Cllr. Mrs. Armorel J. Carlyon – written evidence (CCE0234)

When I learned of the consultation in respect of Citizenship and Civic Engagement - I felt it necessary to respond especially Question 8 which I read as a determination by the House of Lords Select Committee to ascertain what these oft quoted BRITISH VALUES might be.

Both my husband and I were born in Truro, Cornwall. I have lived in Truro all my life and am therefore in a position to reflect on the changes in Cornish society though some 70 years.

I was first elected as an Independent Councillor to Cornwall County Council in 1973, (I think there were only 7 ladies out of 89 Councillors) having served on all three tiers of Local Government and still remain an elected Councillor on Truro City Council. (My May election addresses enclosed with hard copy)
I am also a Cornish Methodist Local Preacher and run a flock of Poll Dorset sheep.

My husband and I have lived at 3 Strangways Villas, Truro TR1 2PA for the past 55 years. Members of the Carlyon family have been HM Coroners in Truro since 1837 and Mr. Carlyon was HM Coroner until his retirement and now our eldest daughter Dr. Emma Carlyon is HM Coroner for Cornwall.

We were both brought up in Christian families and surrounded by gracious kindly folk, where everybody knew one another - spoke to one another and cared for one another. In fact for the first 25 years of our married life we never felt the need to lock our front door. Almost every aspect of our lives has now changed and I welcome the determination of the House of Lords Select Committee which will have the ability to summon evidence from all parts of the country to analyse what has seemingly “gone wrong” and then to build on the present aspects of modern society which they deem to be successful.

My response is based on the market town of Truro in Cornwall which has a population of around 20,000 where I have spent the whole of my life and where I have devoted almost 50 years to the community influenced by my non-conformist Methodist background.

1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to the questions of identity?

To be able to address this question it is necessary to briefly review the changes that have taken place within the space of 50 or so years.

Truro like many other towns and cities in the UK was full of family run shops where everyone knew everybody. These have now largely been replaced by national companies. One can go shopping and not see anyone one knows.
I have watched the changes taking place in the City and since “developers” arrived in about 1967 and “ripped” the City apart for no other reason than for their own profit I resolved to be vigilant and to protect the remaining historic environment (this does not only involve the large developments but also attention to detail such as fenestration, down pipes, advertising ....). Truro
has a vibrant Civic Society and a Truro Conservation Advisory Committee and I am a member of both.

I suppose within the historic environment within the City centre itself we have been reasonably successful - because I believe it is essential to preserve the historic environment to give the people who live here an identity and not another alien “catalogue” shopping mall. Our work has not been made any easier by the introduction of the NPPF and the lack of Government funding which has reduced the number of Conservation officers to TWO for the whole of Cornwall. However there are many aspects to Civic Engagement.

In the first instance it is necessary for people to speak to one another. There are three ladies, including myself, who promote as we call it the “Ministry of the Smile”! - we speak and smile at everyone we pass or meet everyday. The response is varied - the majority of the young people are “plugged in” and do not hear or see you - others look at you and are obviously thinking “What have you to be happy about?” and JUST OCCASIONALLY there is a response but usually a very wary one. I often ask myself how can life have changed so much in such a short span of years?

I write this because here in Cornwall, although it is changing, we have not had to address the changes brought about by people coming to Cornwall from other countries on the scale being experienced by other large Cities but rather people coming to live from other parts of England - many of whom come to Cornwall to retire.

So I wish to highlight the basic fact which is that people, especially the younger generation seemingly have no interest in communicating face to face with people they meet and that the problem is not confined to towns/cities where there has been a large influx of people coming in from other cultures.

The plain fact is that we are no longer communicating with one another on a daily basis ... we do not know our neighbours and sadly they do not seem to want to know us.

Another contributing factor is that parents are both working and that there is no longer time for neighbourly chats.

Many English people have made their homes here in Cornwall but do not seem to want to be part of the Cornish community. There is also seems to be a trend where people spend much of their lives “going on holidays” this in turn means that they are not able to be committed to the community in which they live.

No doubt you already aware of these facts but I cannot see how people can become a citizen if their only means of contact is either on “twitter” or “facebook”.

Needless to say we have events in Truro such as the Festival of Lights, an annual firework display and Christmas late night Shopping which attracts many people to the City Centre and friends meet up on these occasions.

Personally I think it is essential that every community has a village hall/community centre at street level where people meet one another on a regular but informal basis. However, sadly in Truro, the City Hall has now become the Hall for Cornwall (a theatre) and if Truro wants to put on an event it has to erect a marquee on Lemon Quay!! The City Hall was a vibrant place where Dog Shows, the Christmas Livestock Show, the Conservatives and LD Christmas fayres(not on the same day!), Scouts and Guides all held events but there is no longer a place for local people to meet on an informal basis at street level.

