



# How the Localism Act hands power to older generations



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## Foreword

Will we have enough new homes for today's growing families? Will we have enough new homes for the growing families of tomorrow?

Local bodies, particularly local authorities and town and parish councils, now have a critical role in shaping the answers to these questions. They have great influence over the operation of the planning system and the future delivery of new housing.

Local institutions and their role in the planning system shape all our lives. They take decisions that matter for us all. In particular they will have a crucial role in how many homes we build and, via controlling the supply of land with planning consent, the price of housing and the quality of new homes.

But, as this report carefully sets out, there is sharp inequality in who is represented in these critical institutions.

The blunt problem is that those who have the loudest voices tend to be a wealthy section of the older generation, who also have the least need for new housing. More than this – those with the loudest voices also have the largest economic interest in preventing new housing supply, and there is strong statistical evidence that older people are more likely to be opposed to new housing developments than younger ones (see pg. 16).

There is a real danger that the representative imbalance in our local institutions will further reinforce a planning system that already under-delivers new homes for young people, whilst over-protecting existing older homeowners.

In the past twenty years the tendency of the planning system to constrict the release of new land for housing has been getting worse and worse. The politics of new homes have become the politics of opposition and rejection.

There are compelling reasons to suspect this conflict is set to grow still further – as younger people find it harder and harder to get on the property ladder, housing need continues to rise, whilst home ownership rates among the older generation are set to reach record levels.

We must have local institutions that rise to the challenge presented by these trends. This means giving a representative voice to all parts of our communities – allowing us to debate and argue for outcomes that recognise the needs of all generations, not just a few.

**Matt Griffiths, PricedOut.org.uk**



# 1. Executive Summary

Based on data from the electoral roll and analysis of the age and background of local councillors in the UK, the Intergenerational Foundation has discovered that local elected officials are increasingly unrepresentative of young people and their needs.

- **Local councillors are getting older and are now 14 years older than the average UK adult.** Whereas the average adult age is 46, town and parish councillors have an average age of 60.
- **Few younger people become councillors.** Whilst under-35s account for 32% of the adult population in England, fewer than 5% of councillors are under 35. Worse still, the under-25s hardly ever get elected to their parish council as only 1 in 200 parish councillors is under 25.
- **Older people are heavily over-represented.** Over-65s account for 20% of the population, but they make up 40% of local councillors.
- **The problem is rapidly getting worse.** Over the last dozen years the average age of councillors has risen by over 4 years and there's been a 50% increase in the proportion of over 65s serving as councillors.
- **Councillors tend to live in properties which are more valuable than average for the areas they represent.** Using data from the Land Registry, the estimated value of properties belonging to councillors was 18% higher than the average in the surrounding postcode area.
- **The age bias among councillors exacerbates the housing crisis facing young people.** New housing requires planning permission from local authorities, who have to take account of the views of town and parish councils. Several surveys have found that older people tend to display much higher levels of opposition to new house-building than younger ones (see p.16), meaning the age profile of town and parish council members is likely to act as a barrier to increasing the supply of housing.
- **The Localism Act was intended to give more power to local residents but it is clear from these figures that what it is doing is handing more power to older people.** Unless the age profile of the people who engage with local democracy changes rapidly, its real effect will be to exclude young people as they are so under-represented.

*The Intergenerational Foundation ([if.org.uk](http://if.org.uk)) is a politically independent charity that promotes the interests of younger and future generations in British policy-making.*



## 2. Introduction

### A) Background

Young people in Britain today struggle to have their voices heard. On issues ranging from education to the housing crisis, public transport and beyond, the interests of young people are routinely ignored by an older generation of policy-makers who appear to be increasingly out of touch with the problems they face.

Scandals over MPs' expenses and lobbying at Westminster have shown the extent to which our nationally elected politicians live in a different world from the people who they are supposed to represent. Yet there is also a severe failure of representation at the local level.

In November 2011 parliament passed the Coalition government's Localism Bill into law. This aims to transfer power from unelected officials and the central government down to the individuals and communities who are affected by decisions, particularly with regard to local planning. A significant part of this strategy will involve giving greater powers to town and parish councils through neighbourhood planning.

This strategy asks a lot of Britain's local democratic institutions, particularly town and parish councils. In order for it to increase participation in the democratic process to a meaningful extent, the local bodies which will now have increased powers need to be genuinely representative of all their constituents.

To assess the degree to which they are representative, the Intergenerational Foundation ([www.if.org.uk](http://www.if.org.uk)) used information from the electoral register to profile individuals who are currently serving on town and parish councils. This research is completely original, as the membership of these bodies has never previously been examined in this way.

This data was complemented by some existing sources of information in order to enable a comparison between town and parish councils and other democratic bodies which function at the local level.

What emerges from this research is a compelling picture of elected councillors who are clearly not representative of the people electing them, in terms of wealth, gender, and, most significantly, age.

The implications of these findings are deeply problematic for Britain's tradition of representative democracy. If the Localism agenda is to succeed in genuinely increasing democracy in political decision-making, local representative bodies are going to have to make a much better job of giving a voice to young people.



## B) Outline of Methodology

The methodology of this report is described in detail in Appendix A. In summary, the research was structured around the following principal areas of investigation:

- Original research using the electoral register was undertaken to discover more about the profiles of town and parish councillors in England and Wales. These are examined in detail in terms of:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Value of residential property
- Existing data sources were used to examine the age and gender profiles of all other types of councillors so that they could be compared with town and parish councillors.
- The powers of town and parish councillors were examined, as well as how those powers are likely to change in the light of recent legislative changes – principally in the form of the Localism Act 2011.

## 3. Research Findings

### A) Town and parish councillors in England and Wales

There are approximately 8,000 to 8,500 parish councils in England<sup>1</sup> and some 600 town councils. In England, over 15 million people live in communities which are covered by town and parish councils. This is about a third of England's population.

In Wales there are a total of 735 town and community councils<sup>2</sup> (the equivalent of England's parish councils). These cover a far higher proportion of the population than in England with 70% living in a community served by a town or community council.

#### i) Age

Our research has revealed that the age profile of the members of town and parish councils in England and Wales is much older than the population average.<sup>3</sup>

- The average age of a parish councillor in England and Wales is over 60 (60.2) and the average age of a town councillor is 59.3. (Fig. 1)
- There are very few young councillors. Under 5% (4.2%) of parish councillors are aged under 35, despite the fact that adults in this age group make up almost a third of the population (31.9%). Less than 1% of all parish councillors in England are aged under 25. (Fig. 2)
- Younger people are only slightly better represented amongst town councillors with 7.3% being aged under 35 and 2.4% being aged under 25. (Fig. 1)
- The age profile of parish councillors varies by region. There is a difference of four years between the region with the lowest average age for parish councillors (West & South-West – 58.1) and the highest (Yorkshire, East Yorks & Lincs & Northumbria – 62.4\*). (Fig.3)
- In terms of the proportion of parish councillors aged over 65, in the South and South East under a third (30.9%) of parish councillors are aged 65+ but this figure rises to well over half (54.4%) in Yorkshire, East Yorks & Lincs & Northumbria. (Fig. 3)

\*For an explanation of these regions, see the appendix on p.28.

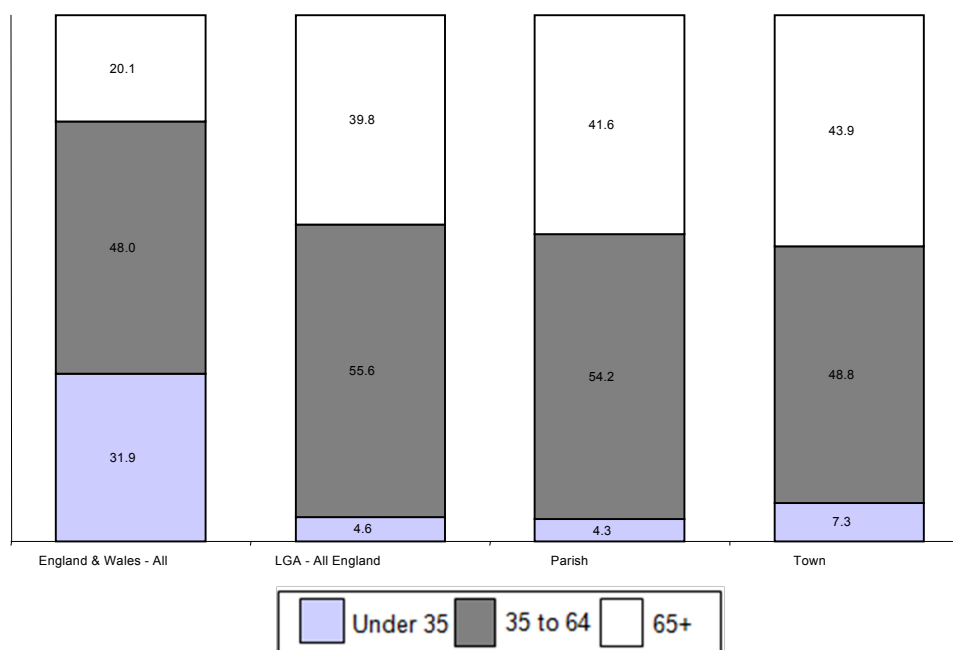
Fig.1. Comparing the Age Profile of Town and Parish Councillors to the Population and Councillor Averages

	England & Wales - All Adults	LGA* - All England councillors	Parish councillors	Town councillors
<b>Under 25</b>	16.0	0.8	0.5	2.4
<b>25 to 34</b>	15.9	3.8	3.7	4.9
<b>35 to 44</b>	17.2	7.1	9.6	7.3
<b>45 to 54</b>	16.5	16.4	14.0	17.1
<b>55 to 64</b>	14.3	32.1	30.6	24.4
<b>65+*</b>	20.1	39.8	41.6	43.9
<b>Total - %</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Average age</b>	<b>46.5</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>60.2</b>	<b>59.3</b>

\*This average calculation is based on 65+ = 71.5. For more information on how we arrived at this figure, please see Appendix B on p.31

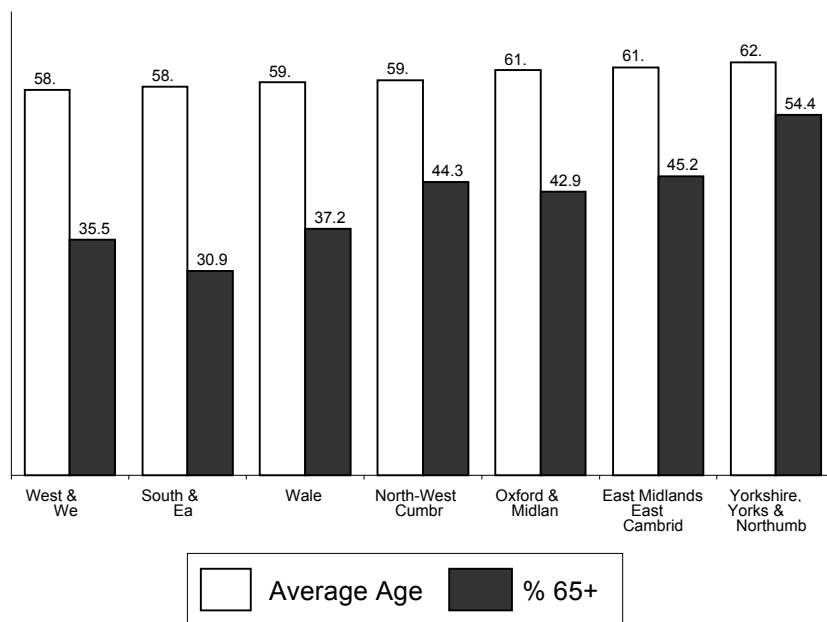
\*\*LGA=Local Government Association

**Fig. 2.** Chart of Comparison of Profile by Age Group





**Fig.3. Comparison of Age Profile of Parish Councillors (Average Age & Proportion Aged 65+) by Region – England & Wales**

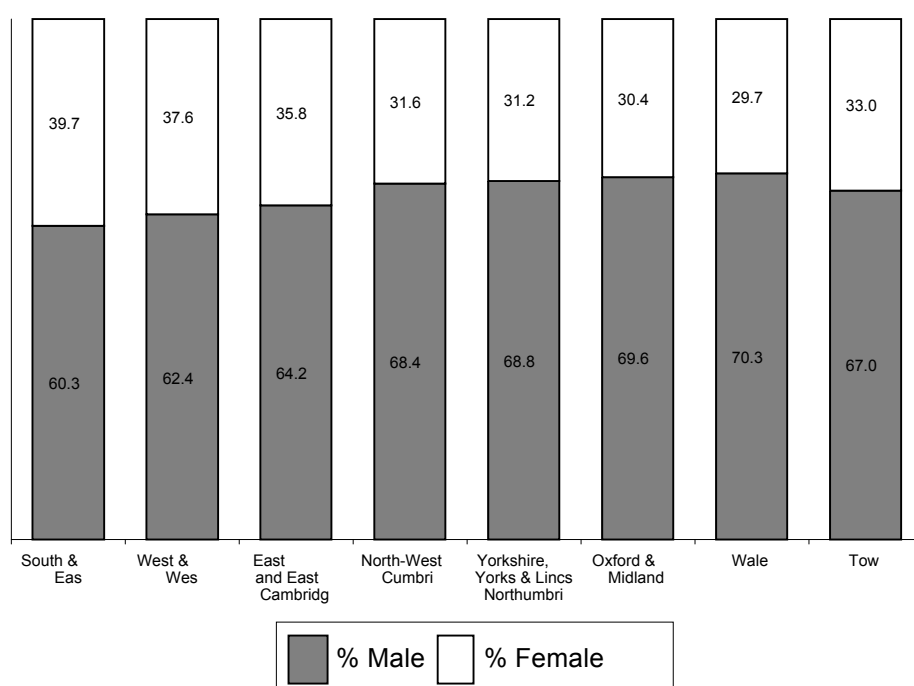


## ii) Gender

Our research has also revealed that women remain significantly under-represented among town and parish councillors:

- Although females make up more than 50% of the population in England and Wales, 66% of parish councillors are male and 34% female.
- 67% of town councillors are male and 33% female.
- There are significant variations in gender representation between the regions. In the South-East of England the proportion of female councillors rises to almost two-fifths (39.7%). At the other end of the scale, however, the proportion falls to well under a third in Wales (29.7%). (Fig.4.)

**Fig.4. Gender Profile of Parish Councillors (By Region) & Town Councillors in England & Wales**

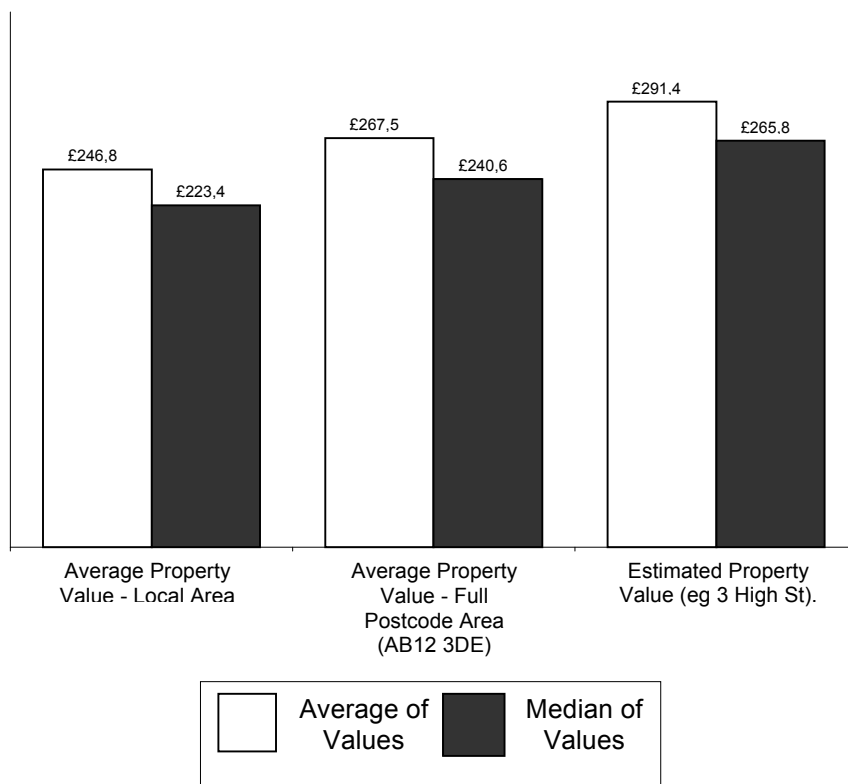


### iii) Value of Residence

Our research also revealed that town and parish councillors tend to reside in properties which are significantly more valuable than average for the area where they live (for the full methodology on how property values were estimated, please see Appendix A):

- The estimated value of all the properties in the full postcode area (AB12 3DE) in which parish or town councillors reside exceeds the average property value for the postcode area (AB12) by 8%. (Fig. 5)
- Where an estimated value is available for the property itself, the estimated average value exceeds the postcode area (AB12) average value by 18%. (Fig. 5)

**Fig. 5.** Comparison of the Estimated Values (by Mean & Median) of the Properties in which Parish Councillors & Town Councillors in England and Wales Reside with the Values of Properties in the Full Postcode Area (AB12 3CD) and those in the Local Area (AB12)





## **B) The profile of local authority councillors excluding town and parish councillors**

Our research into town and parish councillors is supplemented by the work of the Local Government Association (LGA)<sup>4</sup>, which conducts regular and detailed research into the membership of other types of elected councils in England. This includes Shire County councils, Shire District councils, Metropolitan District councils, London Borough councils and Unitary Authority councils.

This allows us to see the age and gender profiles of these representatives who are elected to local office more broadly and how these are changing over time.

### **i) Age**

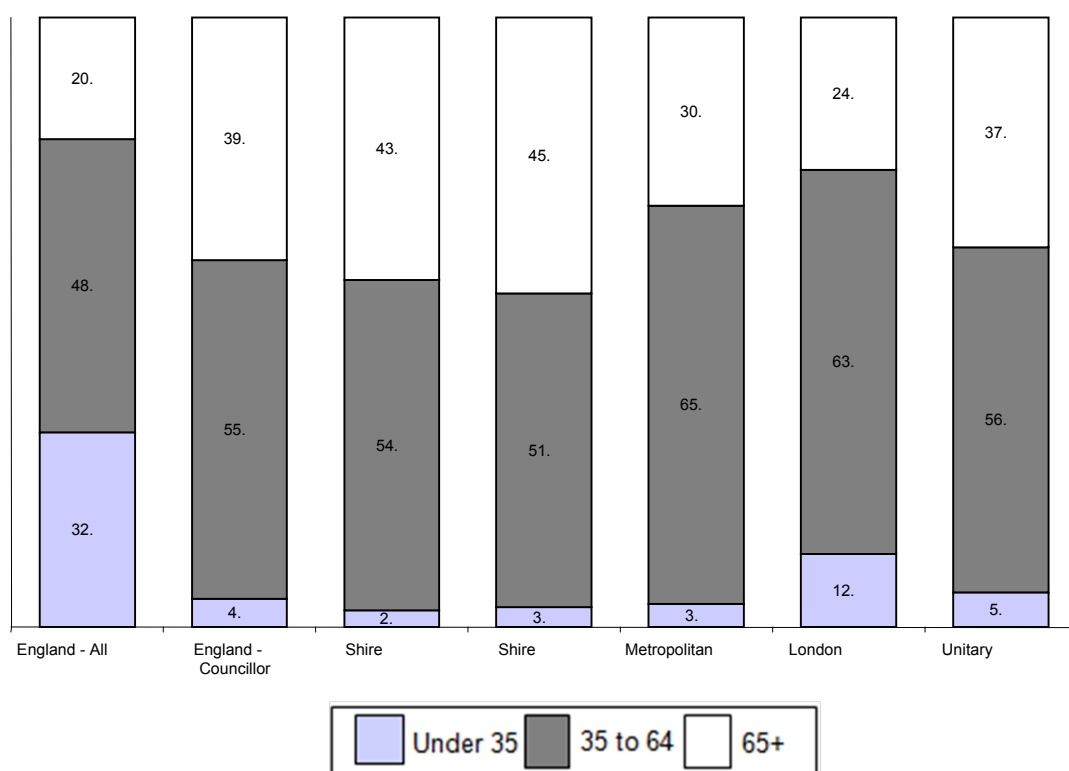
The LGA data shows that the age profile of other types of elected councillor is far older than the profile of all UK adults, in common with town and parish councils:

- The average age of a councillor in England is almost 60 (59.7). This is more than 13 years older than the average age for all adults in England of 46.4. (Fig.6)
- Amongst the different categories of councillors, the groups with the oldest averages are councillors in Shire Counties and Shire Districts, both of which have an average age of over 61. The youngest average age is 54.3 amongst councillors in the London Boroughs. (Fig.6)
- Younger councillors, identified as those aged under 35, are poorly represented. Whereas 32% of all adults in England are under 35, less than 5% of all councillors from this age group. This age group is least well represented in the Shire Counties and Districts. Representation is higher in London Boroughs, where 12% of all councillors are aged under 35. (Fig.7)
- The numbers of councillors aged under 25 are negligible. Less than 1% of all councillors in England are drawn from this age group whereas those aged under 25 make up 16% of the adult population. (Fig.6)
- The age profile of elected local representatives is growing older. The average age of councillors in England has risen by over 4 years from 55.4 in 1997 to 59.7 in 2010. Over the same period the proportion of councillors aged over 65 had risen from just over a quarter (26.4%) to almost two-fifths (39.8%). (Fig.8)

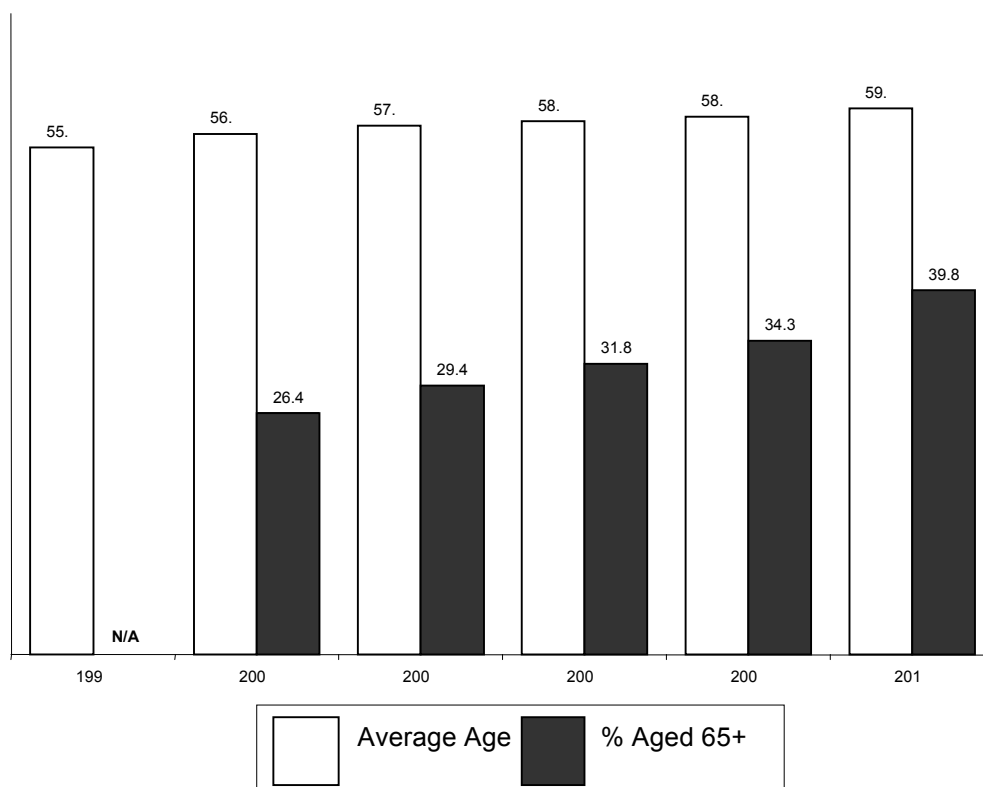
**Fig.6. Comparing Age Profile of Different Types of Councillors (excl. Parish/Town councillors) to the Profile of Adults in England (National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 – LGA)**

	England - All Adults	England - All Councillors	Shire County	Shire District	Metropolitan District	London Borough	Unitary Authority
<b>Under 25</b>	16.0	0.8	0.3	0.6	1.5	1.0	0.8
<b>25 to 34</b>	16.0	3.8	2.4	2.6	2.3	11.0	4.9
<b>35 to 44</b>	17.3	7.1	4.9	6.3	9.5	11.2	6.5
<b>45 to 54</b>	16.5	16.4	15.1	13.6	20.5	22.7	18.2
<b>55 to 64</b>	14.2	32.1	34.2	31.6	35.1	29.1	31.8
<b>65+</b>	20.0	39.8	43.0	45.3	30.9	24.9	37.7
<b>Total - %</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Average age</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>57.8</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>59.0</b>

**Fig.7. Chart of Age Profile of Different Types of Councillors (National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 – LGA)**



**Fig.8. