1. About Involve

1.1 The Involve Foundation (‘Involve’) is the UK’s leading public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making. It supports people and decision-makers to work together to solve our biggest challenges. [www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)

1.2 In recent years Involve has undertaken considerable work on public participation and engagement for the UK’s parliaments. This includes:

- Delivering all aspects of the [Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care](#) for the House of Commons’ Health and Social Care Select Committee and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. These two committees commissioned the Assembly as part of their inquiry into the long-term funding of adult social care in England. The Assembly brought together a representative sample of the English public eligible to vote in general elections (in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, place of residence and social class, as well as attitudes towards a large/small state). Over two weekends Assembly Members learned about the issue of social care funding and the different options for its future, deliberated on this evidence with one another and arrived at a set of conclusions about how they thought social care should be funded long-term. The Committees found these conclusions very useful in its own deliberations and reflected many of the Assembly’s preferences in its own report.

> “If we are to ensure that the social care system of the future is sustainably funded and provides the high quality care that people deserve, then any proposals must command not only a political consensus but also the support of the public. The views of those that took part in our Citizens’ Assembly have been vital in informing our thinking and the model also provides a possible route for further public engagement and building the support that any reforms will need.” Clive Betts, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

- Writing the report ‘[Innovations for select committee engagement](#)’ commissioned by the UK Parliament’s Education and Engagement Service. Our understanding is that the Education and Engagement Service’s current offer to committees draws heavily on this report. Seven of the nine methods it offers (according to paragraph 2.1 of its written evidence to this review) come from the report (all except ‘General promotion of inquiries’ and ‘Early career academic receptions’). It is also our understanding that the Service draws significantly on the report when delivering its section of Committee Office School training.

- Providing [informal advice and formal training](#) for Education and Engagement Service officials at the UK Parliament, the participation team at the National Assembly for Wales, and participation and committee officials at the Scottish Parliament. In Northern Ireland we are about to conduct public engagement training for attendees including parliamentary officials.
2. Review questions

2.1 Our evidence to the House of Lords Liaison Committee review of investigative and scrutiny committees is relevant to detailed questions 11, 13 and 14 set out in its call for written evidence:

- How can Lords committees engage more effectively with the public and media to encourage a national conversation?
- What new offline channels could be used to engage with the public?
- How should committees engage with stakeholders in evaluating their activity?

It is also relevant to four of the key questions set out in the same call:

- How can Committees add most value to the scrutiny work of the House of Lords as a second chamber?
- How can House of Lords Committees develop a national conversation to complement their inquiry and scrutiny work?
- How can House of Lords Committees maximize their impact inside and outside the House?
- How can House of Lords Committees promote inter-parliamentary dialogue both within and outside the UK?

3. Why engage the public with committees’ work

3.1 Recent increases in public engagement by House of Lords investigative and scrutiny committees are welcome, as is the inclusion of public engagement in this review. There is considerable scope for House of Lords investigative and scrutiny committees to develop this aspect of their work further.

3.2 There are many reasons for House of Lords investigative and scrutiny committees to engage the public in their work and further develop this part of their activity. These include but are not limited to:

- **Ensuring committees’ have access to key evidence:** The public often holds knowledge that is vital to considerations of a committee’s inquiry topic. Yet public knowledge currently goes unrecognised as a form of evidence more often than it should. Relevant knowledge held by the public could be lived experience, for example what it is actually like to live in an area, use a service, or have a particular life experience (e.g., homelessness). Alternatively it might be about public opinion and what a representative sample of the public think (please see paragraph 5.4 below). Engaging the public can provide an important check and balance to the evidence provided by professionals.

- **Adding value to the scrutiny and representative work of the House of Lords:** Quality public engagement on a topic is something that is often not readily available to members of the House of Lords. By undertaking this activity, committees add value to the scrutiny work of the House and better enable it to hold the government to account on the public’s behalf.

- **Moving forward politically difficult issues:** Concerns about public reaction to policy alternatives can make it hard to move forward on issues where any
solution is likely to adversely affect some people, so-called “too difficult box” issues. This can mean that issues of real concern to the public are not dealt with by government. Understanding the considered views of a representative sample of the public on such topics can help create political space for progress (again, please see paragraph 5.4 below).

