GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE MODERN LOCAL AUTHORITY:

AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF VIEWS FROM INSIDE & OUT – WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO OUTSOURCING AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING.

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ANNEX 10

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Annex 10A - Local Government Association (LGA) Interview

START AUDIO

Interviewer: To do a degree in public administration at Huddersfield University. I've already got a degree in political science. I'm training to be a lawyer and all the rest of it. I taught myself local government law 20 years ago. I took a year out and thought to myself, "I'm doing that. I really want to do it". I got bitten by the bug and never looked back in terms of local authority. I love it.

I got the chance to do this degree a couple of years back. It's really all aspects of public administration. I'm specifically interested in local authorities in terms of how local authorities run, so in terms of governance, how they operate, how they work. It strikes me at the moment, from what I've seen, that there's an increasing complexity. It used to be relatively simple, didn't it? There's all different powers, different streams of funding, different people responsible for different things. It's really just trying to get an idea of that.

What I'm trying to do about that is I'm trying to speak to people who are actually involved in it. It strikes me that there's an awful lot of academic stuff that's written by people who've never actually been involved and they've never even taken the trouble to go and say to people, "What happens?"

One of the things that I've been doing is I've been going and speaking to a couple of local authorities. I spoke to one local authority in the West Midlands, who has been working with me on it. I'm going to speak to, hopefully, two more local authorities

in the Leeds city region who hopefully will assist as well. It's a real eye opener just to go and speak to people and say, "What happens? What do you do?"

I mean I was speaking to somebody yesterday and they told me – I was asking them about scrutiny committees and about whether members were interested. The chair of the committee said, "Well, what happens is, whereas before you were elected, the leader of your group tends to write to you and say, "What are you interested in in terms of positions?"

I've never known that and I've been 15 years – it's these insights that you get. It's really just trying to get a handle on that. It's trying to get a handle on issues around accountability generally and scrutiny. I'm actually going to have a chat with the Centre for Public Scrutiny as well.

Respondent: I was going to say they'd be really helpful.

Interviewer: I'm going to have a chat with them after we've had our conversation as well. That's useful just to try and look into it. Again, it's about picking up how things work in practice and just trying to understand more in terms of what goes on. I mean it strikes me from looking at it – I mean the first thing to say about the LGA is that it's got a massive presence hasn't it on the local government scene?

Respondent: I hope so.

Interviewer: I mean it seems that. Everything I pick up and read, LGC every week. I've been ___[0:02:53] that for the last 25 years and everything else. It seems that it's got a massive presence. It seems that the idea of sector improvement is really on the agenda. Is that right to drive that?

Respondent: Absolutely. It's definitely one of our key drivers. It's quite interesting that you've picked up it really is on the agenda, because obviously the thing about being here centrally is you do fear that – one of our challenges is all of us who work here at the LGA need to stay in touch with local councils on a regular basis.

I don't just mean phone calls and things. We need to be at ground level and in touch in the same way to get those insights in the same way that you're saying. Clearly, the way that things have changed over the last couple of years, the taking apart of the audit commission, the rise of sector led improvement, from an LGA point of view, we want local areas to be accountable for themselves. We support the whole concept of sector led improvement.

The challenge for us is supporting councils to make that a reality at the moment, I think, because it is all well and good saying that but what does it look like? How does it function? Obviously if sector led improvement doesn't work and councils start to become at risk or fall in any areas, then central government will then be…

Interviewer: Will be only too pleased to step in. That's right.

Respondent: Well, quite. Will then be saying, “Well it clearly isn’t working, we’ll step back in”. Very much our role here is very much trying to support sector led improvement but encouraging the sector also to support one another and to be accountable for one another because obviously if one local authority fails, that looks bad on the credibility of all local councils.

Interviewer: There’s lots happening in that area now, isn’t there, in terms of authorities sharing best practice, trying to get together and understand how things can be done better, working jointly. It all seems like there’s a concerted effort on that. It probably looks easier saying it now than it is actually putting it into practice.

Respondent: It is, yes. I mean I’d say one of our main ambitions – it has been for some time – I mean sharing good practice and innovative practice is much harder than it sounds actually. Here internally, we are always talking about how best to share those innovative examples out there and get it out quickly.

I think one of the things at the moment, the pace of change in local government is unprecedented. I mean I’ve worked in local government, a bit like yourself. Been interested in local government and worked in local government for 15 years now.

Interviewer: You’ve been bitten by the bug like I have.

Respondent: Yes. The last two years have felt completely different to the previous 13 years. The pace of change.

Interviewer: Is part of that down to the economy and austerity and trying to sort that out?

Respondent: I think it is. Personally, I mean I don't know whether everybody here would say this, but I think it's an opportunity as well. I mean it's interesting about the cuts and the economy. I mean it's harsh, really harsh. I work in the productivity team so we're supporting councils specifically around productivity and efficiency. That's what I'm particularly interested in.

I think what we see now is that the traditional efficiency savings that have rumbled on for the last 10 years, aren't now sufficient. It's no longer enough for people to be just – if I say fiddling round the edges, I don't mean that derogatory but I mean literally making little savings here and there. That is ___[0:06:42].

Interviewer: It just doesn't cut it now does it?

Respondent: Doesn't touch the sides at all any more. I think the feel of the place here at the moment is we need to be supporting councils at a greater scale and a greater pace in terms of looking at new ways of delivering services than ever we have before. This is quite unprecedented times.

Interviewer: That was the thing wasn't it that came out of the Rewiring Public Services project which was very good. I mean I was fascinated when I read that. I really was because I think the thing that stood out to me was that when I taught myself local government law 20 years ago it was really about – I got the impression that it

was about local authorities providing statutory services in a tight legislative framework, a tight financial framework, you do this, you do that, that's it.

It seems to be - and you'll know this better than me - that all this stuff about wellbeing powers, community leadership, localism, the general power of competence, that has started. Again, with all the partnership work and the realisation that local authorities can't do it on their own, probably coupled with the economic situation, is probably starting to open up a whole new range of – it could be problems but it's also opportunities as well. It is freedom, to some extent, from what – it's almost like it's a different animal from what it was 20 years ago.

Respondent: It totally is. I totally agree with that. I think it feels like a different animal. For instance, using social care as an example, because that's what I've been working on at the moment, I mean…

Interviewer: It's a massive issue.

Respondent: I mean adult social care has obviously taken a massive proportion of the cuts to local authority budgets. Adult social care is a good example because it reflects many of the other council services and the ways of working. Adult social care in the future will be a totally different animal to adult social care in the past. The whole ethos of promoting independence.

Now, instead of being paternalistic and looking after people, we're now encouraging and supporting councils to come up with ways to promote people's independence so that they don't need social care, which is a completely different…

Interviewer: That is very interesting that you're saying that because I was speaking to a leader of one authority yesterday who said to me exactly the same thing. The way he put it to me was he said, "Besides anything else, local authorities now haven't got the resources to do it directly". We need to encourage people to sort themselves out with the right support. It's about putting that support in place.

Respondent: It is. Of course that support is completely different to the sort of things we did 20 to 30 years ago. 20 to 30 years ago would have all been about putting people in residential care, about day centres and care homes. Now it's about using technology so that people can stay in their own homes for longer. It's about supporting people to be able to travel on their own. It is completely different.

I think one of the things – it comes back to your point about culture and behaviours actually – some of the councils, probably the braver councils, are now quite openly saying that they're managing demand for services. That's where other organisations, particularly private sector, third sector, other public sector organisations come in because they're working with other organisations to reduce demand on council services.

Actually, some of them have been quite open about that. For instance, I do quite a lot of work with Hackney around social care, who are very interesting. They were one of the very first people who - several years ago the mayor published a compact that said, "We will promote independence of residents in Hackney". He actually stated in that compact, "We will expect to see a reduction in demand for services".

He was quite open in that, whereas some councils might have that conversation themselves but wouldn't necessarily be so open and transparent. They were quite cutting edge. That was actually before the big budget cuts came. Hackney were a bit ahead of their time really.

One of the interesting aspects and the opportunities, I think, is councils now are taking on much more of a leadership role, working with all sorts of other organisations. I think encouraging community groups to have more power and provide some of these services or third sector or voluntary sector.

Interviewer: This is what interested me because I spoke to a ward councillor a couple of weeks ago. It was only really after the conversation I had with him that I really understood what they did in detail. I mean I've always had a lot of respect for what they did but it was only really after understanding. I said to him, "What do you do in a typical day? Just tell me what you do".

It was only really that he told me that he'd been a parish councillor, started out with the parish council. He was involved in all these community organisations, all kinds of things, theatre groups and everything else, and then became a ward councillor. He progressed to various different things.

The thing that came across to me about that was how interlinked everything is and how the communities are all linked, it's everything. There's all these networks of different bodies and everything else that's linked together. This community leadership stuff that we get from the 2000 Act, it really stems from that, doesn't it?

Respondent: Yes, it is. Yes, I think so. I mean I still think we've got a way to go with that in terms of councillors. You see it working well in some areas and not so well in others. I think the ideal model is with the council and the council leaders taking a community leadership role but working with a much wider range of organisations than previously have done. There's models of things that we're involved in there. For instance, I think some of the work that – I don't know if you know much about the Troubled Families programme.

Interviewer: I've heard of it. I need to look more into it actually. Tell me how it works.

Respondent: Well, the Troubled Families programme was a massive government DCLG run programme. They put millions into setting it up and running. I think the majority of the DCLG funding went to – every council then recruited a Troubled Families coordinator which was quite a senior post.

They were quite specific about that needed to be somebody who could take a leadership role within their area. DCLG then identified, for each area, what they perceived to be the most troubled families. There's some debate around that because obviously local councils feel that they're more in touch with that.

Anyway, we won't go into that. That wasn't really my point. I think the interesting point is that in each area, now councils have moved well beyond those figures things. They now actually are starting to work with the most troubled families, or have been for a year or so at least. What the Troubled Families programme has done really, has provided a kick-start and a bit of money to

actually set up a model of really collaborative integrated working.

For each of the troubled families, now there is a key worker, who might be somebody from social care, might be somebody from health. There are even examples where it might be somebody from probation or police. Actually, each family has one key worker that works with them so instead of in a normal…

Interviewer: They're not chasing round all different people trying to find out who does what?

Respondent: Instead of in a normal week or a month the most troubled families might see visits from health. They might see visits from education because the children aren't going to school, police because there might be something going on, anti-social behaviour. They might see drug and alcohol workers. They might see mental health support. They see a plethora of different people.

They might have 20 different people who are visiting in a month but actually in quite an uncoordinated way, often asking for the same information. What the Troubled Families programme has kick-started a model whereby each family has one key worker who then has knowledge of all those other bodies, organisations and people, but coordinates all of that in a much more coordinated way and will take the lead on liaising with the family.

Interviewer: These problems, somebody was talking to me about a problem in one estate, in one authority, I think a few days ago and the

thing that came across to me is how interlinked all these problems are if you get troubled families.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: There can be everything from education, to mental health, to ___[0:16:01] disorder. Everything meshes together, doesn't it?

Respondent: It does. I think that's probably what adds, as you said at the beginning, to the complexity of what goes on in local government. In fact, probably a good read for you in terms of giving a good, almost a case study example of local government, is the Troubled Families – if you look on the Troubled Families website. I think about six months or so ago Louise Casey produced some case study examples from some of the troubled families.

They're fascinating because they talk in quite a lot of really, not personal detail because obviously it doesn't identify individuals, but in a real level where you can really feel for these families. They talk about the number of interventions from different public sector bodies they have, the impact of that on the family and what it involves. I think it's when you read a case study like that you think there has to be…

Interviewer: Because that would increase the stress wouldn't it presumably? If you've got 20 different people knocking on the door asking the same information.

Respondent: That's right. You think to yourself…

Interviewer: How many times do you need telling?

Respondent: You think there has to be a better model of doing this. It's quite a good case study.

Interviewer: Is there a website dedicated to that?

Respondent: Yes, there is. In fact, I can probably have a look and see if I can find that actual report. It's quite hard reading actually. It really tugs at the heart strings. It's a great example of local government transformation. I think here we often use that as one of our examples of how local government can transform – sorry, public sector transformation I guess, not just local government, is it – how it can transform and pull together to support the community.

Interviewer: Just generally, I mean how important is – I went to a meeting last week at the Liver Building on HS2. Sir Howard Bernstein from Manchester City Council was speaking at it. It was great to hear him. I'm trying to get an interview with him as well. I'm having a go.

One of the things that he said was about the current system being bust. I walk in here and pick up this about local government finance ___[0:18:17]. I mean how important is it to sort that local government finance situation out, given the fact that you've got local authorities who are still – I don't know what

the figures are – heavily reliant on central funding. How important is it to actually get a grip on that finance issue and sort it out for the LGA in terms of moving forward?

Respondent: In terms of credibility for the sector? Yes, I mean I think it's absolutely vital. I think one of the things that's really interesting is, where we started with this is, local authorities are in very different positions financially. The variation between the savings that are required in different councils is astounding.

For instance, I've been recently, as I said, working on adult social care so I know much more about that. In a big cross section of, I think it was about a third of local councils we had, the savings required for this current year varied between two councils that, on their adult social care, didn't have to say really make any savings or negligible savings, which is astounding, right the way through to councils that were looking at 25% of their budget or more in one year, which is astounding.

Interviewer: I mean I suppose when you get to figures like that, you're beyond the salami slicing, saving on back office services and all the rest of it. You really are getting down to the front line.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. For those councils that were looking at 25% as well, many of them, that isn't the first year they've had to do that. That can be the third year of massive cuts for them. Not only have they gone beyond salami slicing, but I think they're actually now looking at – I think the LGA, we say this in some of our documents now, there are many councils who can no longer say that cuts won't be felt by the general public because they will soon.

So far there's been a fair amount of cuts that have been back office things that the public don't necessarily feel. I think some councils, certainly that we're working with, are now saying the sort of cuts they require, the public will now feel that and there will be less services, less libraries, less adult social care provision. There will be those front line services…

Interviewer: Yes. It's starting to impact on the actual front line because there's nothing else that can be done?

Respondent: Yes. One of the interesting things, funny I was just looking at this report. I know NLGN produced a report, I don't know if you've seen that. I might send you the link to that, it's quite interesting. It's called 'Something and the Common'. I can't think what it's called. In the introduction to that they make the point, which I've heard several times before, that the latest MORI survey says that the public satisfaction with local councils has remained the same despite the cuts.

Interviewer: Yes, I did hear something about that, yes.

Respondent: NLGN make the point that public services, well, council funding has been cut by 40% but public satisfaction has stayed the same. That's a bit of a contradiction really. That does throw up some questions. I think we would say now that that situation won't carry on like that and public satisfaction…

Interviewer: Yes, because there comes a point when there's nothing else to…

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. I think a lot of councils have been very innovative in making cuts in back office type of services that the public – they've protected the public and the front line services. I think that can no longer be the case now.

Interviewer: Presumably as those cuts become deeper, I was speaking to one authority yesterday that said in 2016 they expect to get absolutely slammed again on the settlement.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: That it will necessarily impact on front line services because there's nothing else that can be done. You've almost got to the stage where all the easy or easier options have gone and you really are down to the…

Respondent: Yes, I think so. Obviously the financial situation is hard because there's no certainty. It just rolls on. I mean as you say, I think most councils are now predicting that the situation will get worse, or certainly continue to be as bad. Councils are certainly not seeing the next year or two everything suddenly becoming rosy again. They're very aware that things will get worse.

Interviewer: I mean one of the points that was made to me in the discussions, a chief exec said to me, "One of the problems is

that you cannot plan for the long term. You get maybe three years and that's it. On some of these things you're thinking 15, 20, 25 years.

Respondent: Yes, that's right. A lot of the things councils do need some sort of more secure financial situation because they aren't quick wins. Some things will be five years in the making before you see any benefits, particularly around – a great example is the preventative side of social care.

I was at a conference last week, the National Children and Adult Services conference and there was a lot of talk about we need to look at preventative interventions. In the media at the moment there's a lot about obesity for example, so we're saying we need to look at prevention.

Preventative approaches, you won't see the benefit of that in terms of health for years will you? There'll be a quick win in terms of fewer obese people in hospital but the longer term benefit will take years. I think, as you say, to have some security over the financial situation would make life a lot easier for local authority chief execs to plan.

Interviewer: I mean obviously there's the issue about providing public services. A lot of these services now are outsourced. I got the impression, which was a surprise to me I'll be honest with you. When I started on this I did not have this view. I get the impression now that people increasingly don't care if services are outsourced or not provided they are delivered correctly. Is that a reasonable assessment?

Respondent: I think that's a really fair comment, definitely. To be honest, I don't know. I haven't recently come across any surveys that would back that up in terms of evidence, but I certainly think that what we say – I mean you can imagine in our team and across the LGA, councils are adopting all sorts of different innovative approaches to delivering services so it doesn't mean them just delivering them directly themselves anymore. It can be setting up all sorts of mutuals, social enterprises.

Interviewer: There's lots of collaboration going on with commissioning stuff as well, isn't there?

Respondent: Yes, loads. There is such a diversity of approaches. From our perspective, what we say to people is it's a local decision and what works locally will be what works for you. I don't have any evidence for this, but I would tend to agree with you. I haven't really thought about it, but I get a feeling there's been a bit of a shift with the public really. I think probably 10 to 15 years ago, I think people wanted services to be provided by the council whereas now I'm not sure there's quite the same…

Interviewer: I suppose the debate then goes in terms of how do you hold these people to account?

Respondent: Exactly. That's much more important.

Interviewer: There's a contract management issue I suppose in terms of how you deal with that. There might be a scrutiny issue about are you getting these people in to…?

Respondent: Yes. I think that's absolutely right. Obviously we do, in the media, see some bad examples of where it hasn't worked so well. Again, social care is a great example isn't it with the care homes. I think where an authority, and there are many that do it very well, where they've got the processes and procedures in place to performance manage contracts, I think that's been a big learning curve and got all that set up. I think that users of any services are happy with that as long as the council are…

Interviewer: Do you find that in terms of local government leaders, and I'm talking about officers as well as inactive members, people working together to do this stuff, do you find that they are increasingly willing to accept responsibility for what they're doing?

Respondent: I think so, yes. I mean I think that people do take responsibility for what they do. I think one of the difficulties in the past is people working in the public sector, for a whole range of reasons, have been a bit risk averse previously. I think in some instances that can stifle innovative approaches because people are overly cautious about taking that leap.

I think the evidence would suggest now that there's a whole range of different approaches. I mean going back a little bit, here in our team, the productivity team, we do an awful lot of work around procurement and commissioning.

We've been working with the Cabinet Office on a commissioning academy which is really interesting because one of the things we recognise is that officers and members now, because they're not directly providing services in the same way that they were 20 years ago, a lot of local authorities are commissioning services from others.

I think it was identified a few years back that there was a bit of a skills gap there in terms of holding people to account and the governance structures and all that. For a while commissioning became the big area of focus. It still is going forward. In fact, funnily enough, we've just developed the commissioning academy. That includes members as well so that they get an understanding of that.

I think part of that is holding people to account properly, taking responsibility for doing that but equally, making sure things are delivered properly. I think I might have pinched somebody's room. I think she's just wandered off.

Interviewer: I was struck by the comments of Jo Miller this week, the former chief executive here and well Doncaster. A former colleague of mine, she was at ___[0:29:09] solicitor. She gave me one of my first legal jobs so I'm always grateful to her. She's very, very good as far as, like I say, in terms of what she's done for local government and everything.

I was struck by her comments when she said about, "Chief executives that don't know about children's services shouldn't be in the job". She really came out and said that at the SOLACE conference up in Liverpool. I think that to me really put it in focus in terms of accepting responsibility for what is going on. In order to get a grip on these things, you need to try and understand

them. You need to try and get in and understand what's going on.

Respondent: That is interesting actually. I didn't hear that. I wasn't aware of that. It's an interesting comment. I mean it's hard to comment on that really because obviously there's a lot of chief execs, and probably like most things it probably varies in different areas doesn't it? It's interesting. Obviously children's services is the most high profile.

Interviewer: It's difficult, yes. I mean it's difficult to actually get direct to the children's services now to actually, it's the shortage anyway of trying to get people to do it. I think it's probably one of those areas again [which they do for 0:30:24] public service motivation because to some extent, I don't want to say quite a thankless task but it's difficult, isn't it?

Respondent: I know. It's really difficult. I wouldn't do it.

Interviewer: It can be a really stressful thing.

Respondent: It can, yes.

Interviewer: What's your views on all this current debate about coming out of the city deal stuff in terms of devolution to the big city, Greater Manchester, combined authorities? We're looking at doing a similar thing in Liverpool but we've got a row about it where the

authorities can't agree. Greater Manchester seems to be able to work together. West Yorkshire doesn't seem to do too bad.

