University Business School and a freelance researcher. Wendy is a Trustee of a national charity and also involved with other community activities.
- **Sarah Weyman** who worked as Legislative Director for a U.S Senator in Washington D.C and on the John Kerry Presidential Campaign in Ohio and is now a Business Development Executive for the Guardian.

For all of these reasons we have been uniquely placed to augment the POWER Inquiry Commissioners' research with locally acquired empirical research data.

Bibliography & Other References

On-line Community & Single Issue Democracy Movements - Power Inquiry
Presentation & Lecture Notes, J. Pritchard, www.communitynet.org.uk/downloads.php, September
2005

Major Political Party Website Policy Links (in alphabetical order)

Conservative Party Website Policy link www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=policy.listing.page

Liberal Democrat Party Website Policy link <http://www.libdems.org.uk/tenreasons.html>

New Labour Party Website Policy link www.labour.org.uk/ourpolicies

Other Political Party Website Policy Links(in alphabetical order)

British National Party Policy <http://www.bnp.org.uk/policies/policies.htm>

The Green Party Policy <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/>

Respect Party Website Policy www.respectcoalition.org/index.php?sec=39

Socialist Workers Party Website only (no Policy seems to exist) www.swp.org.uk