Mr Graeme Davis – written evidence (CCE0108)

The meaning of citizenship and civic engagement in the 21st Century

The meaning of citizenship is quite broad. I think it is about belonging to a nation that values its citizens and will look out for them. Protecting them and their families and making sure that everyone with the community is heard and represented. This may be though protecting a minorities rights to exist, to healthcare and education. I feel that this should be done through engagement with the public through a variety of resources from consultation meetings and councillors, MPs etc. talking directly to the public. For the 21st Century this communication is becoming increasingly important through social media channels as much as traditions methods.

The rights and responsibilities attached to citizenship

As a citizen you should have the right to a good education standard, good healthcare, employment, a home to live in, a good environment and for your views to be able to be expressed through the political system. You have a responsibility to respect you fellow citizens and to do you best to look after your 'neighbours' and to adhere to the laws that have been granted as part of living in a co-operative system. As part of your rights, if a law is not working then you should have the opportunity to question it, raise it and see if others agree to change within a moral framework.

The state of citizenship education and the role that it plays in creating active citizenship

Citizenship education not very strong. How can people get involved in helping society? It should be taught to people how to get involved in your local community. How you can help a community, and how the community can help you?

The role of voluntary citizenship schemes such as the National Citizen Service

I think voluntary citizenship schemes are incredibly valuable in installing values within people and also letting people see other groups points of view. Having worked with many charities this is important. For instance if you work with disabled people you learn what obstacles they have in daily life. This can mould you in decision making for the future, both in your personal life and quite often in your working life. In terms of the environment, working with an environmental group can make you appreciate the damage say something simple like littering can do, or pollution. The engagement with groups you would not normally interact with is also an opportunity that breaks down barriers, like working with the homeless, religious groups that are not your own, or minority groups from other nationalities, disabled, homeless, people with addition problems etc. It helps you get an understanding of other peoples issues/lives and if everybody had access to services like this it would lead to more social cohesion and a better country to love in, for them and yourself. It also opens people to new ideas and activities that they would not normally come across and fuels people's imagination leading to people being happier with themselves, more productive and open to new experiences, reducing problems like depression and loneliness. The question need to be asked though if the scheme if open to all or just the privileged that can let their children go? Could it be used to include other things to get children more involved like music or football?
The ways society can support civic engagement and the role of government and parliament in supporting that

For society, government and parliament to get people more engaged in civic duty it has to be made more approachable. It needs to engage people at all levels and aspects of life. People can not be led to think they are too poor or lack the education to be actively involved in creating a better environment. People need to know they can get involved in local projects and do things that can make a change not just for them but others they care about. This needs to be done more readily through more modern engagement of social media, clubs and talks and then leading onto active participation/discussion meetings and/or related activities. Communication is a strong lead in engagement, and often over looked. People often say, I would have said something about an issue, but I found out after the event. Engaging all interested groups, even via a email, or social media invite at least would go some way in trying to get people more involved in what goes on in the country, especially when it comes to the youth. Local authorities getting the public's opinion on what they want to do to improve their area is a great start, but then when projects get up and going to get people to volunteer to see the project through and have some sense of ownership has a big impact. They then have time and effort invested in ideas and therefore tend to pay more respect to what is going on around them, often leading to engagement in future projects.

Time to get involved is often an issue, as most people work, getting actively involved in civic engagement has to be done outside a normal working life, or time needs to be made to allow people to take part in activities.

The values that all of us who live in Britain should share and supporting

To be able to be a citizen regardless of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, age, politics, class, economic standing, nationality and gender, and to have equal opportunities.
To be accepting of other even though they may be different from ourselves
To create a community where we all bond together making a safer, happier and freer environment.
To reduce obstacles of inclusion so that we can all live an easier life and all have a say
Ensure the country is left in a good state for future generations.

The relationship between civic engagement and social cohesion

A cohesive society is integral to active civic engagement. Listening to people issues/problems can give you ideas about how to help them. This can be done through civic duties like engagement with say the planning of a town centre environment. Issues that a disabled group may have can be brought into the political planning realm and overcome through dialogue with planners to make sure that all groups are included. Within a town plan different religious groups, environmental groups, disabled groups, sexual orientation groups, youth groups, healthy living groups, homeless etc. can all be included and catered for. Helping with the local political system can make sure a bit of wild area is left for a rare species, or that street furniture is placed right for say those with visual impairment. Often those in local government making the decisions are unaware of the problems groups face and these can not be heard unless the public gets engaged in the decision making processes. By working this way as previously stated you also engage with other groups that you may not interact with in your normal life. It is good to get people from all walks of life involved in dialogue together to create a country they are happy and proud to live in. Working together breaks down barriers, and in the case of the current mood in the UK reduces fears of groups of
people who often have exactly the same values as yourself but different religions, sexual orientations etc. It is important for the authorities to help people get more engaged in their local communities to create a rich social infrastructure and make a more valuable and cohesive community and environment.

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