Arguably in Greater Manchester, an awful lot of what's driven the development there has been the people at the top. Sir Richard Leese and Sir Howard Bernstein between them seem to have done a great job. What's your thoughts on that general devolution agenda? Do you think it will go forward?

Respondent: Well to be honest, as I said about the pace of change at the moment, it is phenomenal isn't it? I mean the LGA for years have been lobbying for localism and for local areas to have more responsibility for their own areas and their own communities and to have more devolved budgets. From our perspective that's going to be a good thing if things are heading that way.

I guess one of the things that we try to do is to support areas, share learning and spread good practice. I think it would be good if the way that that pans could be done in a way that we all learn from each other. It's the whole sector led improvement, isn't it?

Interviewer: Maybe if there's a couple of trailblazers, I mean everybody seems to think Greater Manchester is the one. I think possibly West Yorkshire might be slightly behind. The view seems to be that if you can get one or two trailblazers who can do it and show it works then everybody can maybe pick up…

Respondent: I think so. I mean it's always better to have some learning to build on isn't it? You can't all be trailblazers can you because I

think there's a danger then that we're all repeating things that could have been done better. In terms of devolution of responsibility, budgets and local people being able to make decisions more and get engaged with councils, that has to be a good thing.

Interviewer: I suppose it all ties in again with this accountability thing in terms of [civic pride 0:32:56] and trying to avoid the democratic deficit of unelected bodies.

Respondent: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: I mean do you see when you go round that members, in terms of scrutiny committees or just in terms of generally accepting responsibility that they increasingly want to get a handle on these other areas for which they're not directly responsible? Do they want to get an involvement in that because of their community leadership role?

Respondent: I think so. I mean I haven't done much work directly with members for a little while which is a shame really. Interestingly, recently I was talking to my mother in law who is heavily involved in politics and interestingly she…

Interviewer: That's never a bad thing. Coming from Liverpool, we're all involved in politics. We can't avoid it.

Respondent: It was interesting – she's in Suffolk – she was saying, "Back bench members just feel like they have less and less role and less and less responsibility". I reflected on that afterwards and I thought, "Oh, what a shame," but I think that probably is a view that is common and that's a shame.

I think that from the members that I work with and see here, obviously I have a slightly different perspective because the members that I engage with on a regular basis here tend to sit on LGA boards. For instance, they are people who specifically wanted a national role. You're not necessarily getting the perspective of members across the country so it's slightly different.

Also, most of them are on a specific board because they have a specific area of interest. I think for most members who work on an area basis, yes, I think they probably want a role and get involved in other areas beyond the specific committee role that they might have or something. It's hard.

I mean the LGA, traditionally, probably are key. One of our key roles was supporting members, and still is supporting members. That role has changed but we're doing a lot more. Traditionally we'd have done member development sessions around scrutiny and all the usual things. Now it's very different. For instance, members come along to commissioning academies. The sort of development we're offering has changed as well with the times really.

Interviewer: Do you find in terms of member involvement, just to get your view on this, do you find that the motivation for members is still public service, civic pride. Is it still that or is it different to what it might have been 20 or 30 years ago?

Respondent: I think it mostly still is that, yes. I mean what's quite interesting is where you get – I mean it's still hard in some areas to get a profile of members that is maybe younger or reflects different sectors of society. That's always hard, isn't it? I think that's still a challenge.

Interviewer: Somebody said to me last week that one of the greatest problems is getting people involved, not because they're disinterested but because there's that many other pressures in terms of work, childcare and everything else. It's difficult to try and get people involved.

Respondent: Yes, it is. It was interesting, I can't think what it was I was watching, there was something on the television. I think it was Newsnight or something. Wasn't it where they'd given young people the chance to vote on something? I only caught this. It was on Newsnight.

Interviewer: I know Sky News have run the Get Involved campaign.

Respondent: Yes. The young people were so active and vociferous and they all had a view. It panned to some older councillor who had been a councillor for years and they said that the sadness is, you look at this and what happens in between?

The profile of members generally is much older, retired, been in responsible, professional roles but all these young people were really engaged, all sorts of young people. You wonder what the

gap is between. I think it's, as you say, it's you've got responsibilities, career progression, families, all the rest of it. I think that's the challenge, to try and get a different profile.

Interviewer: It is interesting because I'm going to attend the event tomorrow of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Northern Futures event up in Leeds. One of the interesting things about that is that they've invited young people to come and give a view in terms – it ties in really with this thing about they're trying to take new ideas on board.

Generally speaking, are you optimistic about how things are moving forward from the LGA point of view? Do you feel optimistic despite the challenges and the financial difficulties and everything else?

Respondent: I think so.

Interviewer: How do you see the future panning out? 74 million dollar question.

Respondent: Yes. I think we'd say that we're still very optimistic. I think we've always said that it's a period of opportunity as well as a real challenge. I mean there is no doubt it is an unprecedented financial challenge for local authorities.

As I've said, I think some authorities definitely say to us that the protection of the front line can't continue. The public will start to feel the effect of these cuts. We still continue to work with local

	authorities and sector led improvement I think builds momentum as it goes along.
Interviewer:	There's a real desire isn't there in some of these places in Manchester, in Leeds, in Sheffield, to some extent in Liverpool despite the fact that authorities are arguing amongst themselves on the ___[0:38:52]. There seems to be a desire to get their hands on these economic levers in terms of to sort out the skills, the infrastructure to skill up the local people so they're there to take the jobs. There still seems to be that real appetite, that place shaping stuff besides the public services to try and sort that out.
Respondent:	I think the economy really motivates people doesn't it locally. I mean I guess it demonstrates that the role for something like the [LEP 0:39:21] in a local area could grow massively. I think there is still a lot of opportunity but plenty of challenges too.
Interviewer:	That's what keeps us going.
Respondent:	It is, yes.
Interviewer:	Is there anything else, [Anna 0:39:37] that you wish to add? I mean you've been brilliant in terms of that discussion. It's really been an eye opener for me in terms of – to tap into your experience in terms of the wider sector, to tap into your views on the social care stuff. It's really been interesting to me to see how that pans out.

Respondent: Well what I can do afterwards is there's a few useful documents that I can send you if that would be helpful, that might just add a bit of interest and flavour to some of this and give you a little bit to draw on if you need to.

Interviewer: Yes, that would be fantastic.

Respondent: That would be really good. Yes, I'll put my brain to it if there's anything else I've missed. I think it sounds like you've got – I mean you're going to more events and interesting things than I am at the moment so you can probably sit there and tell me about local government next.

Interviewer: I think the thing about it is I think the thing that I've found out about it really is it's really all about the people isn't it?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. It is.

Interviewer: It's about people and about place isn't it? It's really about wanting to do the right thing. I think the thing that's come across to me is that members are there for the right reasons. They're there to do the right thing. They don't get much for it in terms of reward. The difficulties can be pretty momentous and similarly with officers in terms of cuts and everything else, where they're expected to do three jobs instead of one.

I've been to some authorities like that. I went to one authority like that, which I won't name, up in the north of England about

three years ago where it was a real tight situation in terms of resources. I mean I noticed it first of all from the point of view of legal services because it was what I was involved in.

I later found out, within a couple of weeks, that it wasn't only legal services, it was everything. It was planning. It was highways. It was environmental services. It was everything. I understand that the social care cuts were even worse. It was a number of people really trying to do difficult jobs in really difficult circumstances with an impact on moral and everything else. It's not an easy thing is it?

Respondent: I think you're right about the culture thing because a few years ago - I mean one of the key things that we do here that adds to that whole accountability and sector led improvement is we lead the Peer Challenge programme where they put together groups of peers and go and do a critical [friend 0:42:13] challenge in a local authority.

Years ago I was project managing one of these peer challenges. I did several but this one stands out. I went to a local authority who it turned out had an excellent chief executive. He was amazing. He was incredibly personable with staff but he was a great leader. The effect of that, of having such a great chief exec – I think actually the membership, the leader and the members were very good too but the effect of particularly him on staff was incredible.

Interviewer: Leadership from the top was really…

Respondent: It was almost tangible. From the moment you went in through there they had a customer service centre, I can remember. From the moment you went in, there was almost a feel to it. It felt positive, dynamic. It wasn't anything to do with it being a review because it was there all the time. It was everywhere. He was amazing, absolutely amazing.

I know I came back from that review and said, "I think the effect of the right leadership on the culture of the organisation…" That was years ago. It was about six or seven years ago. One of the things he talked about then was about how officers can have a tendency to be risk averse. He said that he encouraged officers who came up with good ideas or projects that they thought they should do, whatever, to try things. As long as they learned from them and had a structured approach…

Interviewer: It was really brave leadership that. It was really brave to do that.

Respondent: He also engendered a real sense of trust on people. There was no slapping people if something went wrong.

Interviewer: That is the issue isn't it because if you go to some of these places, and I can think of one authority that I worked for down in the south of England where I actually thought it was alright. The first thing somebody said to me when I went there was, "There's a blame culture here".

Respondent: It's awful, yes.

Interviewer: It puts people off, doesn't it?

Respondent: It does, yes.

Interviewer: It puts people off in terms of - I can identify with what you've just said about leadership because I worked for one authority. I went back to work for them again, obviously to lead their legal section for them, in the West Midlands. A small authority, very small authority.

The chief executive there, absolutely fantastic. I put a lot of that down to the fact that it was a small authority but it was also down to the fact that he was very, very good. It was real leadership, real credibility, real values, remembering what he was there to do and remembering that he was there to support staff, going round speaking to people. The door was never closed. It was always go and have a conversation and try and sort anything out.

Respondent: A real community focus as well, somebody who, as you say, supports staff but is really focused on the community. I think that's a really…

Interviewer: It's a real public service role, isn't it?

Respondent: It is. It's incredible.

Interviewer: Remembering what you're there to do really, besides all the ins and outs and all the day job going on, overall we're delivering to people outside and we've got to try and keep it…

Respondent: I guess what's quite interesting, and I don't know the answer to this, it will be interesting from your study, as the role of council officers and members evolves, as it currently is, into quite a different role, is how many people have those skills and that right culture, I don't know the answer. I mean there's definitely plenty of people out there but whether there's sufficient as ___[0:45:58].

Interviewer: I think it's maybe slightly different now to what it was years ago. I mean I suppose in terms of leadership, what is probably more important now is the servant leadership, the idea that you're there to serve and you'll lead because you serve. It's really this service thing which is at the forefront.

I suppose the other thing as well is it's this thing about concept of the boundary spanner in terms of networks, being able to speak to people, know who does what.

Respondent: Bring people together, yes.

Interviewer: Bring people together so it's not imposing stuff, it is bringing people together to get a solution that everybody agrees to and trying to get buy-in.

Respondent: That's quite a skill, isn't it?

Interviewer: I think it is. I think it's slightly different now from what it used to be.

Respondent: It is, yes, absolutely. Yes, it is.

Interviewer: I suppose you see that to some extent in the different profile of chief executives. Years ago it was all lawyers but I think these days you're looking at there's more accountants because of the financial situation. There's more social services people as well. Presumably that's because of the increasing importance…

Respondent: Of partners and bringing people together and integrating. Yes, I think that's right.

Interviewer: It's all about people, isn't it?

Respondent: It is, yes. We've solved that then haven't we?

Interviewer: I'm really grateful to you, honestly.

Respondent: That's perfect timing. Are you seeing Centre for Public Scrutiny?

Interviewer: No. I'm going to pop up to them and see them on, on floor three is it?

Respondent: Yes, that's right.

END AUDIO

Annex 10B - Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) Interview

START AUDIO

Alex: It's an absolute pleasure and privilege to be back in Northern Ireland. It's my favourite part of the country. I love it. I know this area quite well, as well, but I get all round the province.

Respondent: Yes?

Alex: Any time I come here I love it. I first came here about 20 years ago. I always think it's a bit like Liverpool, in the sense that it gets a bad press from people who have never been.

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: Anybody who has been loves the place.

Respondent: Of course, yes.

Alex: I first came here 20 years ago, and I tell you the people are absolutely fantastic. They really, really are first class. That is the first thing to say. I really love it.

The other thing to say, just in terms of what I'm doing, I'm doing a project at the moment as part of my degree studies at

Huddersfield University. I'm looking at the issue of governance and accountability in local authorities.

I've looked at two case studies in England, and it's really all the stuff around partnership working, and outsourcing, and things like that.

One of the issues I think they've had is in terms of scrutiny, how that works, or how it doesn't work, and trying to keep members involved.

I'm particularly interested in the situation in Northern Ireland, because of course first of all you've got all the reform going on, coming down from 26 councils to 11, which is no small task, is it, really? (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: It's really just to get an idea of what you think about that. To get an idea of where you stand on that, whether you think it will be positive or not. To find out a bit more in terms of the powers that they will have. Also how you think scrutiny will work and things like that. It's just to get a broad idea.

Can you just talk me through what the reforms are? As I understand it, from what I have read, the councils are being reduced from 26 to 11. You've already had the elections last year, because I remember following them, and they're due to actually come into effect in April?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: Have all the councils decided their names yet? I noticed this week North Down is having a ding-dong about whether it was to be called East Coast. Which ones haven't decided?

Respondent: Well, that one hasn't decided yet, and there are at least three or four others where they're finalising the consultation around that. Names can be quite acrimonious, but I think we will be looking now at the majority, and actually the majority seem to be upholding what the Boundary Commission's names were, which were more functional rather than cultural.

In other words, one that is certain is Newtownabbey in Antrim, which is an amalgamation of Newton Abbey and Antrim, and that's it.

However, in other areas, because of the deep-set local community cultural points, there are a whole series of options. However, really to me that sort of issue will resolve itself through local tearing of hair out. Let it happen. It happened in the amalgamation towards unitary authorities in England. It happened in Scotland as well. It will happen in all sorts of reforms.

Thanks, Sarah. Can you remind me? I'm going to go into the city for the 11:45 one. I will probably get the bus in.

Sarah: Okay.

Respondent: Thanks, Sarah.

In terms of reform, I suppose the overall message is that reform of local government, as part of the review of public administration in Northern Ireland, is good.

The reason for that is that there is an opportunity to develop greater democracy, and greater governance, and greater determination of decisions by local people. That's the first thing to say.

We as NILGA, certainly since I've been here, are saying, "Bring it on."

Of course the challenge is not just to give councils a few additional powers and reduce their numbers. The challenge is to review the Assembly and the means by which public services are delivered here.

That of course is a bigger issue. Mindful, Alex, that last year the deficit in the Northern Ireland Assembly was £876m. The expenditure of local government is about £880m. That is a big point to make.

If our fiscal deficit in the 11 emerging councils is 2% of what we earn, and the deficit in the Assembly is 48% of the taxes they receive, my point is that local government actually can be doing more. Local government can have more transferred to it, providing it's given the resources to do the job.

Alex: Just on that resource point, at the moment how does local government finance stand in the province? How does it operate?

Respondent: In terms of the wider public service provision in Northern Ireland, it's quite robust. Seventy five percent, around three quarters, Alex, of what council's spend is raised by local rates. Twenty

five percent is achieved through government commissions, through some rate support grants, through European funding.

Alex: That's quite different to everywhere else, isn't it?

Respondent: It's very different from Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

The point being is that that allows councils a degree of control over what they gain in income and what they spend in expenditure.

In saying that, however, we're starting from an extraordinarily low base proportionate to what councils in England, Scotland, and Wales have.

If you take the fact that even with the transfer of planning, which will be part of the suite of changes coming in April, councils in Northern Ireland will spend 6% of the taxpayers' purse. In England, Wales, and Scotland it's about 25%.

Alex: It's 6%?

Respondent: it's very low.

Alex: Still as low as that?

Respondent: Yes. No local roads, no libraries, no social services, no education. It's still very much what I would classify as maybe a district council role across the water.

What that means for councils, in essence, is that when they're faced with the challenge of reform they actually don't have the financial resilience to go to Mr Big Bank or Mr Whitehall and borrow, because they have got very limited reserves proportionate to their expenditure.

Birmingham City Council, or Cardigan Council in Wales, they would have an ability to borrow, based on accountable decision taking on a much greater scale than Belfast City Council, because Belfast, being the biggest council, still has a very small expenditure on proportionate reserves in relation to the scale that exists across the water.

Alex: It's very interesting that. Even once these new powers are through, education is still going to be central?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: Libraries still central?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: What about housing? Still housing ___[0:08:04]?

Respondent: Still central, yes.

Alex: Still central?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: What about licensing?

Respondent: Licensing is councils, yes.

Alex: Is that with councils at the moment?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: That is with councils? What about the new powers then? What's coming? Planning is coming?

Respondent: Planning is coming.

Also, it's very, very important to get the perspective on this. In 2007/2008, under direct rule as we would call it, there were proposals for quite a few of the things that you just mentioned in this conversation to come across. Libraries being one example. All parking, both off-street and on-street.

Quite a number of those things have fallen by the wayside and have been retained by regional/central government.

To answer your question, "What's coming?" Planning and off-street car parking.

Now, off-street car parking is a very interesting one, in terms of what I would consider in-your-face pounds, shillings, and pence, and everyday needs of a local person.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: The question, which is rhetorical, is you've got two sorts of parking. You park on the street or you park off the street. Guess which one is profitable at the moment? On-street. Guess which one we're getting? Off-street. (Laughter)

In that, we are very keen to have more services responsibilities and democratic accountability. It could be argued that we're being given the loss makers.

Of course our local government cousins across the water, the first time I heard the phrase when I started here in 2011, is that, "You won't get responsibilities. You will get fag butts. You will get the things that are discarded by people."

That has compounded when you look at the number of services to be transferred in 2007/2008 compared to what's coming across. In addition to planning and off-street car parking we have a number of what I would call 'gestures'.

Alex: Right. (Laughter)

Respondent: The gestures include things like councils will be responsible for some local economic development.

In truth the local economic development that it's being asked to do it's already doing. It's just a re-fashioning of the legislation to make it a statutory rather than a non-statutory responsibility.

Small business starts, they will now be commissioned and contracted by the eleven councils, rather than the councils financially supporting it as a discretionary service that they used to provide.

Alex: Ah, right.

Respondent: What are they getting for that? In turn for getting the statutory responsibility they're getting about £1.1m. Now, if you spread that around 11 councils that's about £100,000.

Alex: Nothing.

Respondent: Hence my word 'gesture.'

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Local economic development, off-street car parking, and planning.

There has been huge communication and strategic messages put out about planning.

In large part councils are pleased that the natural home of planning should be the local authority. The planning authority

should be the council. That's a given in most Western democracies.

One of the things that I feel is just as big a game-changer, Alex, is not so much the functions that have been transferred, but work that NILGA and others did to ensure that there would be legislative strength, legislative powers, for councils to have literally powers rather than responsibilities.

So that they could do more with their local economy, and they could hold other government departments to account, through community planning and fairly quirky bits of subordinate legislation, which nonetheless we fought to get, like the power of general competence.

A lot of that, Alex, links into your point about accountability, and governance, and scrutiny, because councils may not have a lot of functions but they now have a higher degree of influence, both in terms of being drivers of local communities, but also holding government agencies and departments more to account based on the local plans.

Alex: Do they tend to do that? Do they tend to be able to get hold of local partners, third party organisations, and get them in and hold them to account? Are they able to do that in Northern Ireland?

Respondent: They're able to do that to a large extent through relationships, through trust, through local knowledge, because they're not disconnected in the same way that – with all due respect, say a Whitehall body isn't going to engage with somebody in Fermanagh or someone in Tranmere.

There are going to be ways in which you can get that partnership work done, and there are years, absolutely decades of experience of that, on things like social economy partnerships, rural development partnerships, local economic development partnerships, and more.

The game-changer is the legislation now requires the government departments to have regard to the local plan of the local authority, which now has a statutory [determination 0:14:01].

Alex: When you say, “the local plan”, are you talking about in planning terms or are you talking in corporate economic terms?

Respondent: Well, I'm talking about both, really, because you’ve got the development plan. The planning authority is the council. There has to be due regard by the government departments and agencies of what the driving imperatives of the plan is.

Secondly, there’s a direct and a statutory link with what’s effectively, Alex, called the community plan. The community plan, certainly from my perspective, is the investment toolkit for the council corporate.

The fact that there’s a statutory link, it will all be in the doing. It will all be in the coordination, and the relationships, and the enforcement of that.

That will mean that if there’s a problem with potholes then the roads agency must be accountable to the development plan of the council concerned, in a way that statutorily it wasn’t before.

It was goodwill, and it was getting around the table, and, “We will do our best.” Now there is a direct link, in terms of

accountability, with the local community through the local council.