In conclusion I would suggest that in the first instance efforts must be made to create stable communities - people need to know the people who are elected to represent them. At present we are constantly told that everyone in authority is “listening” to the people but it is quite obvious from the plethora of “consultations” that come our way are, on the whole, completely disregarded or the questions are framed in such a manner to avoid unwelcome points of view. This in turn leads to apathy and disillusionment - which is hardly surprising.
Society has also become very mobile and which in turn means it no longer has any “roots” and little sense of “belonging” this naturally deters people from becoming involved in civic activities because they are only “passing by.”

Regrettably there is also a growing mentality of “pulling up the drawbridge” It is now noticeable that many people are choosing to live in isolation, installing, electric gates shutting everyone out from their lives that they do not want to see. This may be the result of fear, burglaries and for other reasons but seldom does one know who lives the other side of the gate!

I do not see any easy solutions but what I do see is that there needs to be a change of attitude from central government. We hear much about “localism” but if one analyses the problem - just take for instance the NPPF - ALL Local plans have to be drawn up in strict accordance with the NPPF - ALL Neighbourhood plans have to be drawn up in complete accordance with the Local Plan - except that St. Ives have bravely made a stand against any more Second Homes!!

QUESTION 4

Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

As an Independent Councillor who has spent 46 years serving on all 3 tiers of Local Government one of the most important things I have striven for is DEMOCRACY. Democracy in my opinion is a very fragile thing and has to be guarded at every turn.

1. I think it was back in about 2002 there was an Act of Parliament that began to erode the responsibility of the elected Councillors and placed it in the hands of the paid officials. This in turn gave rise to the Scheme of Delegation which as time has passed has left the elected members virtually powerless. The electorate are not stupid and appreciate that “democracy” is almost a thing of the past.

2. Then there is the establishment of LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) up and down the country. I have stated publicly that these are no more than “an unelected, unaccountable Government Quango” who do the Government’s bidding using Council tax payers/ Income Tax payers money. Their meetings are held in private and they receive millions of pounds from the Government.

3. Everyone is aware who runs the country - the paid Civil Servants I believe the name is “Sir Humphrey”!!

4. This country had the opportunity to vote as to whether they wished to “Remain” or “Leave” the European Union. The people of this country turned out in their droves. It was not a party political vote - It was a straight forward vote - “Yes” or “No”. When the result was known and the majority of the people of this country wished to “Leave” we were then told that those who voted to “Leave” had not been given the facts, they did not know what they were voting for, they did not understand the consequences. But everyone I spoke to while canvassing at the recent elections, who had voted to “Leave” knew exactly why they voted to “Leave” and have in no way changed their minds. They loathe the fact that Europe can impose laws on the UK. They regret that Britain has lost its Sovereignty which in turn makes Westminster no more than a “talking shop”.

5. Devolution is yet another reason for disengagement.

To take a microcosm of Cornwall Council and Truro City Council
The responsibility of the Public Conveniences have been transferred to Truro City Council - it costs the Council Tax payers of Truro some £150,000 to run... the library alone will cost £120,000 and so the list goes on.

The Parish Precept in a Band D house in Truro is some £236.00 (and rising and the Parish of Kea (about a mile and half from the City Centre) the Parish precept is £45.

The people of Truro are having to pay “double taxation” because there has been no reduction in the Cornwall Council precept due in the main to the Government withdrawing Local Government Grants but at the same time there appear to be vast sums of Growth Point monies which are being spent on what many consider to be unnecessary and useless road schemes/improvements.

6. Planning - This is one of the biggest contentions. The Governments present “build ... build ...build” policy is devastating communities up and down the country and Cornwall is no exception. It is obvious that the word “Sustainability” is no longer in the dictionary - we cannot continue to “develop” on our agricultural land - we cannot continue to “develop” without the necessary infrastructure being provided. People expect services to be provided when they buy a house. Cornwall has only ONE District hospital which is on DAILY BLACK ALERT and yet we are building a further 52,000 houses plus student and sheltered housing.

The above matters are contributing to people becoming “disengaged” “disenchanted” with the Government at whatever level - and who can blame them? To be honest I think it is fair to say that there is a complete lack of trust among the general public for those in authority whether they be officers or elected members. I personally continue to challenge and question at every opportunity but I make little progress I just look to the younger generation and hope they will come to have the a pride in the place in which they are living and care of the environment which surrounds them.

7. Addressing the second part of the question regarding of the voting system.

There is generally mistrust in the present Postal Voting system and also in the registration system as to who can vote where and how many times? This needs to be addressed and the findings made public.

In my opinion and that of many other people, is that the voting age should not be changed. It is unusual for someone at the age of 16 to have a grasp of the economic complexities which face the country unless they have had the opportunity to study political history in depth.

QUESTION 5 - What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship

I would not have become involved in Local Government at such a comparatively early age if it had not been for the example set by my Methodist Chapel leaders.

They generously gave of their time to us as young people. They sacrificed their precious leisure hours (most people were working five and half days if not six days a week) to teach and encourage us. They themselves were involved in the Truro City Council which before re-organisation in 1973 was a major authority. Probably unconsciously, we were inspired by their leadership and example - always putting others before themselves and speaking up for those who were in need of help.

We also knew our Magistrates and they knew us.

So I question why is the school expected to be wholly responsible for the teaching of good citizenship?

Britain at this time is still considered to be a Christian country.

Surely if the true history of our country is taught in our schools it is bound to awaken a sense of duty and pride in our country’s long and amazing history but this appears to be sadly lacking and so too are the sound tenets of the Bible.
The Rev. John Wesley had such an influence for good up and down the length and breadth of our country preaching the Gospel because he lived the life he preached. Many historians agree that this man alone saved England from a “French Revolution”. So it goes back to adults setting the example for children to follow.

QUESTION - 7 - How can society support civic engagement?

There is no easy answer to this question. Measures need to be put in place in order that “the government” at whatever tier can begin to regain the trust of the ordinary citizen. This is not going to happen overnight! These are just a few examples where the Government and Local Authorities could begin to improve civic engagement.

Freedom of speech needs to be restored. The Government and Local Authorities have to begin to respect the views of the public - after all they are employed by the Council tax payer. The Council tax payer is also paying 18.7% of the total Local Authority salary bill towards their “copper bottomed” pension fund plus a lump sum which, as you are aware, is calculated at the triennial actuarial review, when sometimes their own pensions have been taken away.

Any public consultation, such as this one, requires action - people are weary of reports gathering dust on shelves.

On the whole there seems to be little enthusiasm for the main political parties and personally I feel disenfranchised as there is no longer a political party to represent my views and I cannot be alone.

Action needs to be taken to prevent the BBC from indulging in biased reporting both in their news bulletins and documentaries.

Parents bringing up children at this present time need all the support and help they can get - not constant interference from the state.

Schools need to respect parental religious beliefs and rights. Children should not be forced to partake in lessons on LGBT matters if it is not the wish of the parents.

QUESTION 8 - What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support?

In my opinion this is the MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION... Please, if nothing else will the Select Committee define BRITISH VALUES. I have written to my MP Sarah Newton on three occasions requesting the Act of Parliament in which British Values were agreed and when HM the Queen gave her Ascent to the Bill. She is well aware that I am an avid follower of Parliament today! and so I met with Sarah Newton and learned that British Values have not yet been defined!

How can we go around talking about British Values if we do not what they are? So where do we start?

My starting place is with the Coronation Service where the Divine Law is placed above the law of State. It reminds us of the source of all our law, in truth and in justice.

Lord Denning said -
"... if we seek truth and justice, we cannot find it by argument and debate, nor by reading and thinking, but only by the maintenance of true religion and virtue. Religion concerns the spirit in man whereby he is able to recognise what is truth and what is justice; whereas law is only the application, however, imperfectly, of truth and justice in our everyday affairs. If religion perishes in the land, truth and justice will also. We have already strayed too far from the faith of our fathers. Let us return to it for it is the only thing that can save us.”

Lord Atkin said ‘I doubt whether the whole of the law of tort could not be comprised in the golden maxim to do unto your neighbour as you would that he should do unto you.’

At one point in the Coronation Service the Archbishop goes to the Queen’s chair and says “Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for whole life and government of Christian princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.” And the Moderator of Scotland presents the Bible to the Queen, and says ‘Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively oracles of God’.

I think we have to ask ourselves - are these meaningless words in today’s world? Have they relevance in our lives today? Are we governed by them any more? Is there a Government of God?

I hope there is because as Lord Denning said - “Let us return to it for it is the only thing that can save us.”

Almost everyone I meet is desperately concerned about the present state of the country. They feel the very foundations are being shaken - nothing is certain any more.

We are not encouraged to celebrate Christmas because we might offend someone and so we have “Winter” festivals.

Children are being encouraged to decide for themselves whether they are boys or girls - what untold anxiety this must cause.

The age of consent is 16 and yet in the Doctor’s surgery is a notice - “Free condoms - no questions asked” - what message is this giving to our young people?

In 2003 the Government changed the licensing laws to 24/7 - we shall never know what untold harm this caused.

The definition of Marriage is now no longer between one man and one woman and those of us who hold to the traditional view are called “bigots” and no longer is the voice of dissent allowed to be heard.

In a recent Court case OFSTED inspectors have been found to have no satisfactory complaints procedure often placing Christian and Jewish schools in “Special measures” because they happen to hold to their values and beliefs. - what if they heard the children in a Sunday School singing Baring Gould’s “Onward Christian soldiers onward as to war, with the Cross of Jesus going on before ...”unless they understood the Gospel of Christ how could they be expected to understand what the children were singing?

So as I approach the end of my life the saddest thing for me is that England is seemingly no longer permitted to be a Christian country and the values established in the Coronation service which have changed little since around 800AD are steadily being eroded.

My question is - what will replace them?