- **Increasing committees’ impact:** Public engagement can help strengthen the impact of committees’ work by enabling them to demonstrate public support for their recommendations. This can make their work politically difficult to dismiss.

- **Helping to increase public understanding of key issues and develop a national conversation:** Engaging the public in committees’ work has the potential to help build public understanding of key issues. The potential for this is greatest when using dialogue or deliberative methods (please see paragraph 5.3 and Figure 1 below). Such methods can be both high profile, if committees’ so wish, and involve producing neutral and accessible materials on the topic in question. These materials can be used both within and beyond the lifetime of an inquiry to help develop and inform a national conversation on an issue, as has happened with some of the materials produced for the Irish Citizens’ Assembly and Constitutional Convention.

- **Building public trust:** Engaging members of the public in committees’ work and listening to what they say has the potential to help build public trust in politicians, parliament and the political system as a whole.

4. When to engage the public in Committees’ work

4.1 **Public engagement can take place at several points within committees’ activity.** At all of the four points outlined below, a committee could make the engagement open to all members of the public, or seek input from a representative sample of the public or from a specific section of the public with relevant lived experience (please see paragraph 5.4 below):

- **Agenda setting:** Public engagement could be used to help committees decide what inquiries to run. This could be done via crowdsourcing inquiry ideas for the committee to consider, through a more in depth process that allows members of the public to discuss and reach conclusions on the issues that they see as most important, and/or by using public engagement to help prioritise the committees’ own ideas.

- **Framing:** Once a committee has decided on the broad topic of an inquiry, public engagement could be used to help frame the inquiry’s terms of reference and inform the specific questions it asks.

- **Responding:** Once a committee has decided on an inquiry’s focus, public engagement can be used to capture the public’s answers to the questions posed by the inquiry. Depending on when this takes place within an inquiry’s lifetime, it can help to inform questions to witnesses or simply feed in to committee deliberations alongside other evidence.
• **Evaluating:** At the end of committee’s life time or parliamentary session, public engagement could be used to assess the extent to which a committee’s work has addressed issues of key public concern, and to flag issues that the committee could consider in the future (linking back to agenda setting).

4.2 It is neither realistic nor desirable for committees to actively engage the public at all four points outlined above and in all their inquiries. Instead we would recommend that committees consider which points in their work and which inquiries would most benefit from public engagement, and prioritise accordingly.

4.3 To-date, public engagement by parliamentary committees has tended to focus on the *Responding* category above. This is because it fits most easily with committees’ existing practices around obtaining evidence. While this is both understandable and a logical starting point, looking ahead committees would benefit from considering the other three options available to them. Case studies and learning from engagement practice within both the UK and other parliaments may be useful in this regard. For example, the National Assembly for Wales has used public engagement to help set part of a committee’s agenda via crowdsourcing inquiry ideas.

4.4 There is a **distinction to be made between committees’ work being open to public participation, and committees actively engaging the public.** For example, calls for written evidence may be open to all individuals and actively promoted on twitter and elsewhere. This is important. However it is also true that only very limited sections of the public are likely to participate in committees’ activities through these types of channels. Where committees want high quality public input to their work, a more tailored and proactive approach is necessary.

5. **Types of offline public engagement methods**

5.1 There are many different ‘channels’ or methods for offline public engagement. Which specific method is most suitable for a committees’ needs in any particular instance will depend on the answers to questions such as who exactly it wants to engage, to answer what questions, and over what timescale. These considerations are outlined in Section Six below. They can also usefully be applied to online engagement methods and mixed online/offline approaches.

5.2 We do not believe it is necessary for House of Lords investigative and scrutiny committees to have a detailed knowledge of the many specific engagement methods that exist. However it is important for committees to have an **understanding of the different types of public engagement available to them and what they can offer their work.** This section therefore contains a high level overview of different types of offline engagement. It is possible to provide this high level overview in several different ways. Paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 consider two of these.