You can see where the challenge is there, is to magnify the accountability but equally importantly optimise the resources that are going into an area, in a way that heretofore hasn't happened.

Alex: Just on that point about accountability, and just thinking about the fact that local councillors have got that democratic legitimacy, going back to the period of direct rule, before Stormont was back up and running again, is it fair to say that local government bodies were the only democratic bodies in Northern Ireland where debate took place? There was nothing else, was there?

Respondent: There wasn't anything else, and the centralisation of services was, if you like, a wedge between the local democratic decision taking and the Civil Service.

Now, there were historic reasons for that, in many respects. Northern Ireland has been divided, and a lot of prejudices would have determined a lot of decisions.

Now that there is a multi-party relative cohesion, despite the fact that there are still disputes and problems, our organisation since 2002 has never had a recorded vote issue between, if you like, the polarity of local government parties here.

Which is in large part a reflection of the Assembly, in terms of the demographics and politics, but if you take for example the fact that the local government associations' political leaders

have stood collectively in terms of the sector's interest, regardless of their party politics, at least that's a positive point.

You do touch on with this point about accountability. There is a new dawn, which perhaps isn't fully realised by people who just want to get over the line in April and make sure that the bin lorries are there.

Alex: Yes, that's the more immediate concern. (Laughter)

Respondent: Quite right too.

Another phrase is that April 2015, and the financial year that will follow, will be hopefully the final year of transition. What we're pushing for is transformation. Transformation of how the public purse is spent, where it's spent, who's responsible for spending it, and making it altogether more accountable.

I couldn't over-stress the point about local government reform is just one chapter of a big book. The need to reform the Assembly, the number of government departments.

The proportion of expenditure, compared to say Wales and Scotland, vis-à-vis the role and the distinct electoral mandate of an MSP versus and MLA, there's a hugely disproportionate central resource, which is about £16bn of the £17bn we spend here on public services.

Now, when you go to places like the Netherlands over 89% of the public purse is spent through municipalities. I'm not saying that Northern Ireland should be doing it that way, but we need to look more at the Welsh, the Scottish, and the emerging 'devolution plus' situation in England as well.

Our point about beyond 2015/2016 is that the local government association is looking to deinstitutionalise public services, and making them much more the requirement of local people determining what the services are and who should be spending them.

It's a huge transformational debate which is now opening up. It has been quite vibrant here anyway, because of our campaign work, but now if you like the lid has lifted on it into a wider debate, because of austerity and the impact of the Scottish independence referendum.

Alex: Just in terms of what you do as an organisation, do you find it easier to communicate/get things done through Stormont rather than Westminster? Is it easier?

Respondent: It's easier to communicate. It's not necessarily easier to come up with decisions and results, because direct rule, like it or loathe it, is similar to the European Union, like it or loathe it.

The point I'm making is that we have in the Northern Ireland Assembly a managed coalition, which was driven by the need to move away from the politics that we had before.

That managed coalition has led to an administration which many people believe that we're over-governed, but my argument and NILGA's argument-

Alex: There are 10 new parliaments, aren't there?

Respondent: There are actually 12.

Alex: Are we including police and justice?

Respondent: The Department of Justice, yes. I believe it's 13 if you include the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Our argument is that there's too much government, but that doesn't necessarily mean that governance is good.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: We're really relishing the post April 2015 period, because that should see reform more manifest in all aspects of the civil and public service, rather than just saying, "Councils are now spending 6p of the tax purse."

Alex: You're hoping that that will, in effect, be a catalyst for a wider debate to say, "How do we actually do public services in Northern Ireland across the board, with the Assembly, local authorities"?

Respondent: Absolutely. It's one of the reasons why we put foundation pieces in place, like we've developed our own programme for local government.

The reason we've done that is not to write loads of paper, because there are too many strategies in an over-governed part of the UK, or part of the Island of Ireland, Alex.

Why we wanted a programme for local government, it was to actually determine what local councils should aspire to be doing by the time of the next election, and also to make that, if you like, a strategic feed-in to the new programme for government.

In terms of a key tenet I think of your work in Huddersfield, which is about scrutiny, accountability, and governance, the last programme for government, which ends in 2016 here, referred to councils literally as, quote, “We will reduce the number of councils from 26 to 11, as part of the review of public administration.”

That isn’t challenging councils to be part of the efficient, effective, innovative public service. It’s referring to councils as almost, “People you write to, and we’re reducing their numbers.” It doesn’t give councils a role in a democratic government programme.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: We believe that this time around, because there’s a mechanism now, two mechanisms in place, which we fought for, that we will now be able to…

It’s a mutual challenge. Let’s get our public services more directly related to the requirements of local people rather than the institutions who currently serve them.

Alex: Given the limited ___[0:23:27] the local authorities have, presumably the position in terms of outsourcing is completely different here to what it is on the mainland?

Respondent: It is. Bearing in mind the small first steps you have, councils are, in terms of number of people, you have maybe 16,000 in total employees across the 11 councils.

Alex: That's what it is, is it, 16,000?

Respondent: Yes. There has been the beginnings of outsourcing on things like leisure services, waste, but the full potential hasn't been realised yet.

If you're going through the treadmill of a mechanical legal reform process you tend to say, as I said earlier on, "We will look at how we provide our services in a different way once we've got over the line, once we've named the council, and the bin lorry run is guaranteed for the street in question."

What we would be proposing would be some very serious forensic work, which looks radically at how councils can work together collectively to look at regional improvement, regional collaboration, and some of that has already happened.

Alex: There's much talk over the water about community budgets and Total Place, and really trying to get people together to see what [Crosstalk 0:25:01], [co-designer] services and things like that.

Respondent: Absolutely. Well, it's well understood, but I think your point is well made.

If you have a scale of expenditure, and a relatively small component part of public services being the councils, the

councils have tended to run, and run quite well, the majority of their services.

Now is the opportunity to look in an enlightened way, and certainly our experience from across the water has said that when…

Well, frankly, when the Minister for Local Government and Communities ridicules councils, and yet asks them to make even further cuts, you tend to…

Like the cliché in business. There are ten people in a room. There's only going to be one or two of them who are actually going to be the inspiration to deliver. They keep going back to councils, because councils tend to be more efficient.

We haven't forgotten that, because on Tuesday of last week I was part of building the competencies of elective members here and officials in local government.

On Monday last week we had the head of the adjudication panel in Wales over speaking to our folk about the code of conduct for councillors.

On Tuesday we had a councillor and an officer from Suffolk over talking to us about how innovation and desperation have led them to deliver the library services, 47 libraries in Suffolk, entirely by local communities.

Alex:	Yes, this is a constant theme, this idea of the 'graph of doom', and in 20 or 30 years' time all local authorities will be able to provide is social services and nothing else.
Respondent:	It's a very stark, stark picture.

Compare that to a relatively small role for councils here, and the ability of councils here to determine over three quarters of their own expenditure through local rates, and you can see that we are in a position to exercise greater self-determination, because we're not beholden to a relatively inefficient Northern Ireland Assembly.

When the Northern Ireland Assembly tells us to make savings, we could be forgiven for saying, "Listen."

Alex: "Get your own house in order first at Stormont." (Laughter)

Respondent: "We're a small kettle and you're a very big pot."

We were delighted that, as always in our little place, at one minute to midnight the Stormont House Agreement took place, and as part of that there was an, "Okay, well, by 2016 we will have the government departments reduced to nine." That's a big concern.

Alex: How long has that debate been going on? That debate has been going for ages, hasn't it?

Respondent: I think it's been going on longer than Liverpool football club has taken to win a championship. Sorry, I hope that's not a sore point. (Laughter)

In many respects, and I suppose one of the elements of this discussion, it's really to accept that, for reasons which are too complicated and political to go into, this is only chapter one.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Northern Ireland is looking at an opportunity. The graph of doom was constructively criticised by the Conservative counsellor in Suffolk, who preferred to say, “Well, we know the graph of doom. Now it’s about self-help and growth.”

Now, whether one agrees with that particular ideology is not of any interest to me. What’s important is that councils have a greater ability to self-determine their resource management here and now, because of the legislation which we fought literally day and night for, from November 2010, to overturn, to get a means by which councils, as mandated democratic bodies, can hold others to account, not just themselves.

At the risk of the coffee kicking in, the point that I was going to make as well is that there is a lot of scepticism, in fact cynicism, around the turnout in local government and regional government polls.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Give or take a percentage, we would still be hitting 50% for local government council elections.

Alex: [It’s still higher in 0:29:58] Northern Ireland [Crosstalk].

Respondent: I think it was 48.5% for last year, slightly down.

My point being that if democracy and ballot boxes are the way in which we're going to continue to mandate bodies to do work, 48.5% can be substantially improved upon, but it's nothing like the situation, say, in America, where you would have 6/8/9%.

Certainly not like the police commissioners' events which took place in England, which were…

Alex: Is there still a big differential turnout between the west of the province and the east?

Respondent: Yes, there would be. Proportionately there would be. I keep looking up at my grid reference there, but you would have the 55s/65s heading into Tyrone, Fermanagh, and more the 43/45s east of the province. You're absolutely right. Again-

Alex: There's usually some sort of apathy along the sort of-

Respondent: Yes. That is very similar in a lot of democracies, where you will have dispersed local communities and a much closer parlance with the local politicians. As a result of that there's still a turnout engendered in people's philosophy.

Whereas, if you're basically using the motorways and the dual carriageways to get to work and go home, you're going in the 24 hour Tesco's and the streetlamps are lit, you tend to say, "Well, actually, I don't really care."

Nonetheless, an average of 50% is still reasonable. Room for improvement, but reasonable in a democracy.

Alex: Yes. Of course we all wait to see what happens in Fermanagh and South Tyrone at the Westminster election, given they only had a majority of four, wasn't it, last time? (Laughter)

Respondent: That's right. It's extraordinary. We're conscious that local government has a higher profile, if nothing else, as a result of this.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: There will be a huge need first of all, in Dad's Army terms, not to panic.

Secondly, to accept that perfection does not exist, and from April there will be sticking points.

Thirdly, to build the competencies and the confidence of local government, basically to do more better, and that's going to require-

Alex: It is going to take time to bed down, presumably. I've worked for authorities in England that have joined together as unitary authorities. I worked for one of them in the North West of England. Even two/three/four years on they were seriously struggling even then to get a grip on it. It's not going to happen day one, is it? (Laughter)

Respondent: No, it's certainly not, but I mean-

Alex: Is there many cost savings [to be got there 0:33:09]? At the time that was all the story from Stormont, wasn't it, about how it would save a lot in terms of costs. Is that true? Or is there really not much in it?

Respondent: I think in the long term there will be savings, but of course to get those savings, particularly when you have employment law, and public service terms and conditions, you have to incentivise people to leave. It's a common point held.

As a result of that, Alex, you will get people who are encouraged to go. There will be investment required to get those people off the payroll, and the rationalisation and the transformation will kick in five/six/seven years down the line.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: One of the figures bandied about at the moment is that the savings for local government and the public purse generally would be in excess of £100m, which is not unreasonable if you take our current public purse, the role of councils, and their expenditure, but the cost of reform has also been quantified at £80m.

The most recent effort, by a combination of financially astute people, because that's in their job description, and local government politicians, and central government politicians, and undoubtedly a few consultants, were sort of saying, "Well, it's more like the cost would be £80m, and we secured a £47m package to ease the way to reform.

We're also conscious of jurisdictions like Scotland, where local government reform, the impact of it and the sorting out of it, as you've alluded to in one of the North West English councils, took about three/four years in Scotland. There's a common view that it took about ten years, and then they started reform again.

Alex: Yes. That's the other problem, isn't it? (Laughter)

Respondent: As soon as you start to be able to say, "Well, look, I'm an objective financial person", or, "I'm an impartial politician. I'm now assessing what the benefit of this all this", the likelihood is that there will be a cycle of change again, so you won't be able to build it in.

Alex: What's the situation in terms of local government structures under the new councils? Are they going to broadly follow the position in England that's set out in the 200 Act there, whereby you've got a choice of either a committee system or, more likely, a cabinet system with scrutiny and all the rest of it?

Respondent: In the Local Government Act those options are laid down, so they pretty much reflect the options which exist across the water.

Alex: Right.

Respondent: At the moment I think all of the 11 councils are still wedded to the committee and council position.

That, to me, in terms of again scrutiny and democracy, is very, very important, because Suffolk County Council, as I learnt last Tuesday, spends £1bn. We spend about £900m for all 11 councils put together.

If you spend £1bn you probably need to develop mechanisms where there is a degree of authority given to sub-committees, or in the case of cabinets or executives, but here this is a new period for local government.

Across the 10 councils other than Belfast there are 40 councillors, and they are responsible for planning, local economic development, and those wonderful off-street car parks. (Laughter)

To me adding in the existing functions, like waste, like building control, like regulatory etc., they should be handled, as much as possible for the first period of the new mandate, within the committee and the full council structure, because the danger of going to cabinet is, if you like, too much too soon.

Alex: Yes. What people are telling me in England is that one of the problems with that is that you get councillors who feel disenfranchised.

Respondent: Well, that's right, and imagine feeling disenfranchised when you've sat for 12 months as a shadow councillor. (Laughter) Then you realise that you come into a meeting and you find that for example a decision around the council's name has been taken by four party leaders. Well, the phrase 'pissed off' comes to mind.

Alex: Yes. That's true. (Laughter)

Respondent: As far as we have been concerned, having taken the temperature from the current 26 and the emerging 11, pretty much all of them were saying, "No, we're going to keep the same system at the moment, so as many people know as much as possible around the decisions."

Will that lead to absolutely dynamic, responsive decision taking? It may not, because you need to get the monthly cycle of meetings sorted out. But historically councils have done that.

Really it's like saying to 462 councillors, which is the number we have now, reduced from 582, "Listen, can you add planning into the mix, and keep taking decisions using the governance mechanisms you had before?"

The answer to that is yes, they will be able to do that. They will be tested, in terms of the planning, because planning of course requires a new way to work with constituents, around being the planning authority as opposed to one of the key consultees.

Alex: Well, just on that, am I correct in thinking that the traditional role for local authorities here in planning was as a consultee on planning applications?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: They've always had some role in it, but it's been minor rather than actually deciding it?

Respondent: It has been a role which has seen some material changes to proposals, because councils obviously would be a key consultee. However, the ultimate decision rests with the central body.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: The ultimate decisions on regionally significant planning decisions will still be the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Alex: They’re going to have the John Lewis situation? (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes, absolutely.

Alex: How long has that gone on now? (Laughter)

Respondent: Well, again, longer than a certain team has taken to win a championship, but I think also you're right. John Lewis, Waitrose, various other bodies are looking around here.

Then there would be regionally significant infrastructure projects, which would be to do with roads infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, waste management infrastructure. The Assembly will have a role there.

In the most simplistic way, as I explained not to your good self but to other colleagues, it reminds me, having been across the water and worked there a little bit, like the English Tourist Board.

The Tourist Board sets a broad policy, but Yorkshire and Cornwall do its own tourism stuff.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Similarly, in terms of the vast majority of planning, there will be planning policy statements derived from the Assembly, but I would encourage the localisation of planning decisions rather than the homogenisation, because it's a small place, but it's not small enough to have absolutely uniform decisions.

Certain things, renewable energy, highly contentious, waste management, roads infrastructure, that's a different thing, but basically what council areas do with their land for say business improvement districts, or environmental improvements around the coast, that should be localised.

Alex: This is actually one of the things in England now, where the debate is on the combined authorities, isn't it? They're looking to say, "Well, we want to protect our spatial planning for us, even if there is a wider role for more strategic [Crosstalk 0:41:35]."

Respondent: Absolutely.

Alex: It's a hot issue. Particularly for local authority councillors, because they really guard that jealousy. (Laughter)

Respondent: Absolutely, yes, but I think the real change will only be manifest during the 2015/2016 period, and we've been very, very careful to pick through forensically things like the realisation of an accountable and pragmatic code of conduct for councillors here.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Because one of the-

Alex: Has that been imposed upon local authorities? Or is it voluntary for them to [Crosstalk 0:42:19]?

Respondent: It's imposed. It's mandatory. As an association we believe a compulsory code is a good thing.

Going back to a point that you made earlier-

Alex: Is there a model code, or is it optional in terms of parts that they accept and don't accept, but is it just one that's-?

Respondent: It's a uniform code. The reason we had the head of the adjudication panel in Wales across was to say, "Well, look, you've been running one since 2002, warts and all. What's your experience?"

The code is different in practice and in policy in Wales, but the bedrock principles are the same, the ethical framework, which all started in 1994, cash for questions, blah, blah, blah.

We've no issue whatsoever with a compulsory code of conduct. We have major issues around the current system as exists, because all councillors, regardless of whether they're outgoing councillors or incoming new councillors, are being required to sign the new code of conduct as of June 2014.

My point about that is it's commonly known that, when the research was being developed to deliver a code of conduct here, they took a lot of the code of conduct policies and practices in England around the time when there were – I think it was something equivalent to ethical standards boards.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: My understanding, and the Welsh ombudsman's understanding, is that there has been a move away from what would be considered a rigid system to a more flexible system.

We don't uphold either system, but we do feel that there has to be a way in which – basically you shouldn't gag local politicians, but similarly local politicians shouldn't exploit their position.

There is a way to do that. One of the things that exists here, for example – or doesn't exist here, I beg your pardon, is there's no local authority monitoring and compliance officer role.

Alex: Oh, that's interesting.

Respondent: It goes direct to the process, as managed by the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. The Northern Ireland Ombudsman is both adjudicator and investigator. There is a separation, a

delineation, and a very distinct one, as emphasised by the Northern Ireland Ombudsman, between his office's investigation team and his or her role as an ombudsman.

Alex: How is your ombudsman alerted? I'm just thinking about ___[0:45:11] in England. How is the ombudsman made aware of an issue to [Crosstalk]?

Respondent: The ombudsman is made aware by either the person to whom the code of conduct issue has been alleged against, or the perpetrator of the code of conduct allegation.

Basically, if it's councillor versus councillor one of those people may formalise that complaint. That has to be in writing. A phone call doesn't constitute a code of conduct process kicking in.

Both NILGA, most of the councillors and councils that I've spoken to, and the Welsh experience, would attest to the fact that if you and I were speaking as councillors, and we crossed swords about a certain issue on a Thursday night, and it became a problem for us, my belief is that there should be at least a local mechanism to say, come the Friday morning or the Monday morning, "Well, actually I was in a very bad mood, and I really didn't mean to call into question the birth of this gentleman's mother."

Instead of that, the denial of that, means that all formal enquiries then go up to a machinery, and once you get a machinery-

Alex: It's in the system.

Respondent: Then there's that prospect of a High Court, etc. Expensive.

Alex: It is.

What's the situation, just in terms of local government officers here, the top corporate team for each authority? Do they have specific statutory responsibilities, in terms of Chief Finance Officer, Chief Legal Officer?

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: You've got a similar structure, then, to England on that?

Respondent: Yes, very similar to England and Wales, with obviously variations. There are, if you like, those statutory terms of reference which have to be upheld by chief officers.

Indeed, there is a code of conduct for staff, all staff, and there's been a recent re-emergence, because it used to kick around for a while, of a member officer protocol.

Again, that's something that is not dissimilar, in rather simplistic terms, to what I see when I'm picking up a parcel at the Post Office. Which is all about how one treats with common courtesy, and how one doesn't stray into trying to get a decision based on familiarity or pressure. It's a protocol about how one behaves.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: The two crucial ones would be the actual code of conducts, for the officer and the member respectively.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: In terms of the public eye and the predatory media, it tends to be the councillor who is looked at askance regarding code of conduct. Unless you read Private Eye, in which case it's a liberal amount of officers as well.

Alex: Yes. (Laughter)

Respondent: I suppose to regular folk, who are looking for their bins to be emptied and small businesses to grow, it's seen as a very time-consuming and potentially expensive distraction, but in such a predatory, litigious society there needs to be a way in which people can be held to account, and at the same time protected, because of the various…

Like Article 6 and Article 10 of the Convention on Human Rights, which have recently been tested, in terms of the ability of a councillor to express his or her views. These are, I suppose, things that get us up in the morning, that get the heart racing.

We are not on the side of protecting councillors. We're on the side of a reasonable system, which is both affordable and democratic.

We've got to say we found the Welsh system good. Not just because the Welsh Assembly pays for it, but because there's

consistency in terms of code of conduct between an AM and a councillor in Wales, and there's not consistency here.

Alex: That's interesting.

Respondent: What does that say about a local authority person? You're in a straightjacket and the Assembly member has diplomatic immunity.

Alex: Yes. (Laughter)

Respondent: I exaggerate to prove a point, but we think that it should be made consistent.

Alex: [Crosstalk 0:50:15] between the two of them, yes.

Respondent: In terms of casting a ballot for 462 members and about 100 MLAs, we reckon that all 500 should be subject to the same code. Why wouldn't they be?

Alex: All public representatives [Crosstalk] service, yes.

Respondent: They're all public representatives. If there's a factory closure you will probably find all of them, regardless of their status, will be lamenting it, so I just feel that there should be consistency.

Alex: Yes. [That's good 0:50:45].

Well, I'm really grateful for your input on that, because it is strange. I read a lot of stuff, but it is very, very rare that you can get detailed stuff, particularly about the province.

Respondent: I think a key reference point in terms of this – I was thinking about this this morning – on our website we would have the campaign document, which is called 'The Programme for Local Government'.

Why I'm referring you to that is that there are two very difficult to read slides, if you've got short-sightedness, but when you blow them up on-screen it's the services proposed for councils under direct rule and the services given under the Assembly. There's a huge difference. I think the tenet of what you've been talking about is the role of the councillor, the scrutiny and accountability.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: Those two things suggest to me that there has been a move away from the localisation of services, and the retention, for a variety of reasons.

The other document I wanted to give you, just to take away with you, is a document which a colleague of mine delivered to NILGA's executive in mid-January, Alex.

What that is it's – if you're an inquisitive person, in terms of how the public purse is divvied up, you will have lots of Jon Snow type graphs, which highlight…

Alex: Oh, brilliant.

Respondent: There's that Assembly deficit, and it's one of the reasons why they went to the Treasury to seek a £100m loan. Then of course it's all relative to…

Alex: Oh, that's fantastic, yes.

Respondent: It's only a few pages, but it gives you an idea of why we feel that the local government sector has really not been challenged, in terms of due diligence and fiscal opportunities coming out of austerity.

We did a document, which we begged, borrowed, and stole from the very auspicious body known as Pinsent Masons, (Laughter) a financial body, and basically we put together, primarily through their sponsorship, because we've got no money, 22 ways to deliver services without raising taxes.

It was a big eye-opener to the emerging councils, which was prudential borrowing. There's a £40bn UK loan infrastructure guarantee scheme.

We don't hear too much about what's happening in Croydon, so sometimes you actually have to go to these high rise classy buildings in London to say, "Well, actually, looking at your assets, and working with partners, could at least be one way to

move away from this constant fear that services will simply stop if grants and taxes don't."

It's just another example of the fact that there's so much uncertainty other than the fact that 11 councils will exist next year.

Alex: Yes. (Laughter)

Respondent: We have enough investment until March, and then we are going through the process of, potentially anyway, reconstituting to provide a service to the 11 councils. We're not a public body or a statutory body. We're basically a membership organisation.

Alex: Are you funded by subscriptions from the member authorities?

Respondent: Entirely, yes, and the extent to which we've been innovative is…

From my point of view, to finish on this point, because it's a positive, we would be a seven day a week organisation, working around the clock to keep things going with a small team.

Our budget is less than three quarters of a million pounds. We're tiny in comparison to, say, a huge local government association or a [COSLA 0:55:01].

Nonetheless, over one of those dull Sundays in November, a period in November, we applied for and we won for Northern Ireland the Entrepreneurial Region of the Year, for the financial year April 2015 to March 2016. We competed against 16 regions of Europe and we came out as winners.

What is the European Entrepreneurial Region of the Year? It's no budget, but it's an opportunity to promote enterprise in a given region, in front of half a billion people in Europe, some of whom are investors, some of whom provide structural and non-structural funds. It's also a challenge to government to look at how they support and enable or disable enterprise.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: As we have no budget, we have to deliver events, promote, and determine a way in which we can say, "Northern Ireland isn't just known for its darker period. There's an awful lot of enterprise here."

Alex: To me, looking at it from across the water, Northern Ireland seems to stand out in terms of being able to attract inward investment.

Of course there's all this debate around Corporation Tax, and what will happen as a result of that, if and when that finally takes place, but it seems to me that Northern Ireland at the moment is probably one of the most successful regions anywhere at inward investment. Is that correct?

Respondent: I think to a large extent the government has got right its policy of going out of its way to attract foreign direct investment, yes.

I think for ourselves, when you look, and it's mentioned in the slides, there's very small growth in terms of indigenous

business, small business. There isn't enough R&D being put into micro-businesses.

You don't want to be over-reliant on the public sector, and you don't want to be over-reliant on Bombardier/Shorts from Canada, because, as you know, if there's a global crisis they go back to the parent country. It's a fact of life.

Our point in winning the European Entrepreneurial Region – and one of the judges was [Maddy 0:57:25] [Sharma], who is Midlands based, 30 plus businesses, UK SME envoy. She said, "The difference between your application and even the Southern Germans is you said enterprise should be built from the bottom up. Local enterprises should be fostered and encouraged."

Alex: That's interesting.

Respondent: It's amazing what you can do on a Sunday morning, because a lot of the other regions paid consultants, and we wrote the thing ourselves, and we ended up winning it. To me success was being shortlisted, but to win that prize…

It's not a budget, but it does actually mean that the Northern Ireland [Crosstalk 0:58:04].

Alex: It puts you on the map though, doesn't it?

Respondent: It puts us on the map. It gives Northern Ireland an opportunity to go into Europe and say, "Actually, the Small Business Act is a pain in the backside." You need to release these companies

from, of course, the infamous red tape, but it's also an opportunity to advertise the very best of local enterprise.

Alex: It's also got a real authenticity about that. The fact that you would write it yourself, would do it here in Northern Ireland, sort it out yourself, no consultants. Get on with it. Get it in.

Respondent: Get it in. We used the body Invest Northern Ireland to support us. We got the three MEPs to write the letters of support. If you like, it was self-help. There wasn't anyone who came in and we paid them £20,000 to borrow our watch to tell us the time, and charge us a fee for it. It was a piece of self-help.

From our point of view, and the reason I mention that, is that how do we then pay for things to happen? We haven't got the money for staff. So we're going out and we're looking at crowdfunding.

Alex: Oh, really?

Respondent: As an organisation we're pitching for a few thousand quid of donors to make enterprise a – if you like a dynamic call to arms to get enterprise on the map here, so that our small businesses-

Alex: Is that one of your key things now in NILGA, to try to promote enterprise? Is that one of your key…?

Respondent: Obviously we're driven by the needs of councils, but there was an interesting survey done before the last election. We were encouraging people to be more aware of what the changes were.

It was one of these – I can't remember the term, Alex, but it was an online survey, and 8,000 people of all classes, creed, across the demography of NI, responded to a survey about the priorities for local government.

Over 7,000 said priority number one should be the local economy, and that to me is an indication of where councils are going.

Alex: That chimes very much with what people are telling me across the water. That is the number one issue, is jobs. People say to me, "If you sort jobs out, if you sort that out, then an awful lot of other things flow from it.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Alex: There's a whole load of other things [Crosstalk 1:00:44].

Respondent: It sustains the public sector. It sustains the infrastructure. We're very aware of that, and that would be a key priority.

The other priority for us, post April 2015/2016, is during this next mandate, this period which runs to 2019, to develop the capacity and competencies of councils, both elected members and officers.

They will have to be project managers, more versatile, have a group of skills, rather than be the development officer, or the elected member who receives calls from constituents and then puts them onto other agencies to sort the problems out.

Alex: Yes.

Respondent: The councillor and the council officer. It's a real test, but it's also an opportunity. Despite all this graph of doom.

It may have passed your attention, but last week, in the middle of all this hiatus about agreeing a budget for the Assembly, that lovely gentleman Donald Trump offered $1bn for training of MLAs.

Well, my point would be, "As long as a proportion of that goes to all elected members."

Alex: Oh, yes. I heard something about that, yes. (Laughter)

Respondent: We would be wanting to have realistically put investment into building the competencies of the elected members, so that they can serve their constituents better than they have done before, regardless of what party or whether they're a single issue politician or not.

Alex: Yes.

Sarah: Sorry. Are you wanting to get the bus?

Respondent: I am, yes. I'm going to go into the City Centre. It’s 11:45 that appointment, isn’t?

Sarah: Yes.

Respondent: Or 11:30?

Sarah: It’s 11:45.

Respondent: Brilliant. Thanks, Sarah.

I hope that was of use?

Alex: That’s great. No, that is absolutely brilliant. I really appreciate it. Really useful for me to get an insight from you, because you’ve got a view right across the sector as well, and you’ve got a view not only on that but also in terms of what’s happening in Stormont. It’s useful to get that, because quite often in the national stuff Northern Ireland is ignored.

Respondent: Yes.

Alex: Quite often it’s just left sort of on the side, but it’s pretty central, I think.

I think it ties in an awful lot with what I'm doing, as well, because the stuff that I'm doing, I'm looking in terms of accountability, scrutiny, how that fits in, and I've caught a firm belief that when the new councils come on-stream here they will be looking at similar things. It's the same kind of debates that are going on.

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Alex: I'm really grateful to you my friend. I really appreciate it.

Respondent: Not at all.

Alex: Thank you very much.

END AUDIO

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Annex 10C - Centre for Public Scrutiny Interview

START AUDIO

Interviewer: Just to try and sort of understand in terms of what happened and that, I'm keen to get a practitioner's view on it and I'm keen to try and understand in terms of what happened.

Just in terms of your role, in the sense of a public scrutiny, just talk me through what you do and your role in particular.

Respondent: We get a grant. We're an independent organisation. We're a charity. We get a grant from the LGA annually to provide support to councils around corporate-governance issues.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Particularly with relation to open scrutiny. So that's been in place for a number of years now. We were set up 10 years ago because it was felt at the time there needed to be a kind of national centre of excellence and good practice around open scrutiny for local government.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Over the years, our role and remit has expanded somewhat. So now we do stuff around the accountability of government and health and education and policing. You know other sectors.

Interviewer: Yes. I was going to ask about that.

Respondent: Yes. We're not just focusing on open government now. Obviously the LGA remains our kind of core client and we're based in this building. Technically, we're all LGA employees permanently seconded to CfPS.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Ah, right.

Respondent: Which is a bit odd. But that's a sort of legacy kind of thing.

Interviewer: Just in terms of scrutiny, I mean, is it fair to say that if you're looking at the question of how you make governance accountable, given the fact that governance now is all complicated, and you've got authorities directly providing services; you've got outsourcing services; you've got shared arrangements; partnerships; everything else – given that it all seems to be a lot more complicated than it was even 10 years ago, is it fair to say that the importance of scrutiny, and that function in terms of delivering accountability, has become even more important than previously?

Respondent: We would think so.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But the difficulty is in these partnership arrangements that have been established in various different forms in the last 10 or 15, or I suppose 20 years in some cases, firstly a lot of them have been done in isolation. So you know, one government department decides that, for example, they want to set up community-safety partnerships. That happens, like this, without really reference to what the Department for Health is doing or DCLG is doing on setting up its own partnership arrangements operating in particular areas.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That produces a kind of diffusion of decision making and also the diffusion of accountability. So you can't quite tell who is responsible for what, when.

And councils themselves obviously set up their own partnership arrangements. Partnership shared services; joint commissioning. All this stuff, arguably, takes decision making away – well, it takes decision making away from the council as an institution.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So it sits down –

Interviewer: This was my original sort of concern. That was the original motivation to sort of ask the question.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Because it struck me that an awful lot of the stuff that's happening in terms of partnerships and everything else originally started out to improve efficiency.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: It might be happening now because everything is complicated in terms of public-policy stuff. But the original driver was efficiency; that's where the focus was.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But accountability, nobody really asked the question.

Respondent: No. Governance has always been a bit of an afterthought with these arrangements.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's all been about creating flexible systems for our with our decision makers to get on to make decisions.

Interviewer: And deliver.

Respondent: And that's great. As long as decision makers know what they're doing and as long as they're omniscient basically.

(Laughter)

So as long as they don't need to get input from anybody else at any point, that's fine.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But in the real world, you need to have multiplicity of voices being heard by decision makers and partnership working is designed to suit the interests of decision makers by decision makers.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So they're the ones who are coming together and saying, "What do we need to do to ensure that this works for us?" and then thinking about –

Interviewer: Because the focus is on deliverability of what they've got to do.

Respondent: Because the focus is all about delivery.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: It's about saying, "What do we need to do in terms of governance in order to secure delivery?" So it's about having a very, very light system in place. It's all about pushing through decisions and all about making sure that the handful of decision makers that there are have the information at hand to allow them to make their decisions.

But beyond that, there's no real thought about governance because it seems bureaucratic, disproportionate; "Oh, well. Accountability is provided by the fact that we have a councillor sitting on this board." And that's often an argument that I've heard. You know, "We're partnership working. Oh, well, yes, we take governance seriously. But we think that this arrangement is accountable because the partnership board is chaired by the leader," and that's all you need, apparently. Which obviously is silly.

So really it's kind of a combination of things. It's this structural problem that's developed through the cultural misunderstanding by decision makers about the fact that they come at this with some very, very big assumptions about what they think is important in terms of this.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And with them being in a position of power, naturally they're not going to think that getting the wider range of voices in is particularly important because they're the one making the decisions [so that we can 0:05:25].

But obviously for others who are cut out of that process, so for the remainder of the average councillors, for other partners who are not included in that partnership group, and for the public, it is much more difficult.

Interviewer: So there's a real question about what you do in terms of putting structures in place, getting a cultures of accountability.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that fair to say?

Respondent: Yes, yes. No, I think it's about getting the culture in place really. Initially getting the cultural understanding in place.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because if you're just going to talk about the structures, then you're not really getting far because you're just going to have – there's going to be a process – you might have another kind of board, non-executive board somewhere. And you do seem this.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: There's a group of non-executives sitting somewhere. But ultimately, what value do they bring? Probably very little. So you've got to say, "Well, how do you actually embed the principles, the governance, the accountability within decision making?" Not having a board sitting off to one side. Not having a kind of formalistic kind of approach to structural accountability. But instead thinking about it in terms of, "How can governance help us to achieve those aims?"

Interviewer: So it's as much a cultural thing as…?

Respondent: Oh, yes. Yes. I think in many ways, it's more a cultural thing than a structural thing.

Interviewer: Yes.

In terms of the current situation with scrutiny, and scrutiny committees on local authorities, and given the situation with partnership working and shared services and all the rest of it, what's your current take on how that works or not?

Respondent: I mean, I think scrutiny functions have found it really difficult to engage with those kind of partnership shared arrangements.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because I think firstly I don't think enough information is shared with members about those arrangements.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So members aren't necessarily aware of the breadth of partner working goes on and they're not aware of, you know, what impact that has.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So there is still very much a sense from members, or from some members, that council services are still delivered in a traditional way by council officers.

Interviewer: Really?! You really think…?

Respondent: Because their day-to-day contact will be with council officers, there's an assumption that council officers are much more in control of things than they actually are.

Interviewer: Okay. I see. Ah!

Respondent: So they get reports from council officers. They get council officers to come in to give them updates on ‘things’.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So there is still very much this sense of the council almost being a bit of a walled garden and there’s an internal council staff and an external staff that we can [do 0:08:06] as well.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That division, as we know, has been broken down for a long time now and it’s effectively fully broken down now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But there’s still very much this sense on the member side that they need to engage with council officers and they’re the conduit through which information will be shared.

In some authorities, they’ve deliberately gone out to do that and the idea is, “Well, we don’t want councillors kind of crawling over our partners and our partnerships all the time.”

It makes sense to make sure that they have a link officer who is in council, who might be for example on client side manager for a service or for an issue, and they’re the person who, within the council, is accountable. So therefore, they should be

accountable to members.

There's a logic to that. There is a functional logic to it because it means that that officer will be a person who was an expert in the field. They will be the person who is managing contracts; who is managing commissioning arrangements; who is in ___[0:09:01]. So, you know, it makes sense that they should be the person who feeds back to members because they are accountable to the council.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But it oversimplifies for members the complexity of the situation. And it means that members aren't necessarily speaking to people who are delivering services on the ground.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: They're speaking to contract managers. It's been spoken about before about the risk of partnership working, the risk of shared services, of hollowing out expertise from the authority.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: When you've got that and you end up with a situation where actually you don't have any experts within the council anymore, like Barnet not actually having any lawyers all of a sudden.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, I saw that. (Laughter)

Respondent: You think, “Well, what does that mean for the processes and the function of scrutiny?”

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: It’s a dangerous situation.

Interviewer: So it can actually go too far. If there’s not a corporate focus kept going, like the Barnet situation.

Respondent: An authority, no matter how much it wants to commission, no matter how much it wants to parcel out to partnerships, it must maintain a strong corporate core to control those arrangements on behalf of its elected members and on behalf of the local population.

Interviewer: Presumably so that you know what services you’re asking for and you can tell whether it’s delivered or not.

Respondent: Yes. You are a democratic institution.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: You have councillors there who are directing services. You need to have the officer support there who are able to liaise and negotiate with other partners from a position of expertise in order to be able to ensure those services have been delivered in as effective a way as possible.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: If you just transfer all your staff out, you end up in a situation where – what happens is, you probably retain the level of expertise within your existing staff for a couple years. That's fine. Then people move on. Then you reappoint someone.

Interviewer: It's [like the old district / all district Labour / labour organisations going about building council houses 0:10:39], wasn't it?

Respondent: Yes, yes. What happens is –

Interviewer: Then all of a sudden it goes. (Laughter)

Respondent: You re-recruit to that role from somebody else. Somebody else comes in and you think, "Well, that's fine. I've still got a person." The problem is that person has probably come from another authority and they don't understand the context. ; they've got no experience of delivering that service within your geographical area.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So you've got somebody who understands the issues but doesn't understand the local impact. So that immediately places you at a disadvantage when it comes to liaising with partners. Because they're the people who are delivering the service on the ground; they're getting their hands dirty. And there are contract managers who may sometimes be somebody who has also worked in the county. But if they've come from another authority, they will also be in a position of disadvantage.

That position can only be served over a period of a length of time to dissipate the level of professional experience within the authority. Unless you're operating a kind of revolving door of officers between contractors and your client-side arrangements. But then you've got the legal conflict-of-interest situations in appointing people who have just been…

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So you know how it's difficult.

So situations which are created, I suppose, to create what is a very, very sensible governance Chinese Wall between the provider and the council actually means that you don't get expertise being passed through ___[0:11:58] less and less skilled.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So that the contractor ___[0:12:03] is able to – you know, I mean, it's possible that things get a bit sloppy and ___.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And then you've got to say, "Well, what role do members have?" Members should be playing a role alongside officers and the whole ___[0:12:17] [partnerships in terms of] the services they provide.

Interviewer: Because it seems to be a weak point. From what I've seen, it seems to be weak point in terms of contract management.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: That local authorities say – we saw that Southwest One business.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: [3,000] ___[0:12:31] contracts that nobody could understand. (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: You know, it was a real sort of basic, basic flaw in that they couldn't get the contract right.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It was probably people not asking the right questions in terms of sorting it out.

Respondent: Yes. These things very often fall down on implementation.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: The theory and the strategy behind it might be sound and it might make sense and people bandy around ___[0:13:01] that and say, "Oh, you know, this will achieve X, Y and Z. If we go into partnership in 'this' way, we'll save X amount of money. The services will be delivered in 'this' way."

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But when it comes down to it, I mean, well, for a start, big shared services and big partnership arrangements often won't necessarily – if you're looking to make financial savings, often

you won't break even until you're three, four or even five years ___[0:13:26].

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: When you're going into those arrangements to save money, what then happens to service improvement? Because if it's a traditional contractual arrangement, you're locking in a particular style and nature of service for 10 years. So you're basically –

Interviewer: The world might have moved on.

Respondent: The world will have moved on.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Respondent: Your contract, you'll have to ___[0:13:46] lengthy negotiating period, you'll have to build in like six break points or something. It just gets crazy.

So I think that's why a lot of councils have moved away from the traditional, you know, delivery-by-contract arrangement, where you had a client-side management team and the contractor. You had that great big contract and everything was based on the contract. And it's wanting to move more towards a more partnership collaborative approach to service delivery.

That's great but –

Interviewer: But does that lose the benefit in terms of competition in the sense that, you know, the driver behind it all originally was you would get it cheaper if everybody's competing.

Respondent: What you have to do is you have to set up, I suppose, arrangements so that within that broad, collaborative arrangement, you are contracting elements of it. So elements of it are subject to competition but you're controlling that much more.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: So I suppose it's saying if you're collaborating with two or three or four neighbouring authorities, you're saying, "We, for example, might want to come together in different ways to deliver different services. So what we need is kind of a collaborative agreement to define how that would work."

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But within that, there will be lots of different kinds of delivery vehicles. So for some stuff, two of us might want to merge some of our services together; legal services, for example. We want to merge our revs and bens, or something like that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Then for other things, we might say, all four of us want to come together, all districts, to have a joint waste-collection service and we will jointly commission that from an external provider.

So it's saying, you've got a very, very generalised collaboration ___[0:15:32] and then within that you've got the flexibility to say, "We're going to have a more specific contract but quite narrow and defined services."

So the era of expansive, enormous contracts for, you know, everything, like the Barnet-Capita thing, I suspect that's kind of over. Because the difficult – you know, Southwest One, you've mentioned; the Barnet-Capita thing; others as well, have experienced such problems with that.

You know, you're locked in for an enormous period of time. Everything ends up going back to the contract. You're unable to be flexible. You're unable really to effectively end this.

Interviewer: The contracts never work.

Respondent: The contracts never work.

(Laughter)

It means that you are contracting for transactional services. So for the transactional stuff, it's easy to contract for. So, you know, the stuff that local authorities have contracted for for ages, stuff like waste, where it feels more transactional than kind of other stuff. You can do that in a big block. It's easier.

But for other stuff, for stuff that looks more like a service, you're having to think of different ways to deliver that. So you're parcelling it up and you're working with neighbouring authorities to think of how you'd parcel it up across the geographical area. And you're parcelling up different elements of the service in different ways and you've got a superstructure above that that allows you to define how you –

Interviewer: So it's more of a sort of collaborative approach rather than competition?

Respondent: Yes. It is. Yes. Well, it's a mishmash of everything.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: And this is the problem for governance.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because it means that you've got this mishmash. Some of it's by contract; some of its' quite informal. I mean, if you look at the tri-borough arrangements.

I mean, the tri-borough arrangements here at Westminster, K&C, Hammersmith and Fulham, have been quite informal in nature. I think that's been because you have three leaders who got on well personally, who came from a very, very similar

position politically, because obviously the Conservative Party is a very wide church but even within that, they had a very, very similar vision and priorities. Small geographical area. And they were able, between them in their cabinets to basically cobble together an effective solution for joint working that worked well [off the] ___[0:17:41] at that time without too much in the way of governance, bureaucracy and anything.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: What's happened now is that of course Hammersmith and Fulham have changed political control. So you've ended up in this situation where Hammersmith and Fulham is now Labour. So you don't necessarily have that close personal relationship between the leaders.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Respondent: So they're having to kind of rethink how those arrangements work. I think that they will end up formalising what those arrangements look like because they'll have to.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because you can't have that level of [improvising 0:18:10] because that person isn't there.

Interviewer: That personal chemistry isn't actually there.

Respondent: Exactly.

So you've got to think about there is always going to be pressure for informality and flexibility. But that informality and flexibility rests on the same people being there doing the same stuff.

Interviewer: yes.

Respondent: And people move on and new people come in whose vision and priorities may not be the same.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So you need there to be some kind of framework to manage that relationship. It won't manage itself; there has to be a way, a superstructure. And that's where governance comes in; that's what governance is. It's about managing your relationships. That's really what it's about.

Often places just haven't really thought about that. I mean, they've kind of designed arrangements for them as they are now, rather than thinking, "Politically and organisationally, where are we going to be in 10 years' time?"

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So that's the difficulty.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's trying to make short cuts. That's the problem.

Interviewer: I'm just thinking about scrutiny and the current sort of legislatively basis for it about who these people can [account for, hold to account 0:19:08].

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Are there issues around who they can force to turn up to committees ___?

Respondent: Well, yes. I mean, they have always have been really. Because I mean obviously legally you can require council officers to attend. You can require cabinet members to attend.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But obviously now that services may be being delivered by partnership entities, other bodies, or you know where the councillor's contract manager may actually be employed by a

different authority, so they may actually not be an employee of the council. So you think, “Well, what do you do then?”

And it’s kind of, I think, I suppose, there are multiple different ways of doing it. Either you set up some kind of joint committee, which means that if it’s a partnership arrangement ___[0:19:54], then it’s easy to exercise those legal powers if you’ve got a joint committee.

I have always been a bit down on joint committees because they’re a bit lumpen and I don’t necessarily think that they deliver – if you’re after a system that has flexibility at its core, joint committees are not particularly flexible in the way that they work and the way they deliver scrutiny.

So your alternative really is to say, “Well, we need to look at the legislative framework.” And you’d say – well, it was tweaked slightly in 2011 in the Localism Act. We moved from a situation where scrutiny was ‘allowed to’ scrutinise issues that related to local improvement targets under the local-area agreement.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: When obviously that regime was abolished, they needed a different way to describe local priorities. Now, happily, they introduced quite an expansive reinterpretation of it which says that scrutiny can look at anything that affects or the area’s inhabitants.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Which is good. But you need obviously the power to build on that. You need to say, “Well, scrutiny really needs the power to request information or require information and require attendance from anybody who is involved in delivering a service in the local area.

Interviewer: Yes. Because at the moment, legislation doesn’t…

Respondent: It does not provide for that. No. And you need a way of basically doing that.

The way that it is currently provided for in legislation is there is a list of named partners.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But I think that’s just sort of crazy because you’ve got to rely on the government putting partners on and taking them off. And partners will be different to everywhere.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I think obviously there’s got to be an expectation that scrutiny uses its powers proportionately. But I think putting those powers out there and saying, “There should be an expectation that anybody who is delivering a service locally to local people…”

apart from defence, apart from nationally reserved matters, where there's an element of local-authority involvement, I suppose.

Interviewer: They should be able to call people.

Respondent: They should be able to call people in.

And this is around the idea that we've developed this local public-accounts committee idea. So we've been developing this idea of setting up a sort of legal basis for local public accounts committee that would be comprised of, you know, councillors, but also, potentially, non-executives from other agencies, who would come together and would sit on this committee. There probably wouldn't be a local-government committee, it be would an independent body, that we think could be funded through direct precept and it would kind of sit kind of 'there' as an independent body almost. A bit like the Public Accounts Committee does in the House of Commons.

Interviewer: That would comprise of what? Elected councillors from –

Respondent: Elected councillors. So it would be chaired by a councillor. It would have a majority of elected members on it. But it would have non-executives from other agencies as well.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So it's basically based on the European Union subsidiarity idea.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So that most scrutiny would happen locally; would happen within individual local authorities; within individual agencies about what they're doing.

But for the partnership stuff, which is important, there needs to be that kind of thing where you can kick stuff up or kick stuff down.

Interviewer: Would that operate on a regional basis?

Respondent: I think what we thought about, it would be a sort of county and unitary basis.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So you'd have one for each unitary, one for each county. So in county areas, you know, it would be district councillors and a couple of county councillors on it and other partners. In the unitary areas, obviously it would sit within the local authority. But in other areas, the county council would probably the kind sponsor for it. But it would obviously be its own separate legal entity. It would raise its own funds.

Interviewer: How is that being received in terms of…?

Respondent: We submitted the proposal to Labour's local-government innovation task force earlier this year. They took it up and it's technically, or so as we understand it now, officially Labour Party policy that they're going to do this.

Interviewer: Oh, right.

Respondent: Although, we don't know if that's the detail of what we submitted. But I suspect the final version ___[0:23:58] and probably sadly watered down.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: We considered the financial independence elements to be absolutely crucial. It needs that financial independence in order to work. It needs to be an independent body.

I think the issue about the precept is about saying, so that people have got to be ___[0:24:15] but almost saying, "This is what we're spending per year." So that's the governance and accountability essentially.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: You know, “You’re spending…”

I mean, we calculated that it would probably involve several ___[0:24:26] to support a secretariat, to pay expenses and allowances, and that kind of thing. We’d be looking at for an average of £7,000 to £8,000 a year basically so you’re probably talking about I suppose the political realism ___ I suppose and it may be that wouldn’t be seen –

Interviewer: I suppose that comes back to the point, if you want accountability, if you want scrutiny –

Respondent: Well, yes. You’ve got to pay for it.

Interviewer: [It costs, doesn’t’ it 0:24:51]?

Respondent: It costs money; you know, it’s not free.

Interviewer: But it’s very poorly resourced, isn’t it?

Respondent: It’s exceptionally poorly resourced.

Interviewer: I mean, I was amazed though. Because I read your annual report the other day and when I saw the discretionary spending for all of the other scrutiny; a couple of thousand a year, if you’re lucky.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: I was amazed.

Respondent: Yes, most councillors have had their discretionary budgets for scrutiny taken away. So that's just staff costs and nothing else.

Interviewer: Yes. I was speaking to one yesterday who had to have a begging bowl out if there's anything required.

Respondent: It's kind of fine when, you know, for the run-of-the-mill scrutiny work that you might do within the authority. When you do want to do something a bit more ambitious, you need a little bit of cash to fund that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So doing a kind of quite a large survey, organising quite a big public meeting, these kind of things that scrutiny traditionally might have wanted to do, the kind of stuff that costs £1,000, £1,500, £2,000, that kind of thing, is now beyond the reach of many teams. And also beyond the capacity of many teams because when you've got the –

Interviewer: The staff's been cut as well.

Respondent: Well, you've not go the staff. You can't put the time in to doing that work either. So that creates enormous difficulties.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So financial stability for it and recognising the role that it brings, in term so helping the authority at large manage its financial situation, is important.

Interviewer: Is there an issue around in terms of members? I'm thinking about going back to the situation with Rotherham in particular. I think I read somewhere on your website that there's an issue in terms of members what officers tell them too lightly.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Did I read that right?

Respondent: You did. Yes. No, we put that out shortly after Rotherham because it reflects the Mid-Staffs stuff as well.

Interviewer: Yes. Yes.

Respondent: That was all about members being too inclined to take what not just officers but what people generally tell them and take it at face value.

Interviewer: In terms of not grilling these people when they turn up?

Respondent: Yes. In terms of just getting information from a single source, I think.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So you've got a report prepared by an officer and you've got the officer turning up. So the officer has basically been allowed to set the framework within which that discussion happens.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So members would have said, "Oh, we want to get a report on X." But the officer is the person who decides how that gets written; decides what goes in the report and what doesn't. And then officer turns up and members ask them about the issue but it's all then – you know, the officer is basically the person who is in control which is not really the way that it should be, to be honest. So it means –

Interviewer: And you reckon that was one of the issues in terms of Rotherham and Mid Staffs ___[0:27:41]?

Respondent: Yes. I think the principle issue was about members being too willing, or too complacent, about the information presented and about ___[0:27:51] services. And not sufficiently willing, or not having the capacity or the skills or the support from officers, to challenge where there was evidence, or was a suspicion, that they weren't getting the whole story.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because there is resistance and you need the officers support, from an independent or scrutiny officer, there who is able to argue [with members of staff 0:28:14] within the authority to get the information that they need.

Interviewer: And does that itself raise issues about training members? ___ [resource] ___?

Respondent: Yes, well, it is an issue about training. But it's also an issue about the culture of local authorities more generally. Because if you've got a culture within a council of a leadership that wants to hold things back from a scrutiny [committees 0:28:35] because it thinks that things are too sensitive, even when that starts out in quite a benign way, which often it does.

It's kind of, "Well, we don't really want to take this stuff to members now. It's at a delicate stage. We need to work through the proposals in more detail." It always starts out like that. And then gradually, over time, it gets to be, "Oh, well, we don't want

to let anybody know anything about what we're doing." And that's how you breed this kind of culture of not telling anybody anything and a lack of transparency.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Members need to be able to kind of pick up on where the risks are of that occurring and recognise and have early warning systems, I suppose, that would let them understand. Part of that is about their skills. Part of it is about having frameworks ___[0:29:16] about the information that members will see on a regular basis. So often members will get –

Interviewer: So what to expect; to see certain things?

Respondent: Yes. You want to get certain things regularly. Often members will get to see quarterly performance reports and that kind of thing. But that again can lull people into a false sense of security because that's what happened in Mid Staffs. The scrutiny committee of Stafford Council which was doing scrutiny of the health trust –

Interviewer: That was Stafford, was it?

Respondent: Well, yes. Interestingly there, Staffordshire basically kind of effectively brushed off the task of health scrutiny to its component districts and that was seen as one of the problems, because the districts didn't really have the resource to transact

health scrutiny effectively.

So what happened with Stafford Council is that they health trust were passing performance information up to the council and it all looked fantastic, because of course they were measuring all the wrong stuff.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So when you're measuring the wrong stuff –

Interviewer: It can look alright. (Laughter)

Respondent: – it looks – yes, everything is green; hunky dory.

So it's about giving members the skills to look behind that data and say, "Well, what does this actually tell us really about services?"

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But often, you know, there's an issue about confidence in doing that. There's an issue about time, because members don't have a huge amount of time at their disposal to read through reams and reams and reams of papers.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So there needs to be somebody there who is distilling information on the member's behalf in an independent way. That's why we think having a scrutiny officer is so important because it's about having somebody who is there, is working for scrutiny members, to enable them to do that job of distilling things down.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So you're not relying on members who often barely have enough time to read the papers for meetings as it is, let alone anything else.

You know, so it's a combination of members' skills and resources; officers' skills and resource; and also effective prioritisation. Because if you prioritise work effectively, then you find that you free up more resource. But that involves, on the flipside, firstly having a way of deciding what's important and what isn't, which is critical. And also members having, I suppose, the self-discipline, the self-criticism to say, "There are some things that we just won't look at because we've decided they're not important."

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Whereas there's this mindset, which I completely understand, amongst members, and I think if I was a member, I'd feel like

this as well, of we've got to kind of keep a watching brief on everything all the time.

Interviewer: On everything. Yes. So too much and none of it ___[0:31:31].

Respondent: Because what if something slips between the cracks?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And that's a lack-of-confidence issue.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because of this feeling that you've constantly got to be getting reports and everything because of a fear that if you miss – if you don't get a report on 'this' thing for six months, then something horrible will happen.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: You think, "Well, what systems do you need to put in place, outside of committee, so that you get information on that as part of your normal member briefing and it gives you the confidence to know you don't have to bring that issue to scrutiny?" Those are the kinds of issues that councils need to talk about more.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: About seeing scrutiny as being a part of the way that members get information about how the council does business generally. A lot of councils are very, very poor at passing information to members; briefing members about what the council is doing.

Because councils under the cabinet don't really have to do that anymore, the way that under the committee system, arguably, you know –

Interviewer: ___[0:32:19].

Respondent: – the department would pass lots more information through to the members of its relevant committee.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Even if it never got read. There was still a way.

(Laughter)

You know even though a lot of the information that was passed through was kind of irrelevant and superfluous, at least then there was an acceptance that information had to be passed out.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Now you get challenge and resistance even to that system that, "You need to share more information with members more regularly more usefully." Even then, people say, "Oh, you know, we can't be collating information for members all the time. Blah, blah, blah."

And there's not an understanding really about the amount of officer time that gets wasted writing unnecessary reports for scrutiny members and how if you managed your member briefing and member information-sharing systems more effectively and almost semi-automate it, which you can – you know, councils have got management systems, automated kind of performance-management, financial-management systems. They have improvement systems which were about reporting information from middle managers up to senior managers.

If some of that information could be drawn out and sent to members in a kind of accessible way, it would not involve particularly onerous imposition on resources.

The problem is that a lot of officers, a lot of councillors, don't have those effective systems in place. And that's why they're resistant about passing that information out to members because that [data 0:33:44] does not really exist in a particularly useful form.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: It's all a complete mess.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because a lot of councils lack an effective corporate core which would normally ___[0:33:54].

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: So it's a whole-authority issue really rather than just a scrutiny issue.

Interviewer: So it's really about viewing scrutiny as a corporate matter.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's about viewing in terms of a positive culture so it matters.

Respondent: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: And it's about sort of building in the long term to get those relationships and also get the resources in place.

Respondent: Yes, yes. That's it. That's it.

Interviewer: Is that fair to say?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's fascinating. It really is. It's fascinating to be able to see it really from your side because the discussions that I've had with various people, sort of moving around different places, it seems to be quite often that scrutiny is on the back foot.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's on the back burner. It's not sort of up there when it comes to resources.

Respondent: Yes, yes. It's very much ___[0:34:48].

Interviewer: It's only when there's a problem –

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: – that people start to ask the question.

Respondent: Whereas it should be seen as a critical component in the corporate governance.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And in fact, it's a way of councils maintaining an effective corporate core.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because you've got this group of members here. They're a significant resource the council should use more effectively to help to direct and to construct ___[0:35:13]. It's crazy not to use that resource when it's just sitting there.

Interviewer: Yes.

Do you find, just in terms scrutiny, that local authorities, in terms of the sort of policy-development role for scrutiny, that that's increasing or is that…?

Respondent: That's always – I mean, we went through a stage, I think probably 6 to 10 years ago, when a lot of authorities kind of upped their game quite significantly around how they engaged with ___[0:35:37] [development] issues through scrutiny. I think that happened because scrutiny was getting more resource. Scrutiny officers were getting more experienced. Scrutiny members were getting more used to the idea of scrutiny.

So I think between – I mean, this arbitrary. I mean this is my own opinion.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But I got the impression that between about 2004 and maybe 2009, we had this significant upswing in scrutiny's general effectiveness.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: This kind of, you know, officers getting more confident; scrutiny bedding down; issues arising absolutely, yes; and you know, scrutiny, arguably, in some places, not doing stuff that was particularly effectively. But generally speaking a national trend towards doing good work and some authorities who were doing really excellent stuff.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Since the election and since the financial ___[0:36:28] authorities, there's been a very much kind of roll back from that position, which is sort of around resource depletion.

Interviewer: ___.

Respondent: In many ways that problem has been of scrutiny's own making in some areas because in some areas scrutiny very, very jealously guarded its operational independence and used that independence in quite antagonistically towards the executive and towards senior officers and others about its role.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Respondent: And it's difficult. Because what you need is for scrutiny to be recognised as being this independent constructive challenge led by councillors, independent from the executive – on the other hand, as I've said, it's a critical element in corporate governance for the whole authority.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's contributing to the way that the authority does business.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And I think that aspect of things was, to an extent, lost in some places, where they had a more adversarial approach to scrutiny.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That in some places worked because, you know, it was about being quite combative but constructive, I think, really in many cases.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But that culture of scrutiny in some places, being quite combative, led to where you have a position now where councils are financially difficult straits, scrutiny looks like this thing that sits off to one side. It has this budget that does this think. You think, “Well, it needs to be cut back because it just sits here.” Rather than seeing it as integrated.

Interviewer: As part of the corporate…

Respondent: Exactly. So that’s the difficulty. So I suppose it’s about changing that mindset. Firstly, I suppose, among scrutiny practitioners themselves.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Because there’s almost been an acceptance that scrutiny has got to work with the executive but I think you do still do get an element of resistance form officers, as well as members, about the extent to which they should be doing it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That's resistance I think and an unwillingness to even enter into some of those conversations is causing problems.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So that's a real issue, to be honest.

Then I think secondly, it's about having that conversation with leaders, cabinet senior officers as well. And that's what we're trying to start doing now is going out to, you know, leaders and people in charge and saying, "Think about scrutiny differently. It's not just non-executive members being annoying and something useful for backbenchers to do. But actually, it has the potential to play in ___[0:38:58]."

Interviewer: So its' really selling that argument that it should be seen as part of the overall corporate governance.

Respondent: Yes. And as a way to improve, to manage, some of the enormously difficult decisions that councils are having to make at the moment.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: "You know, you are making decisions that are going to affect the local community for the next 10 years. So does it not make

sense to try and engage and involve all members in making those decisions and getting scrutiny as a kind of independent voice to gather evidence, to make recommendations to the cabinet, in a transparent way?”

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So it’s all about making sure that you’re assuring – this is an assurance process for the council to make sure that the big, incredibly difficult decisions that it’s making –

Interviewer: So they’ve been involved in that process.

Respondent: – exactly – are effective and the council isn’t making decisions now that it will regret in two years’ time.

Interviewer: It really is fascinating to get an insight.

Can I just ask, in terms of my final point, if you could do one thing to improve local-authority scrutiny, if you had one thing on your wish list, top-line issue, what would it be?

Respondent: I think –

Interviewer: Or is there more than one?

Respondent: I think if I could develop some kind of magic want by which I could change the way that leaders thought about scrutiny, so the general –

Interviewer: So it's that cultural mindset.

Respondent: Leaders and senior officers. It's all about that cultural mindset. It wouldn't be, you know, getting all councillors to give scrutiny X amount of money per year. It wouldn't be about changing scrutiny; expanding scrutiny's legal ___[0:40:34]. It would be about getting leaders and senior officers to understand what scrutiny can bring to the party now, where local governance is right now.

Interviewer: It's the cultural importance of…

Respondent: Yes. That would be it. Yes.

Interviewer: Fascinating. I'm really grateful to you.

Respondent: That's alright.

Interviewer: I really appreciate it.

Respondent: It's no problem.

Interviewer: You've helped me out no end in that.

Respondent: Good.

Interviewer: I have learned a lot more from that than I would, you know, reading stuff for weeks.

Respondent: Yes. Good, good.

Interviewer: So I'm really grateful you to, sir.

Respondent: I'm glad.

Interviewer: It is fantastic.

Respondent: I'm sorry that –

END AUDIO

Annex 10D – City Council Chief Executive Interview

START AUDIO

Interviewer: It was really to sort of tease out a few issues around that, and then also just to get your thoughts on partnership working generally, and how [redacted] fits in with that.

Respondent: Sure, yes. Okay. So, shall I start and give you a bit of an overview about how –

Interviewer: Yes, please, yes.

Respondent: - I think I see our core purpose, right now?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's something about having your compass needle set at true north really, in terms of leadership. If you go back to the abiding reason why we have local government, it's actually about creating local prosperity for the people of a place and the people of a place, as they are now and into the future.

So, as far as I'm concerned local government is not essentially about providing services, it is actually about a duty of care for the whole place, now and for its future.

It's been that, in [redacted] for about 800 years, because there has been the Town Clerk since 1212.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: So there is a long-standing history – and I am a historian – and if you look at the historical sweep and history of local government, actually that has been its focus more than direct service delivery, so if you look at the Medieval period, the guilds of the city came together and elected a number from them, and they raised the monies to build the bridges, provide sewage and sanitation, almshouses and so on. That's not quite the same as taking responsibility for the provision of day in day out services, but making arrangements for things to happen that enables a city to function.

I think it's quite helpful at this moment in time to return to that core purpose. My definition, which is where it connects to the thing about enabling people to be everything they can be and make the choices they want to for their lives, is my definition of prosperity is not just about economic growth. It's actually about health and wellbeing as part of prosperity.

For me, the best way for people to be prosperous and to have good health and wellbeing is to cultivate all of the potential that individuals have and that [I think is actually 0:02:16] what our responsibility is. Do you see what I mean? As a local authority.

Interviewer: So it's much more than just providing services, then?

Respondent: Much more. It's to unlock the assets of this place, connect them to each other and make sure they're in play so that we create the greatest amount of prosperity possible. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yes, it does make sense.

Respondent: So, when I talk to staff I will often say, "Our job is actually to do what it takes," now, within a legal framework – I'm not saying break the law, but it's to think about the outcomes we want, and the outcomes we want are prosperous people, prosperous communities, prosperous place. Not necessarily just within the boundaries of the services within which we are employed. That means bringing people across discipline, it means bringing people across agencies, it means bringing people from communities together. So we are a sort of team working [to try and create this 0:03:13] thing.

Interviewer: Yes, so it's much more – in terms of leadership then, it's much more than just providing – in terms of your role, it's much more than just providing, I say just, but providing executive leadership to the Council, isn't it? Because it's the wider area, and that is really, I think, what I didn't understand before I started looking at this. It's a wider [link, isn't it, to everything else 0:03:37]?

Respondent: That's the essence of local democracy, which is the guardianship of place, and the place leadership role. So we are the only democratically elected body, which has a statutory responsibility for the social, economic and environmental

wellbeing of a place. So, to discharge that requires you to provide leadership across the whole place, all its communities and all its agencies.

Interviewer: Do you find that – in terms of engaging with partners, do you find that they respect and recognise that democratic mandate? Or is there an issue [over it 0:04:16]?

Respondent: Yes and no. So, I think that in the same way as that wasn't necessarily your understanding of local averment before you started doing this PhD, the actual depth of understanding there is of what we do and why we do it is patchy, isn't it? It's patchy across partners.

I actually, in a funny way, think it's less patchy across communities, because the default of individuals and communities, in all my experience, is still to think, "I'll go and talk to the Council about it."

Interviewer: Yes it is, yes; I agree.

Respondent: So if the water supply goes off, that's the water utility company but they'll still ring the Council.

Interviewer: Yes, there's almost a default, isn't there?

Respondent: There's a default. If the buses don't run on time, I'll ring the Council. So I still think in the public's imagination, the Council is

all responsible, and sometimes seen as all powerful, and so that residual understanding is there, but I think I'm not sure that the agencies that we work with, or businesses in the city, see it in quite the same way. Although, you'd have to say, the city centre retailers still think that it is our responsibility to make sure that there is parking, that there is football, that there are Christmas lights, the public realm is well-maintained, that we support their businesses.

So there is still – there is a higher regard, still, for the influence that we have, as well as some resentment about it, because we're not in a position always to discharge all of those expectations [and meet all those expectations 0:05:56].

Interviewer: That was my next question in terms of –

Respondent: Yes, so it's a double-edged sword, isn't it?

Interviewer: - in terms of the powers that you need to do that. I mean, as things stand at the moment, given all these debates around devolution, extra powers, [funding streams 0:06:09], everything else, do you think that, as things stand at the moment, that you've got sufficient powers to be able to realise that potential in terms of place shaping, or does it need more? Does it need a radical re-think in terms of - ?

Respondent: So, yes, we have powers that we're not fully using, and yes we could do with more. So, we have the power of [general competence 0:06:33]; as you're a lawyer, you know about all of that, the duty of care enshrined in the Local Government Act

2000, and if you were to look at all local authorities, none of us have used our powers to the full, and I think that's because of a lack of confidence in the sector, and where the appetite for risk is.

So, if you take procurement, you can procure for public value, you don't just have to procure to the economic bottom line. How many local authorities are pushing that envelope because they're worried still about challenges? They're still worried about the ___[0:07:03] procurement frames. That's one small example, but I think you can look across the board and see that we have more powers than we actually utilise.

That said, I think that local authorities have, in this region, because I know them better, used their powers more and more over the last five or six years, because the moment we're in requires us to think differently about the level of risk that we might be prepared to take, the level of investment we might be prepared to make to enable things to happen. I know local authorities here who have re-set their appetite for risk around child protection to try and sustain children in extended family settings, because it's actually better for the child, it's a lot less costly to the public purse, but it carries a greater level of risk if you get it wrong. Are you with me?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I know local authorities that have purchased land and made investments to get companies headquartered in a city to keep the employment in that city that never would have done before. Do you see what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent: They wouldn't have gone into a joint venture with a private business in the same sort of way. I know that on flooding, to take our own example, because of [redacted] flooding repeatedly, we have to have an appetite for managing the risk of running a city that floods regularly, in a way that you cannot eliminate that risk, and we now enable and empower communities to manage that risk with us, we support businesses and residents to proof themselves against that risk. Does it - ?

Interviewer: Yes, I do.

Respondent: Because you [can't 0:08:41] the flood [plane], where people are living. So, I think you can track –

Interviewer: You need to deal with that, in a sense, ___[Crosstalk].

Respondent: So for us, we had no – yes. But we've also taken other sorts of risks that we never would have taken, about levels of borrowing, about judgement calls on child protection, around residential care, do you know what I mean? So I think you can track the emergence of a greater appetite for risk, and the greater use of the powers that we have. I still don't think we've exhausted all the powers that we might have, and at the same time, to make the second point, it's still true that the amount of control we have over our resources falls far short of most of our European counterparts. So, fiscal devolution is a huge issue for us –

Interviewer: What is the fiscal position in [redacted]?

Respondent: In what sense?

Interviewer: In terms of how much you get in [after tax 0:09:39] how much do you spend out?

Respondent: Okay, so, by contrast with [redacted] and [redacted] which would be top-up authorities, we're a tariff authority, so we actually collect more in council tax and business rate than actually we receive, in terms of the return business rate from central government.

So we're about 66-70% of our revenue budget is collected locally, and 30% comes from central government.

Now, if you're in Bradford or [redacted] – maybe not [redacted] as much. You can flip it over in Bradford, 70% of their money comes from central government. So we are in a relatively privileged position in that sense, in that we have more control over our local resource base, because it's strong, we have fewer people on benefit, we have greater tax take, locally, and we have a growing economy, ___[Crosstalk 0:10:33].

Interviewer: Is this the most profitable authority in the region, in terms of that?

Respondent: It's the fastest growing economy, I'm trying to think in [GVA] terms. So, Harrogate, Leeds and [redacted] are tariff authorities, I think – yes, we probably are actually, because Leeds has higher levels of benefit dependency still, so even though it's in ___[0:10:53], it's probably not per capita as much as ours is.

So yes, we have a relatively prosperous city, therefore we have more people paying council tax, per household, than most places, and we've got a growing business rates base. So that's a strong place to be.

However, we still have a limited amount of control over our local tax base because of the council tax cap. Now, I'm a democrat, I would argue [for] central government, and if I was in Scotland I would be furious, I would argue that the persistent concentration on council tax freeze, as a narrative, is actually depreciating the asset base of local government. Every year you don't put the council tax up by inflation your asset base is actually worthless.

I have to say, the private sector in the city said to me, when we put the council tax up, which we have done, "Absolutely right ___[0:11:52], why would you allow your asset price to depreciate?" Even then it's not keeping pace with inflation.

Interviewer: Is that because of short-term thinking in Whitehall? Is it because nobody understands it?

Respondent: Well, there are couple of things; one is, the narrative has been about deficit reduction, the narrative has been about hard pressed families, the narrative is about right sizing the state. So being the least burden we possibly can be to residents, and only providing those things that are absolutely core to what we're here to do. In some sense we have drifted into forms of

provision, or unnecessary bureaucracy, or vanity projects. So I think it's all part of that.

By the way, I'm not so sure it would be a different narrative if it was a different party in power. So the recent statements suggest, don't they, that –

Interviewer: Yes, [I think they say the same thing 0:12:49].

Respondent: - a level of cuts to local public services will [stay].

Interviewer: Yes, ___ difference, yes.

Respondent: But I think with this coalition government there has definitely been a thing about a smaller state. A smaller state that is less involved in people's lives, and that we have got involved in ways that debilitate people from taking responsibility for their own lives. That takes you back to that original premise, really, which is, what we're here to do is enable people to live the lives that they want to lead, and to be everything they want to be.

Interviewer: Is there an issue around centralisation? When I spoke to one local authority they were saying to me that they were really frustrated at the level of directives that were coming from Whitehall to do this, do that, and that they really did not understand the local conditions and the situation locally. Is that an issue? That there is such centralisation, and that there is such a stranglehold from Whitehall; is that a problem for [redacted] That it takes you ___[Crosstalk 0:13:57].

Respondent: I mean, I have always said that our main objective is to become self-reliant, it's a bit like my manager about individuals and communities. My main objective is that this local authority can become pretty much self-reliant in terms of its tax base. So, as the money tapers from central government, we know what we're in control of, we know what our resource base is, we know what the needs of the place are and we can seek to address them.

I think we sometimes obsess too much about what central government is doing, and we don't focus as much on what we're capable of doing. That goes back to my point about, we haven't used all of our powers under the power of [general competence and duty of care].

Now, of course, central government does things that, at times, look centralist, look unhelpful – you'd say the incentive money for bringing back weekly bin collections would be a case in point. We've all moved to two weekly, three weekly, because actually we're doing not bad on recycling, so why pick a pin up that's half empty every week? Which is a hugely costly exercise. So that would be an example.

We certainly noticed the reintroduction of a lot more ring-fenced budgets, which therefore incentivise particular schemes, and that's a way government has a lever that it pulls –

Interviewer: Is that unhelpful? When you're looking at trying to shape the place as a whole? Would you prefer more freedom on that?

Respondent: Yes, well certainly the trend over the last decade had been towards establishing single pot funding, so, "Here is the

quantum of money for you… Here are our expectations, and we would agree about the aspirations for the city, but actually use the money in the best way that you know to produce those outcomes."

Whereas now, we've got troubled families money, or we've got local sustainable transport money, or we've got bins money; do you see what I mean? You've got myriad funding streams that you've got to try and work with and account to Whitehall departments for –

Interviewer: For each particular…

Respondent: - instead of saying, "We spent this much money over the last year, this is what we spent it on, these are the outcomes from it," do you see what I mean? That being set within – you do have to have some kind of outcomes framework agreed with government, at some level, don't you? Basics. A reasonable basket of indicators I don't have a problem with. I do think that the return to lots of different funding streams for different projects is not very helpful, because you end up with disjointed activity.

Interviewer: Is the debate around devolution now, is it different this time because Whitehall recognise that there is an issue for the national economy? The national economy is being held back because local authorities, for whatever reason, either don't have sufficient powers, or won't exercise the powers that they've got. Is it in a different place now because Whitehall recognises that unless they allow further freedoms and funding and flexibility to local authorities, that they won't deliver on the national

___[0:16:58] or the national economy? Is that what's different about it now to what it was – when we've had debates previously?

Respondent: I'd like to think so. I think there are conflicting drivers for this, really. We would say that the lack of productivity in the UK economy is, in part, related to the dominance of central government, the lack of devolution, as well as to the disproportionate growth of the southeast, vis a vis, other parts of the country. There is a combination of things going on.

We would point to other studies of OECD nations that show the level of fiscal devolution and decision making powers to city level, city state level, as being correlated with higher levels of economic growth, productivity and competitiveness. So we would say all of that, we'd say all that to Treasury.

There are some people in government who I think believe that too, think the evidence base is there. There are others, however, in Whitehall – and it would be a mistake to think of Whitehall as one mind – so there are others who will never willingly let go, because of the nervousness about whether that means not having control over what happens, and not being able to guarantee, for Ministers, progress on certain high priority projects.

I think one of the issues is, central government is all run on the basis of serving Ministers and serving their interests and their success, and not a joined up programme across government. That, in itself, doesn't make it easy to look at a joined up approach to growth in localities. Treasury just don't want to let go, basically; never have done, and never will do. But also, different Whitehall departments, in their own way, don't want to let go either, because those are the levers of control. They can

guarantee something will happen that they can then go to a Minister and say, “We funded the Troubled Families Programme, here are all the different programmes, you can see them here, you can ___[0:19:08] you can go and visit them you can [stand by them]. If you actually just fund a local authority to do its best to create prosperity, what do you send your Minister to stand in front of?

Interviewer: Yes, definitely.

Respondent: I hate to boil it down to such a basic thing, but I think that is part of what goes on.

So, there are some officials who get it, there are some Ministers who get it. I think it also sits alongside some government Ministers’ view that the state should be small and individuals and communities should be empowered, so sometimes it works along that narrative.

I think there is another push – well, another two reasons for the push on devolution. One is more it’s a decentralised responsibility for a smaller pot of money, and there is a bit of risk transfer going on. So, we know, as we are reaching an agreement on devolution deals, whether it’s on rail, franchising, or skills and college capital build or whatever, the money is less and we’re being put in the position of doing the commissioning with less money to commission from, and therefore we are managing those very tough conversations.

So, like the Northern Rail franchise that we’re looking at, at the moment, the likelihood is [we’ve been / we’ll be 0:20:20] given the responsibility for the franchising, we might be, but actually there [is going to be] less money to do it.

Interviewer: But with very tight funding to actually do it.

Respondent: So as the money contracts, we may be given more responsibilities, and that has already happened at local authority level. So that's the other push, I think, but that's decentralisation in the end, I think, not really devolution properly [without proper fiscal ___ 0:20:42], because we're not raising the money, do you see what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes, I do.

Respondent: If you get given a [goblet] of money, but it's less than it was before, and you're having to do something and secure outcomes ___ decentralisation.

Interviewer: What's the situation in terms of broad infrastructure stuff? Because obviously ___[0:21:04] to ensure that there are jobs, that there are high levels of prosperity and that they're good jobs and not just some of the low paid jobs, which is always the other issue, how does that link in with the debates around infrastructure, particularly around HS2 and HS3 in [redacted] How does it fit in with the debates around digital infrastructure and broadband? How does it fit in with the debate around skills education and being able to have control over that? Where do those issues sit within your idea of being able to develop this place shaped governance?

Respondent: Sure. I don't know if you read the Leeds Commission on the future of local government, about civic enterprise, because actually in a way, what I've been to talking to about is about a return to civic enterprise, the kind of 19th century, we had Joseph Rowntree and George Hudson in this city, who made [redacted] great and [all sorts].

Interviewer: Because these are very proud cities these, as well –

Respondent: Well most of the north of England actually is dominated by these proud post-Industrial cities, Liverpool being one, Manchester being another, but a core idea in there is that, again, an abiding responsibility of local government is to provide the infrastructure, the utilities infrastructure for a place. Actually, rail, education, roads and digital are all part of that.

Digital is very particularly a 21st century infrastructure agenda, and I think they are all part of what I'd call the supply side that creates the conditions for growth, so they ought to be strategically planned for in an integrated manner. So, for an economy to flourish it has to have road, rail and digital connectivity. For an economy to flourish it was to have a supply of labour and appropriately skilled labour. For an economy to flourish it has to be able to house its workers, its peoples, close to transport infrastructure or digital infrastructure, or with digital infrastructure. So you have to plan for all these things.

Interviewer: So everything works together, doesn't it? This is really something that I hadn't particularly up on, the fact that everything was so closely ___[0:23:34] and that all the ducks need to be in a row if it's to work.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. Well, they're interdependencies, aren't they? I mean, I have, pretty unashamedly, as has the administration here, prioritised economic growth above all other things. I'll tell you why, only because I think it is evident that the best way of people having long, healthy, productive lives, in which they don't necessarily need the state so involved in their lives, is for them to be in work and in good work throughout their lives, whether it's the same job or not. They can move between jobs, they can choose where they want to work and so on. That creation of employment and –

Interviewer: That unlocks –

Respondent: - is primary, because actually that also creates tax payers, that also reduces benefit dependency, that also reduces the likelihood of people in early adulthood, through to – being poorly and the involvement of the state in their lives. Do you see what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Now, I think the problem for the UK, it's back to the productivity challenge, is that actually we have – I don't know if ___[0:24:43] growth is the right word to use, but we have shaky growth, so we are evidently coming out of recession, [GVA] is picking up but wage levels aren't, and therefore, some of that thesis isn't working, because with the return to the Exchequer, we're not paying tax as the Treasury predicted .

Interviewer: It's not [coming in], is it?

Respondent: You're not getting the income tax in. You still have a level of benefit spending, because now half of people on benefit are in work.

Interviewer: Yes, is part of that due to the state of the labour market, where you've got all the middle level jobs effectively going? You've got a high level set of jobs at the top which are very well paid and mobile and all the rest of it, and then at the bottom you've got the complete opposite.

Respondent: That's absolutely evident in the [redacted] economy, the hollowing out of the employment structure, and it's posing us a real concern. It's particularly accentuated in [redacted] because the economy is balanced between the knowledge economy and the service economy, and the service economy is pretty low wage, shift, part time working, and wage levels have not picked up and – what did we say the figure was? One in five are earning below the living wage.

Interviewer: Something like that.

Respondent: Something like that. So, what we've noticed – I would say, at the point of the recession, we were one of the most equal economies in terms of the income differentials in the city, and

actually what I see is that is moving apart, so we're becoming a much less equal city.

I don't know if you've read 'The Spirit Level', which looks at the impact of wide gaps in income in places, but it tends to lead to a level of dysfunction in terms of educational attainment, mental health, involvement of the criminal justice system and so on, so you start to get issues, tensions and problems, because of that income differential.

So it's not so much about the overall earning level, it's about the income differential, and that's my worry for [redacted] is that hollowing out that you described is leading to that widening gap.

Interviewer: Which might lead to problems down the line.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely, and therefore blow a hole in my whole thesis that if we get people into work, we get people off benefit, we get taxes being paid and we reduce demand –

Interviewer: Yes, but it's got to be high paid work for it to work –

Respondent: It's got to be decently paid work.

Male 1: It's quite common in post-manufacturing industrial towns in that those middle wage jobs have disappeared and what now fills the gap? That's quite similar to the situation [we're ___ 0:27:15] in [redacted] I think.

Respondent: It is, and what we notice also is a population hollowing out. So actually we've got a very vibrant population up to the early 20s, which is to do with people like ___ students and postgraduates and so on, and then we've got a real decline in our population base between 24 and probably late 40s, early 50s.

Interviewer: And you've actually got that in [redacted] have you?

Respondent: Yes, we've got it in [redacted] it's not as marked as it is I would say across the rest of West Yorkshire, but it's still evident to us, and what I think is happening is people go off to London, they go off to other places, or they want to buy a house, settle down, have a family, and they can't afford to do it in the city, because house prices are through the roof.

House prices in [redacted] are drifting further and further away from the average wage level, in terms of mortgage ability, so sometimes the choice people face is going rented, or if they want to own their hoe moving to Selby, or Doncaster, or Leeds and commuting back in to work in [redacted] if that's where their employment is.

So we're seeing quite a lot of what is much more common in London and the south, we're becoming [like] Kensington and Chelsea, or Westminster, aren't we?

Interviewer: Does that cause a problem in terms of the fiscal position? If you've got people who come up here to go to the universities in the north, 21, 22, 23, go down to London, come back later on when there are care services needed, everything else –

Respondent: Yes, that's absolutely right.

Interviewer: - is there an issue around trying to manage that?

Respondent: Yes. I think there is, for all local authorities, and [redacted] as much as anywhere else, but probably not as much as in other authorities. So I think if you look at North Yorkshire, if you look at some of the rural areas, absolutely you can see those pressures coming in. In [redacted] we have a very high level of what's called ['self-funders for care' 0:29:12], so what we have are relatively more affluent older people who are self funders for their care in older life, but the Care Act that is coming in, which is the biggest change around social care legislation for 60 years, brings much greater responsibility to us for those self-funders, to ensure that their needs are assessed and that the right support is provided. So that actually is beginning to cause us some concern, because that will put new financial burdens. I don't think it's the wrong thing. I do actually think if someone is resident here then they are our responsibility, but it is a new burden, so that will start to put pressures in.

But relative to other places, our tax base is strong and growing, and that gives us more resilience and potentially more head room. What I'm trying to do is create a virtuous cycle of investment for growth, reduced demand and creation of head room I can deploy to look after those elderly people who really need the support. Do you see what I mean?

Interviewer: Right. I do, yes.

Respondent: So that's why growing the economy has been primary, because that's what builds our tax base. The tax base builds my ability to actually have monies available to invest in the care and support services for those families and individuals who really need us.

Interviewer: What's the constraint at the moment on the economy, particularly in [redacted] what are the constraints on growing it?

Respondent: The constraints – I mean, we are in strong growth, but the constraints now are - all back to infrastructure – a lack of supply of housing at affordable prices, a congested road network that is over its carrying capacity, and full employment, which means that we have labour shortages in key sectors, and probably insufficient high skilled jobs as yet in the city. That's probably true, isn't it?

So what's constraining growth at the moment is, goods and services can't get around the city fast enough, people can't find houses to live in, therefore companies that want to invest here go, "Well, where am I going to get the labour from?" Also, because there are enough jobs to go around, if you want construction workers, refuse collectors or social care staff, at the moment it's really tough to get. So the private residential care sector is really struggling to get workers. Do you see what I mean?

So there are serious constraints. They're good challenges to have, as in –

Interviewer: Yes, [because at least you're on the right side of it 0:31:47].

Respondent: - because I've got lots of demand, because people want to invest here, people want to base their business here, and I've got a very highly skilled population, it's the most skilled city in the north of England, in terms of educational qualifications. I think it's Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Bristol are the only cities ahead of us, so in the north of England, [redacted] has more –

Interviewer: Than anywhere else.

Respondent: - high skilled…

Male 1: And that's not entirely down to the University population, which is still fairly small compared to the rest of the city, about 20,000 students compared to 200,000, so it is reflective of the citizens [of [redacted] beyond the 0:32:26]…

Respondent: Yes, but what you start to see is an outflow from the city every day to Leeds and other places, of highly skilled people, to work there, and an inflow of people coming to do service sector jobs. I think that's what's happening.

There are other cities like that; Bath is very like that, where most people who work in the service sector can't afford to live in Bath. Well to do people live in Bath but they commute out to Bristol to work, unless they work at the University or some of the other high skilled jobs.

Interviewer: It's fascinating stuff, it really is.

Respondent: It is fascinating stuff, but the truth is, we have some options here, we have some headroom, we can make some investments. The other thing is, because we have a very high skills base, we have long standing institutions, we can secure a lot of *pro bono* support and partner with people.

That's the other part of this place leadership, is actually drawing on that capacity. So, we've got two fantastic universities, one of which is research intensive, one is very vested in the community and more vocational skills, but actually the research power of the University, particularly, has been hugely helpful to us. I already referred to 'The Spirit Level', we've also got [a] Labour economist working on our living wage policy, we've got the [Stockholm Institute 0:22:52] working on environmental issues with us. So across lots of departments there is engagement.

We've got the Joseph Rowntree in the city –

Interviewer: Of course, yes.

Respondent: - they have worked alongside us on our [fairness commission], but they also provide housing and social care in the city, so when we're looking at those sectoral issues about affordable housing or about dementia proofing, we're working with them.

We've got 13 Medieval guilds, which are sort of trade associations –

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: But the serious point is, they are still trade associations, and the Guild of Building, or the Merchant [Adventures 0:34:28] have key business people in the city, architects, lawyers, surveyors, whatever, and actually, they care hugely about the city, so if we are – for example, the Guildhall project, we're trying to create a digital media arts centre in a Medieval building, we'll be able to bring together people with the requisite professional skills to advise and guide that work, which will be challenging, as well as helpful, but it's a really important asset for the city.

So, if we want to –

Interviewer: That's all local knowledge that you can draw on to do that.

Respondent: It's kind of *pro bono* support.

Male 1: It's [fairly] unique to [redacted] in that [redacted] place in history, we have an Archbishop, we have –

Respondent: Yes, yes, exactly right.

Male 1: - we have a Major General that's going to be [carrying on 0:35:09] and because of these things we have access, probably disproportionate to our size.

Respondent: We ran the leadership programme for senior staff in the Council a year ago, which was moving from being service managers to being leaders in the city. We ran a [sort of] master class once a

month; so, for example, the Brigadier came and did a master Cass on leadership in the Army, currently. Then we got the Financial Director of Aviva, which is based here, to come and talk about what does leadership look like in a big corporate, and [Julie Ernwin 0:35:38] came and talked about equality and diversity in the 21st century.

Now, there aren't that many places you could call on all that expertise, but that, for me, is part of what we're about now, is actually tapping into the resource base of a place and making it work for the place. Because people associate with a place, they're proud to be part of the place, the brand is strong, the sense of pride about the place – like you say, you love coming to [redacted].

I do think that every place – because I worked in [redacted] previously, and you can find the same things in [redacted].

Interviewer: It's true.

Respondent: It's a fascinating place.

Interviewer: It is true, [Peace Hall 0:36:17] in Halifax.

Respondent: Well, I was responsible for the Peace Hall. What you'd have to do is tap into the [seem] of pride about a place, the willingness of people to contribute their expertise or their enthusiasm or whatever, and you start to make things happen, which I'm not –

Interviewer: I know that that's [very much 0:36:33] the thing now in Liverpool, in terms of trying to make the most of historic assets that are there.

Respondent: Yes, and it's also about the DNA and the story of a place. So, the story of [redacted] at least the last couple of hundred years, has been a lot about social justice and equity, as well as economic prosperity, because that's a very Quaker tradition of the city with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and what we've tried to do is return to that set of principles. So yes, we're all about growth, we're all about prosperity, but in that –

Interviewer: What are you going to do when you get –

Respondent: - it's about equity. It's not growth at all costs, and it's not growth that polarises the city.

Interviewer: I mean, it's fascinating to me. In terms of scrutiny stuff, and accountability; does that work?

Respondent: In parts. I think we're in quite a fractious time around all of those issues, and I think there has to be more attention to the act of conversation between citizen, local, state, about what we are here for, and what the relationship is all about.

I do think that one of the legacies of a very individualistic and customer oriented society, which I do think the period after the '80s became, was a default to a sense that your council tax is

almost you're purchasing directly, in a transactional way, services. I think that's what people think.

I remember talking to people whose houses had flooded, and they said, "I pay my council tax, I want you to build my garden wall up."

Interviewer: [It's a stock response 0:38:08], yes.

Respondent: "So that's what I want my money to go on," whereas actually, as you know, council tax is your investment in the creation of the kind of place you want to live in. I think we've lost sight of that, and I think that would enable a much more constructive debate around scrutiny and accountability, which is that, "This investment we are all making, what kind of place are we trying to create?"

Interviewer: So it's about looking at the wider picture in terms of what –

Respondent: "What priorities are there, and what compromises are there? How do I benefit directly and indirectly?" So you may not have a child in school, you may not have an elderly relative in need of services; on the other hand, if children in this place are not well-educated, there will be no one to serve you at the till, there will be more children who are caught up in the criminal justice system, and your life will be affected.

Interviewer: So it's about, I think, trying to make –

Respondent: Broader connections.

Interviewer: - it's back to that community issue, isn't it? About trying to make sure that people know that they've got a stake in [a pot of 0:39:10] public goods, type thing.

Male 1: One of the challenges is that, while we might have a mandate to lead the city, with partners, the scrutiny and governance aspects of that are not always within our gift, in terms of things that other partners, other organisations within the city deliver, and I think sometimes that can bear out frustrations.

Respondent: Well, I think that's absolutely right. I think frustrations arise on a number of levels. I think partly because what people hear or say is the money is going down and down, but their council tax level hasn't gone down and down; they think, "I'm paying the same amount of money, I'm getting less and less service," that, I think, is producing frustration. I think because the money is going down and down in relation to the things that people most directly experience, like the public realm, because as the money goes down and down we have to spend more of what we've got on core statutory functions, which is protecting children and support for vulnerable adults and elderly people. Then that inevitably squeezes the environmental –

Interviewer: So it's back to that ___[0:40:11] business, isn't it?

Respondent: Exactly, and as that plays out people are getting more and more disgruntled with us, because they say, “Look, my council tax bill still says £1,100, but the litter bin is overflowing, the pot holes are getting bigger, and the streetlights are not going on all night, so I’m not getting the value I used to get.”

I think that is producing a level of fractiousness. I also think that – and I think this is right, actually – there are more people who want to see the value demonstrated to them, of their investment. I think in previous eras there was more deference, which was, you trusted the local state, you gave your money over, and you didn’t challenge or question too much.

A healthy and a positive thing is, there is less deference, there is more challenge, but that isn’t always a comfortable experience, is it? Because we’re also trying to demonstrate value with a declining amount of money, and the things people really care about not being able to be maintained as well.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you see a situation in terms of – do you see a problem in terms of local authority just being able to deliver statutory services and nothing else?

Respondent: Well, clearly the ___[0:41:29] [graph of doom] is, it’s not just conceptual, it’s real and it’s happening. It’s happening for other local authorities quicker than it is happening in [redacted] because of the things that I described. We’re managing to get into a spiral of investment and growth rather than in cuts and decline, but every year that graph of doom gets closer to us. I think by 2019, or 2020 we will be completely reliant on our own tax base, and I think the amount that remains potentially for discretionary services will go from that, to that, and for statutory – so it will be

like that, do you see what I mean? There will be very, very difficult conversations about, of that discretionary monies, what are we going to spend it on?

We have started to get into that already, in ways that we could afford to, so we've transferred theatres and museums and galleries already into trust status, where they can secure monies in different ways and raise revenues in different ways. Our libraries have become a cooperative, from April; so we've got a staff and community owned library service now. So instead of volunteer-ising the library service, or shutting the libraries, what we've done is create a co-operative, and that co-operative, again, can raise monies and trade in ways that we can't. But it's still a big experiment and to some extent they can re-invent themselves as community hubs at the heart of neighbourhoods, that could house a range of services and organisations, and secure their future that way.

Interviewer: So it starts to think about re-thinking how things could actually be shaped, doesn't it?

Respondent: Yes, but we're trying to do it in a way that isn't just about closure or volunteer-ising, it's a supported approach to it. So you've got a combination of professional staff and community based volunteers working together on it.

So yes, unless we can raise additional revenues, unless we can retain more of our business rates, unless we can put council tax up – so, from my point of view, I would argue we should have the right to determine the rate of council tax, and we should do that through a mature dialogue with our citizens, and our citizens should be able to vote for the politicians and the tax rate that –

Interviewer: Yes, pass a judgement on that.

Respondent: - well that's democracy. I do think that the freeze undermines local democracy, so I would argue that they should be able to get…

I also think – and this is more tricky – that we should retain more of the growth in our business rates than we do. So we are retaining 25p in every £1 of additional business rate growth, because we're in strong growth, so they've capped how much we can keep of it. Now, I recognise –

Interviewer: So you get 25 pence and 75 pence goes back to…?

Male 1: 50 pence goes back to central government, and 25 pence goes back to the –

Respondent: Goes to the [institution 0:44:31], because we're in the business rates [pool].

Interviewer: Oh right, okay.

Respondent: The problem about arguing this too strongly is it starts to punch a hole in the progressive – in the redistribution of tax ___[0:44:41], and I still subscribe to that. I don't think you can say you stand or fall by it. Also, I would cheerfully accept that not all growth is attributable to what I do, we do.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter).

Male 1: ___.

Respondent: Very little of it. The all powerful [eye].

Male 1: That is the challenge back from central government, isn't it? It's fantastic when you have localities championing their cause and they want to share in that growth, [but then the problem 0:45:07] is, well, [how do you make that progressivism fair] and how are those benefits shared [among] all?

Respondent: That's right, exactly.

Male 1: It's finding the balance between them.

Respondent: So I would largely stand on the ground of council tax and actually being able to determine our local tax base. I do think we could get into discussion about things, discretionary taxation like bedroom tax, if you have a tourism economy – I mean, it's commonplace now, I think in both America and Europe, that there is… I don't know, there is a Euro on your bill in Paris, for example, which you don't notice particularly – she says – but we are sort of tax averse in this country, and bizarrely we think America is the same, but in fact there are state and federal

taxes, and there are taxes at every level, city taxes in America, which is how they create their revenue streams.

So we will have to look at those, because I think those are preferable to enforcement taxation, because the other thing we do – and that's coming in for a big hit at the moment, parking enforcement.

Male 1: That's the opportunity for localities, it's knowing which sort of taxes would work better in –

Interviewer: You can get –

Respondent: Are tolerable.

Male 1: Exactly. For us, the real strengths of our [city 0:46:17] are things like the visitor economy, and it's the service sector [within the city] and how to think about supporting them and working with them.

Respondent: Yes, so 7 million visitors a year put additional strain on our infrastructure, which isn't recognised in our settlement from central government. But if we could get visitor tax –

Interviewer: But if you could get a visitor tax, something to just help it a bit.

Respondent: Exactly, which then gives you money to invest in infrastructure, which sort of recognises the impact that the visitors have.

Interviewer: Yes, because I suppose, to be honest, people who are visiting [redacted] staying in [redacted] for the night, they're not going to be bothered if there is £2 on the bill, are they?

Respondent: I don't think so. ___[Crosstalk 0:46:56]. Hoteliers would tell you that it would -

Interviewer: They would argue it was –

Male 1: Our point is not that there should be a visitor tax, I think it's mainly just that what might work for us wouldn't necessarily work for [redacted] or [redacted] For them, I'm sure that there are other ways that they could think about –

Respondent: Well that's why I said discretionary taxes; you have the freedom to set, if you choose to set them –

Interviewer: If it works in your particular area.

Respondent: If it works in your particular locality.

Male 1: And that's the opportunity.

Respondent: And that would be the opportunity. That would be a kind of devolution that I think would be meaningful.

Interviewer: Yes.

Male 1: As much as I'd like this to get on and on and on –

Respondent: We ought to –

Male 1: Can we have one more question to wrap up?

Interviewer: Can I just give you one more final question? In terms of what you've said, and it's been very enlightening to pick your brains on this, these issues are obviously difficult, there are no simple answers. What is the motivation for doing it? In terms of your personal motivation; what makes you tick? Why do you do it?

Male 1: Some days I don't think we know. (Laughter).

Respondent: ___[0:47:58].

Interviewer: What gets you out of bed in the morning, in terms of doing it?

Respondent: It comes back to where we started, which is – I was talking about this to you yesterday – unfortunately, or fortunately, I was brought up in a Scottish Calvinist tradition in which –

Interviewer: Good for you.

Respondent: - there is sort of an obligation to give everything that you can to the world, to bring all your talents into play, right? If I have to be honest –

Interviewer: As a fellow Calvinist, I would agree with that.

Respondent: Well, I'm not necessarily a Calvinist anymore, sometimes I rue the day – but there is a very strong work ethic. I was brought up in a community with a very strong work ethic about [justified through 0:48:36] good works, now it's not about being goody two shoes or moral high ground. Inside me there is a sense of –

Interviewer: A duty.

Respondent: - a duty, yes. So when I see people who are brimming with potential, who either don't have the opportunity to contribute, or who walk away from their potential, I have to say –

Interviewer: You need to try and do something to –

Respondent: I'm not happy about that situation; I want people to have the opportunity to be everything they can be, and I want people who've got loads of potential to contribute it, I think that is a moral obligation. So that's what keeps me going.

Interviewer: So it's really a public service ethic.

Male 1: I think it has to be. The modern day Chief Executive will work pretty much 24/7, and they will always be on call, they can always [call in 0:49:12] for emergencies, they will work ridiculous hours, ridiculous days, with increasing expectations around performance, even lower pay, greater scrutiny in ways that perhaps would have been more applied to politicians in the past. So the sort of person that has to get out of bed in the morning knowing that they've got to deal with all that increasing work and scrutiny and yet still go out and deliver those even greater challenges, I think they really have to thrive on knowing that, at the end of the day, for them, what they're getting back is the contribution that they see in the city.

Respondent: Yes, so it's your inner drivers. It's not – I mean, in the end, I don't think I do this because I get thanked for it.

Male 1: You certainly don't.

Respondent: Because I don't – or because I think it's a route to being powerful.

Interviewer: No, it's not.

Respondent: I just think – I seem to have been given these gifts and this obligation, and I'd better get on with it, really.

Interviewer: But do you know what, that has actually come across to me, from speaking to public servants across the board. They have actually come out to me and said – and it's different, because if you go out on the street to speak to people they'll say, "Well, everybody is making money ___[0:50:15]," the truth is, as far as I can see it, is that the public servants that I have come into contact with, whether they be elected members or whether they be paid official, are not there for that. They're there because there is a public service duty, that they want to do something to improve.

Respondent: Yes, you want the world to be the best it possibly can be.

Interviewer: You want to do your best.

Male 1: If you got to Europe, if you go to the US, running a city is seen as one of the greatest privileges within public life, and it's something that's incredibly well respected, and it's something fairly unique to the UK in that there is a very bizarre attitude towards that role.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Respondent: And yet, I still feel every morning it's a privilege to have the responsibility I do. I look up at the ___[0:50:51] and I think, "Blooming heck, here I am. This is what I do." You do, you think ___.

Interviewer: Well that's wonderful.

Respondent: No, but it's true, isn't it? I think. I think it's really positive and pleasing to hear you say that about elected officials –

Interviewer: I think it's true.

Respondent: - because I've worked in local government since 1990, and I would say the vast majority of elected members I work with, actually just want to serve their communities. They get very little thanks, very little appreciation –

Interviewer: It's true. Yes, they don't –

Respondent: - they get rung about blocked drains, school fields and community [grants in the ward 0:51:23] and there is always controversy and –

Male 1: The hardest and greatest privilege, I think.

Respondent: They get – this lot here won't even take allowances that go anywhere near recognising what they do, or supporting them to do the work they do. So I'm very proud to be a servant of local democracy, particularly [local] democracy. I do say it's the most – because I'm, as you know, politically restricted – the most political thing I do now is support local representative democracy, because it's not fashionable or popular, and I think it's hugely important and you lose it at your peril.

I've worked in places where populism and the far right – well, far right, far left, extremes of all kinds, have surfaced, and it's not a good place to be.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Male 1: And on that note…

Respondent: Well that was helpful –

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Respondent: As I say, I'm a bit of a garbler at times, and I don't always choose my language – [the ___ of my language is at least proper 0:52:22].

Interviewer: No that is brilliant; it's really useful for me to get an insight into this, because again, I can learn an awful lot more from speaking to people than I ever can from reading stuff.

Male 1: We'd certainly be interested to see your early findings when you start putting [your thesis together].

Interviewer: Yes, you can certainly have a copy of it. I hope it doesn't bore you to death, that's the only thing.

Respondent: No, no we're – well, I'm sufficiently sad that that is what I would really like to read of an evening.

Interviewer: Bedtime reading, yes.

Respondent: So when do you hope to have first drafts and stuff?

Interviewer: Well I've got a lot of it done, this is the final bit of the jigsaw, as it were, so I'm hoping to have it done by the spring, so hopefully I'll get you a copy and then you can look at it.

Respondent: Are you hoping to teach it in academia, or what do you think - ?

Interviewer: I don't know, really. I simply did this because the opportunity came up to do it, and I thought, "Well I'll do…" I suspect when I complete it I will be just going back to public service again, and carry on like I did.

Respondent: Well there are worse things that you could do.

Interviewer: No, that's true. Thank you very much.

Respondent: Not at all. Thanks for coming across, really nice to meet you again.

Male 1: Best of luck. I'll see you out.

Interviewer: I really appreciate it. That's brilliant.

END AUDIO

Annex 10E – Parish Council - Vice Chair Interview

Q. Please give a picture of what it is like to carry out the role of an elected member of the Parish Council. Any comments on the community nature of the role and the personal motivation behind undertaking it would be most welcome.

A. My name is **XXXXXXX**.

I presently hold the role of vice-chair of **XXXXX** Parish Council, having held the role of Chair on two occasions. I have been an elected member of the PC for 12 years.

The role of a Parish Councillor is enormously fulfilling inasmuch as one can actively involve oneself both as a resident and a councillor in the Parish you are designated to serve.

The duties of a PC are quite diverse. There is contact with the Local Authority on most issues that arise. One can say every Department of the Local Authority at some time throughout the electoral year is called upon to assist the PC, acting upon the issues we present to them, viz: Street lighting, highways and verges, minor disdameanors, for example overhanging hedgerows, road signs, traffic speeding, dog fouling, street Cleansing.

As our PC is a rural area encompassing 2 villages, there is the matter of trespass on arrable land, the irrigation ditches, the trees and hedgerows all of which are constantly checked.

As the designated area of our Parish Council is in an Historic Village, encompassing the laws governing areas of such status, our passion is upgrading and maintaining the historic sites therein. There are large planters 5 in total that are provided and maintained by the PC, and the planting of bulbs on verges. Obviously there is sometimes the necessity to liaise with English Heritage if we consider it to be required.

The attendance at functions within the Mayoral Elected year is also a duty, as too the attendance at the formal inauguration of same. We have a small precept and have to spend wisely and manifestly appear to do so. There are meetings with the representatives of the LA on a regular basis on site to discuss various issues which have been brought to our attention.

We meet bi-monthly and our meetings are extremely lively!

The basis of a good Parish Council is having local folk, living locally which gives inspiration as their environs directly affect them. Obviously one has to reside within the boundaries of their Parish in order to serve. It is a crucial tier of local government as we are at the grass roots and have a farmer who has farmed the area for generations on our PC.

We are staunchly a-political and refuse to be drawn into local politics.

Throughout my years as a PC, I have gained an inordinate amount of knowledge, an immeasurable amount of satisfaction and pride and gained a lot of friends, albeit a few enemies also! It is a position I cannot imagine my life without.

Annex 10F – Parish Council - Parish Clerk Interview

1. PLEASE EXPLAIN/COMMENT IN BROAD TERMS ON THE NATURE OF YOUR ROLE AND KINDLY DETAIL WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN CARRYING OUT THE ROLE.

MY ROLE AS PARISH CLERK IS LARGELY ADMINISTRATIVE INVOLVING THE DIURNAL RUNNING OF THE COUNCIL.

A TYPICAL WEEK:

- ATTEND PARISH COUNCIL MEETING AND TAKE MINUTES;
- TYPE THE MINUTES;
- EXECUTE ANY REQUESTS FOR ACTION ARISING FROM THE MEETING VIZ: EMAILS, LETTERS, PHONE CALLS;
- ARRANGE AND ATTEND SITE MEETINGS;
- KEEP THE ACCOUNTS;
- PAY OUTGOINGS;
- PAY FOR INSURANCE;
- LIAISE WITH OTHER BODIES AND AGENENCIES.
- ATTEND MEETINGS OF OTHER LOCAL BODIES WHEN APPROPRIATE.

IN CARRYING OUT MY WORK AS PARISH CLERK I AM MOTIVATED BY TAKING PRIDE IN EVERYTHING I DO. ALBEIT A NON-PRACTISING BARRISTER THE WORDS OF THE TREASURER OF THE INN ON CALL NIGHT HAVE ALWAYS MOTIVATED ME: *WHATEVER ROLE YOU TAKE IN LIFE AND WHATEVER THAT JOB MAY BE ALWAYS DO IT FIRST AND FOREMOST AS A BARRISTER.* THAT HAS ALWAYS UNDERSCORED MY PROESSIONAL CAREER. ULTIMATELY, AS THE PARISH COUNCILLORS ARE REALLY PRECLUDED FROM DIRECT CONTACT WITH CLERK ACTING AS INTERMEDIARY, I AM ALIVE TO THE FACT THAT I AM THE FACE OF SEFTON PARISH COUNCIL AND OFTEN THE FIRST AND ONLY CONTACT OTHER BODIES AND AGENICES HAVE WITH THE PC – OR ANY PC FOR THAT MATTER. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT AS THE AMBASSADOR OF THE ELECTED MEMBERS THAT I WEAR THAT RESPONSIBILITY WITH PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE BAR AND A PUBLIC SERVANT. PRIOR TO MY SIGHT TAKING A TURN FOR THE WORSE I HELD THE POST OF SENIOR CROWN PROSECUTOR SO MY CONDUCT AND WORK ETHIC

HAS EXACTLY THE SAME MOTIVATION ALBEIT DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES.
IT IS MY DESIRE TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF
THE PARISH COUNCIL LOCALLY. OUT OF THE TEN PARISHES IN THE CENTRAL RURAL BELT OF THE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH, WE ARE THE SMALLEST PC WITH THE SMALLEST PRECEPT. I AM ACUTELY AWARE THAT MANY WITH WHOM I COME INTO CONTACT EITHER MISTAKE THE PC FOR THE ECCLESIASTICAL PAROCHIAL PARISH COUNCIL OF THE ICONIC MEDIEVAL GRADE ONE LISTED CHURCH WHICH STANDS WITHIN OUR PARISH BOUNDARY OR HAVE NO IDEA OF THE CONSITUTIONAL STATUS OF THE PC. IT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY AGENDA WORK TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE PC, CLARIFY ITS POSITION AND YES ISSUE POSITIVE `PROPAGANDA' LOCALLY SO THAT OUR COUNCILLORS ARE ALIVE TO LOCAL ISSUES, THEY ARE ON THE BALL AND A FORCE WITH WHICH TO BE RECKONED. WHILST I AM CLERK, NOT ONE AGENCY WILL BE UNDER THE MISAPPREHENSION THAT THE PC IS "MUM'S ARMY" [THE VICE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL AND CLERK ARE MOTHER AND SON] OR A POSSEE OF RURAL GENTLEFOLK OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE TIMES. FOR THIS REASON IN ALL MY CORRESPONDENCE I DESCRIBE THE COUNCILLORS AS "ELECTED MEMBERS".

AS A COUNTRYBOY, I AM PASSIONATE TO THE POINT OF OBSESSION WITH RURAL AFFAIRS, FARMING AND FIELD SPORT. THIS POST ENABLES ME TO FEEL THAT I AM CONTRIBUTING TO THE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF THE ENGLISH COUTRYSIDE. THIS IS A MASSIVE MOTIATION IN MY WORK AND UNDERPINS ALL I DO. EVERY EMAIL, EVERY CALL, EVERY SITE MEETING, FOR ME, IS IN THE NAME OF RURAL CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION. I FEEL KEENLY AS A COUNTRY DWELLER THAT WE ARE RUN BY A METROPOLITAN BOROUGH AND OFTEN THE MBC IS NOT EMPATHETIC OF OUR IDIOSYNCRATIC NEEDS. THEY APPROACH ISSUES WITH AN URBAN EYE FROM TIME TO TIME. IN MY OPINION THE MBC OUGHT TO HAVE A DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AFFAIRS GIVEN IT HAS CUSTODIANSHIP OF GRADE A AGRICULTURAL LAND.

I KEEP MYSLEF UP TO DATE ON ALL RURAL AND FARMING ISSUES BOTH ONLINE AND BY SUBSCRIBING TO THE

FARMERS' GUARDIAN AND *THE FIELD;* I HOLD MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND AND ALSO HAVE A LIBRARY OF FARMING TEXTBOOKS BOTH ARABLE AND PASTORAL.

TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN MY RURAL COMMUNITY IS EXTREMELY MOTIVATIONAL AND FORMS THE BEDROCK OF MY WORK. ASSISTING THE ELECTED MEMBERS IN TACKLING RURAL ISSUES IS UNIMAGINABELY REWARDING. IT WAS PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE TO BE PART OF THE VILLAGE CHURCH'S PLOUGH SUNDAY. ALBEIT I AM ON THE PARISH ELECTORAL ROLL AND A COMMUNICANT MEMBER OF THE CHURCH, I SAT WITH THE PC IN THE RECTOR'S PEW RESERVED FOR OFFICIAL GUESTS, WITH THE PC. IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SERVICE WITH THE RECTOR BLESSING A PLOUGH BROUGHT INTO THE NAVE OF THE CHURCH IN FRONT OF THE ROOD SCREEN. SEEDS WERE ALSO BLESSED. FOR ME, THE CONNECTION FROM GOD TO ME AS A PARISHIONER AND CUSTODIAN OF HIS LAND AND EARTH IN MY ROLE AS CLERK TO THE PC WAS THAT DAY SO TANGIBLE. TO GIVE HIM PRAISE FOR THE EARTH AND TO BLESS ALL LABOUR IN THE FIELDS AS PARSHIONER, SON OF LOCAL LANDOWNERS AND CLERK TO THE COUNCIL WAS DEEPLY EMOTIONAL AND MOVING FOR ME AS A PERSON.

2. PLEASE GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE TYPES OF ISSUES WITH WHICH PC IS INVOLVED.

THE ISSUES WITH WHICH WE DEAL ARE IDIOSYNCRATIC TO OUR RURAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE LOCATION OF THE PARSIH AS WILL BE NOTED BELOW.

3. OUR PARISH IS RURAL WITH 347 HOUSEHOLDS RANGING FROM BAND A-G. WE COVER FOUR DISTINCT AREAS:

- xxxxxx VILLAGE
- XXXXX VILLAGE
- THE EASTERN SIDE OF XXXXXX VILLAGE
- THE SEMI RURAL NIGHBOURHOOD OF XXXXXXX.
  ALL OF THESE VILLAGES CONTAIN LISTED DWELLING HOUSES AT GRADE 2, XXXX AND XXXXX VILLAGES BEING CONSERVATION AREAS, THE LATTER CONTAINING INTER ALIA A GRADE ONE LISTED MEDIEVAL CHURCH AND A

SCEDHULED NATIONAL MONUMENT. THESE ARE FARMING COMMUNITIES, PREDOMINANTLY ARABLE WITH MINIMAL PASTORAL LAND. THERE ARE FIVE FARMS IN THE PARISH, THE PRINCIPAL LANDOWNER BEING THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. PRIOR TO HIS DEATH IN 1972 THE EARL OF SEFON WAS THE PRINCIPAL LANDOWNER, WITH TENANT FARMERS AND TIED COTTAGES IN THE DISTRICT.

OUR PARISH STRETCHES TO THE JUNCITON OF THE MXX AND TAKES IN AN XXXXX SUPERSTORE WHICH IS QUITE FRANKLY AN UNTAPPED SOURCE.

WE BORDER ONE PARISH COUNCIL AND A TOWN COUNCIL. THE LATTER HAS THE BOROUGH RECYLICNG CENTRE WITHIN ITS BOUNDARY, JUST YARDS FROM THE CIVIC PARISH LINE AND THE BOUNDARY OF XXXXXX VILLAGE.

OUR PARISH ALSO INCLUDES THREE FOREST PARKS AND ONE GRADE 2 LISTED COACHING INN AND A BOWLING GREEN.

CURRENTLY THE NEW XXXXXXXX BYPASS IS BEING CONSTRUCTED THROUGH OUR PARISH.

THE ISSUES WE FACE AS A PARISH COUNCIL ARE IDIOSYNCRATIC TO THE ABOVE MILEU AS DESCRIBED:

- FLY TIPPING,
- PARKING OF VEHICLES DURING THE DAY IN THE VILLAGE PARTICULARLY COACHES AND HGVS GIVEN THE ROAD CONSTRUTION AND THE PROXIMITY TO THE MXX. WE HAVE ALSO HAD ISSUES WITH A COACH COMPANY – HIRED BY A LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOL – LEAVING ONE OF ITS SINGLE DECKER LUXURY COACHES IN A NARROW COUNTRY LANE ALL DAY;
- CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC SITES WITHIN THE VILLAGE OF SEFTON:
  - ✓ SCHEDULED NATIONAL MONUMENT – MOAT OF XXXXX HALL;
  - ✓ RESTORATION XXXXXXX MEDIEVAL WELL;
  - ✓ CUTTING OF TREES IN THE CHURCHYARD;
    - PLANNING – THE PC WAS RECENLTY ASKED BY THE MBC TO FILE ITS VIEWS ON A FENCE ERECTED WITHOUT PLANNING CONSENT WHICH

BREACHED ALL THE PLANNING RULES IN THE CONSERVATION AREA OF XXXXX VILLAGE;

- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. THE PARISH COUNCIL IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT. THE PC HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SHORING HEDGEROWS, PLANTING BLACKTHORN, CLEARING FLY TIPPING – A RELFECTION OF THE PROXOMITY OF THE TIP. THE PC GUARDS THE PARISH BOUNDARIES REPORTING ALL FLY TIPPING AND KEEPING AN EYE ON THE FOREST PARKS.
- STREET LIGHTNG. WE ARE CONSTANTLY ON OUR GUARD FOR LIGHTS WHICH NEED CHANGING.
- HORTICULTURE. THE PC KEEPS THE MBC `ON ITS TOES' REGARDING GRASS CUTTING. RECENTLY WE DISCOVERED THAT XXXX VILLAGE IS NO LONGER UNDER THE AUSPICE OF THE MBC AND A HOUSING AGENCY HOLD THE FREEHOLD OF ALL THE VERGES AND GREENS. THIS WAS A HUGE SEA CHANGE WHICH THE PC OVERSAW SUCCESSFULLY.
- SPEEDING TRAFFIC. THE VILLAGE OF XXXXX IS DISECTED BY THE XXXXX AND TRAFFIC SPEEDS THROUGH THE VILLAGE. IN THE RECENT YEARS THE PC WAS SUCCESSFUL IN SECURING SPPED CALMING MEASURES AND A PUFFIN CROSSING.
- SIGNAGE. THE PC HAS IN RECENT YEARS ERECTED NEW SIGNS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE VILLAGE OF XXXXX; IT HAS HAD SIGNS ERECTED TO THE HISTORIC WELL AND ALSO HAD SIGNS RESITED WHICH GIVE ERRONEOUS DIRECTION TO TRAFFIC.
- THE MBC'S FORWARD PLAN FOR THE BUILDING OF NEW HOUSES TROUHOUT THE BOROUGH. THE PC HAS ATTENDED MEETINGS AND VOCIFEROUSLY SUPPRTED OTHER PARISH COUNCILS WHO WILL BE LOOSING GREEN BELT, EVEN PETITIONING ON THEIR BEHALF.
- BEING ON A FLOOD PLAIN THE PC HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE ESTABLISHEMENT AND SITING OF PUMPING STATIONS;

- QUAD BIKING WAS AN INSIDIOUS PROBLEM IN THE FOREST PARK TACKLED BY THE PC.

4. PLEASE GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCIES/ORGANISTATIONS WITH WHICH THE PARISH COUNCIL COMES INTO CONTACT. IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO GET AN IDEA OF THE BREADTH OF BODIES WITH WHICH THE PARISH COUNCIL IS INVOLVED

XXXX MBC

- WE ARE IN CONTACT ON A DAILY BASIS WITH THE MBC. WITHIN ONE MAYORAL YEAR WE MIGHT CONTACT:
  - ✓ CLEANSING;
  - ✓ HIGHWAYS;
  - ✓ STREET LIGHTING;
  - ✓ PLANNING;
  - ✓ TREE OFFICER;
  - ✓ CONSERVATION OFFICER;
  - ✓ CORPORATE FINANCE AND ICT;
  - ✓ THE MAYOR'S OFFICE;
  - ✓ ELECTORAL DEPARTMENT;
  - ✓ WAR MEMORIALS' OFFICER;
  - ✓ RAPID RESPONSE;
  - ✓ PATHWAYS' OFFICER;
  - ✓ MBC PCs LIAISON OFFICER.
- ***CHURCH OF ENGLAND***
  - ✓ CHURCHWARDEN;
  - ✓ RECTOR;
  - ✓ THE PAROCHIAL PARISH COUNCIL;
  - ✓ THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND LAND AGENTS

  ALBEIT THE ELECTED MEMBERS ARE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS THE LOCAL ICONIC PARISH CHURCH OF XXXX HAS PROVED A FOCAL POINT FOR CIVIC WORSHIP – A HALLMARK OF THE PROESSIONALISM OF OUR COUNCILLORS. FOR MANY YEARS THE ANNUAL CIVIC SERVICE WAS HELD AT THE CHURCH AND RECENTLY THE PARISH COUNCIL ATTNDED THE OFFICIAL ANGLICAN SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR PLOUGH SUNDAY MARKING THE START OF THE AGRICULTURAL YEAR. ALSO THE LAY READER WAS RETIRING AND BEING CONFERRED READER EMERITUS. THE PC ATTENDED EPITOMISING ITS ROLE

IN SUPPORTING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY REGARDLESS OF FAITH AND CREED. THE PC WERE IN OFFICIAL ATTENDANCE. THE PC ALSO ATTENDS REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY, ORGANISING THE CLOSURE OF THE ROADS AND THE CHAIRMAN ALWAYS LAYS A WREATH ON BEHALF OF THE PC.
RECENTLY THE PC HAS HELPED FINANCE TREE PRUNING IN THE CHUCHYARD AND SUPPORTED THE PCC IN LIASING WITH THE MBC REGARDING COMPLAINTS FROM RESIDENTS IN COTTAGES ABOUT CHURCH PARKING.

- ***FREEHOLDERS***
  AS AFORESAID, THE PC LIAISES WITH THE LAND AGENTS FOR THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND OTHER MAJOR LANDOWNERS IN THE PARISH WHOSE PROPERTY MIGHT BE CAUSING NUISANCE OR ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE TO THE AREA. FOR EXAMPLE, RECENTLY THE PC HAS BEEN WORKING WITH THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AGENTS IN IDENTIFYING DISEASE TO ASH AN HORSECHESTNUTS IN THE GLEBE FIELDS – GLEBE LAND IS CHURCH LAND, ONCE THE PRECEPT OF THE LOCAL RECTOR WHO COULD INSIST ON 10 PERCENT OF ALL HARVESTS IN THE PARISH. THESE WOULD BE PLACED IN THE TITHE BARN AND OFTEN THE RECTOR WOULD DISTRIBUTE TO THE POOR IN WINTER.

- ***WILDLIFE TRUST FOR NORTH WEST***
- ***ENGLISH HERITAGE;***
  THE PC CALLS UPON THIS BODY FOR ASSISTANCE IN PRESERVING HERITAGE SITES IN THE VILLAGE. FOR INSTANCE THERE WAS FLY TIPPING IN THE SCHEDULED NATIONAL MOUNMENT AND THE PC LIAISED WITH EH AND THE FREEHOLDER.
- ***THE LOCAL XXXXXX INN;***
  THE PC HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH THE LOCAL INN AND AS IT IS THE ONLY HOSTELRY IN THE PARISH AVAILS OF ITS HOSPITALITY FOR SOCIAL NIGHTS. THIS ASSISTS IN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE INN, THE LICENSEE AND THE BREWERY.
- ***LOCAL POLICE***;
  THE PC HAS AN EXCELLENT RAPPORT WITH THE LOCAL CONSTABULARY AND ALWAYS INVITES ANY NEW SERGEANTS TO THEIR MEETINGS. OFFICERS GIVE

COUNCILLORS THEIR DIRECT NUMBERS AND ARE QUICK TO ASSIST

- ***THE FORESTRY COMMISSION;***
  WITH THREE FOREST PARKS WITHIN THE CURTILAGE OF THE PARISH THE FC IS OFTEN APPROACHED;
- ***ELECTORS OF THE PARISH;***
  THOSE ON BEHALF OF WHOM WE SERVE;
  - PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS INCLUDES A WINDOW FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION;
- ***LOCAL AREA COMMITTEES;***
  XXXXX AREA COMMITTTEE;
  XXXXXXX PARISHES AREA COMMITTEE;
  PATHYWAYS COMMITTEE (DISBANDED AS OF JANUARY 2015)
- ***ENVIRONMENT AGENCY/NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY;***
- ***LOCAL SCHOOLS;***
- ***INLAND REVENUE;***
- ***PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTANTS;***
- ***SOCIETY OF LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS;***
- ***LOCAL BUSINESSES;***
  THE PC USES LOCAL GARDEN CENTRES FOR THE PLANTS FOR THE FIVE PLANTERS IT BOUGHT AND MAINTAINS ITSELF FROM ITS PRECEPT;
- ***LOCAL PRESS;***
- ***THE OTHER EIGHT PARISH COUNCILS AND ONE TOWN COUNCIL.***