Violet Rook, Chair, Kingston Park Neighbourhood Forum – written evidence (CCE0107)

The meaning of citizenship and civic engagement in the 21st Century
The Kingston Park Neighbourhood Forum was established to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan under the Localism Act 2011.

This idea of a plan for a local area be it a Parish or an area with an established structure was to encourage local citizens to become actively involved in their community, to establish a local plan similar to a core strategy which would be of benefit to this and the next generation. This idea encourages civic engagement and should be encouraged in regard to local democracy. Newcastle also contains many examples of local civic engagement which brings together many cultures and communities in civic endeavours. An example was the Community Voices an organisation which included representatives of the BME, women’s groups, older peoples groups communities in the city who worked together in regard to commenting on council strategy. This established a tradition which the city encourages in schools and colleges.

The rights and responsibilities attached to citizenship
The rights of every citizen should be maintain without fear or favour and not for profit or fame but to endeavour to deliver all from the insecurity of bias and hatred. Showing no privilege or prejudice to anyone, but treating each citizen as unique to themselves and deserving to be considered so. The constitution shows and gives direction to enable trust in each decision and future proof the word of parliament and whose who try to establish a country where it is safe, caring and just. The individual needs to be aware of the rights of others to life, liberty and to pursue their own course in society. These rights have been establish in law, be it parliamentary legislation, case law, common law and precedents. These have been formulated by the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary over time and are the basis of our constitution. Many other countries have followed this example and it provides checks and balances which have brought stable government. This now needs to be adjusted to enable the positive use of technology to work for the citizens advantage in modern day society to have a voice in regard to parliamentary structure and process.

The impact of current electoral law on political engagement
Current law works in regard to democracy. Democracy indicates voting should be a personal choice and not compulsory. The use of technology in regard to voting will undoubtedly become the norm as it is in many countries in the world. But lessons need to be learnt in regard to hacking and false use of electronic voting. It would be useful if a research project was established to further the safeguarding of this procedure before it becomes established.

The state of citizenship education and the role that it plays in creating active citizens
The education of the citizen in regard to how the state works is vital to the health of democracy and the state both now and in the future. The media should play a more proactive role in this with information related to the structure and workings of Parliament. The broadcasting of the House of Commons is not compulsive viewing for the public. Therefore the national curriculum should be used to strength the knowledge of society in the very important topic, with economics being used to illustrate how local and national governments work.

Parliament and the Constitution should be taught to children and adults with refresher courses and visits to Parliament and Council events being made, especially at the commencement of a new
government, this would make the electorate more aware and active in civic developments. Perhaps a formal part of voting would be to indicate an active activity in regard to the topic.

The connections of Councillors and Members of Parliament should be developed in regard to educating the generations and encouraging involvement via visits, and the use of technology in regard to comments on committee meetings. Social cohesion would be encouraged and unite communities in mutual community needs via having the knowledge of how things work, its members being well informed, supporting civic engagement and the role of Government and Parliament.

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