5.3 One distinction often used by public engagement professionals to make high level distinctions between methods is the difference between **engaging individuals, dialogue and deliberative approaches.** All of these types of engagement are valid and will be useful to House of Lords investigative and
scrutiny committees in different instances. What is important is to understand the differences between the types of engagement and employ them so that committees receive maximum benefit.

**Figure 1: Three types of engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of engagement</th>
<th>Engaging individuals</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Deliberation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it involve</strong></td>
<td>Asking an individual about their experiences or views in more or less detail</td>
<td>Seeking to build understanding of different experiences and views (open ended)</td>
<td>Collectively reasoning – weighing options and making choices together (seeks a decision/conclusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it offer committees</strong></td>
<td>The separate experiences or views of a range of individuals in more or less detail</td>
<td>An understanding of the different experiences and views of participants, including their reactions to the views and experiences of others and some of the reasons underlying their views</td>
<td>The considered conclusions of participants - including where these can and cannot be jointly agreed - and the reasons for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of advantages</strong></td>
<td>Good for people who are time poor, as does not involve bringing people together at the same time and can be done over the phone or at the person’s house or place of work</td>
<td>Enables interaction between people with different views, experiences and knowledge, and allows them to react to other people’s opinions</td>
<td>Gives an understanding of where common ground can and cannot be achieved, and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good for subjects that are very personal where people may be unwilling to talk in a group</td>
<td>Builds mutual understanding</td>
<td>Gives an understanding of where people would make trade offs if they cannot have everything they want (eg increased service provision and lower taxes), and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can be used to bring different types of professionals, eg public, front line staff, policy-makers together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of disadvantages</strong></td>
<td>Does not allow for people to hear</td>
<td>Does not allow for the reaching of a</td>
<td>Less good for subjects that are</td>
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different views or experiences, or to see how interviewees react to these different perspectives

Does not allow for the reaching of a collective set of recommendations or priorities between people

very personal where people may be unwilling to talk in a group

Less good for people who are time poor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of methods</th>
<th>The Education and Engagement Service’s offer of Filmed or photographic evidence via semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>The Education and Engagement Service’s offers of Conversation Cafes, World Cafés and Distributed Dialogue.</th>
<th>The Education and Engagement Service’s offer of Deliberative workshops.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5.4 A second, complimentary, distinction between methods is the difference between methods best suited for capturing participants’ lived experiences and those best for capturing public opinion:

- Committees may sometimes wish to engage members of the public because of a particular lived experience they have. For example, they might wish to hear from people who have experience of living in a particular area, using a particular service, or living with the effects of a particular policy change, and so on. Unnecessary here are methods that involve giving participants a lot of information about a subject before asking their views: the committee is asking for information that participants already have.

- In contrast, committees may sometimes want to engage the public – and perhaps a representative sample of the public – to understand public opinion on a particular issue. This may be because an issue is complex, affects large swathes of the public, and/or has moral or ethical implications. If a committee wishes to engage a representative sample of the public, then methods known as ‘mini publics’ can be most suitable, although some dialogue processes can also be used. Mini publics are methods like Citizens’ Assemblies, Citizens’ Juries and Deliberative Polls. They involve bringing a
representative sample of the public together to learn about an issue, deliberate on it and reach conclusions. Mini publics have been used around the world to look at issues from how to fund social care (please see paragraph 1.2 above), to whether a voting system should be changed (Canada), to budget priorities (Australia), and abortion and gay marriage (Ireland).

6. Choosing the right public engagement method: taking a design approach

6.1 As mentioned in paragraph 5.1 above, exactly which engagement method is most suitable for a committee to use at any particular point is best determined by answering a series of questions. This can be termed ‘a design approach to public engagement’. It reflects good engagement practice by ensuring clarity about the brief for the engagement work before a method is chosen. Taking this approach will help to ensure that engagement work carried out for committees’ meets their needs.

6.2 Five key questions that it is useful to be clear on before an engagement method is chosen are:

1. **What is the desired scope of the engagement work?** This question has two parts:
   (1) What policy areas or issues would the committee like the engagement work to cover (and what should it not cover)? For example, engagement work around an inquiry might look at all or part of the inquiry’s terms of reference.
   (2) What level of influence is being offered to the public? For example, committees are likely to be asking the public to submit their views to an inquiry, rather than to co-determine inquiry findings.

   The answer to these questions may be very obvious to the committee, but they may not be obvious to the public so are worth being clear about in order to help manage participant expectations.

2. **What does the committee want to learn from the engagement?** A helpful way to think about this question is to ask, ‘What can members of the public tell the committee that the committee can only find out from them?’. As seen in paragraph 5.3, this may be about lived experience or public opinion. As well as agreeing the headline purpose of the engagement, it is also important to ensure that the more detailed questions that sit underneath it meet the committee’s needs.

3. **Who needs to take part in the engagement?** What members of the public need to take part to answer the committee’s questions? Do they need a particular lived experience? Is demographic or geographic representation important? Does the committee want to hear from these members of the public by themselves, or would they ideally bring them together with other stakeholders?

4. **How much budget and staff time is available to support the engagement?** This will have an effect on method choice, as some methods are more expensive and/or time-consuming.
5. **How and when will the committee consider the findings of the engagement?** This is an important consideration for, among other things, method choice (the method needs to be deliverable within the committee’s timescales) and outputs (in what format do the results of the engagement need to be presented to the committee)? It will also help planning for how to feedback to participants about what happened as a result of their engagement.

6.3 A committee does not necessarily need to answer these five questions by itself. After an initial discussion with relevant committee officials, Parliament’s Education and Engagement Service or other engagement professionals should be able to help, including by providing different scenarios or options for the committee to consider. It is however useful for committee officials to bear in mind that these are the sorts of questions engagement professionals will be asking themselves when assessing how best to meet a committee’s requirements.

6.4 Following discussions with the relevant committee(s) to build their understanding of the brief, Parliament’s Education and Engagement Service or other engagement professionals will be able to recommend a method(s) for the committees’ engagement work.

7. **The role of committee members in engagement activities**

7.1 The best role for committee members to play in public engagement activities is often an under-considered question. There can be definite advantages to committee members attending public engagement events both for themselves (the chance to hear input first hand and to ask questions) and for participants (understanding that their input is being taken seriously). We would encourage committee members to attend engagement events.

7.2 However the exact role that committee members play at events needs to be carefully thought through. For the Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care (please see paragraph 1.2) the two committee chairs attended part of the event. They witnessed the Assembly first-hand and gave over dinner speeches about the importance of the Assembly and participants’ input. They also answered questions about their own thinking on social care, without expressing a direct opinion on the options being considered by the Assembly. The Assembly was led by professional facilitators. This helped to ensure the actual, and perceived, neutrality of the process, and meant the leads could employ facilitation techniques to ensure all participants could contribute equally to the discussions.

7.3 Roles committee members can play at events include lead, host, witness, and observer. The right role for them to play at any specific event should be carefully discussed and agreed as part of the planning process.

8. **When to begin planning engagement work**

8.1 Planning engagement activities, including securing attendance from appropriate participants, takes time. **It is important for committees to talk to Parliament’s Education and Engagement Service at the earliest possible point** - or to talk to other engagement professionals if the work is not being
undertaken by the Service. This could be when a committee is considering undertaking public engagement activity, but has not yet definitely decided to do so.

9. Sharing learning and practice on engagement

9.1 It is our understanding that public engagement officials from the four UK parliaments meet several times a year to share learning and practice. This is something we very much support. **There is significant potential for inter-parliamentary learning on public engagement, as the UK parliaments currently have quite different practices in this regard.**

9.2 There may be potential for innovation in how committee chairs are kept up-to-date with the latest innovations in public engagement for parliamentary committees, both within and beyond their own parliament. We are unsure what information is currently made available to committee chairs in this regard.

10. Conclusion

10.1 We welcome the inclusion of public engagement in this review. We are keen to support the Liaison Committee and other members and officials of the House in further developing investigative and scrutiny committees’ public engagement work. Such development would benefit the committees themselves, the House of Lords more widely and the public.

9 September 2018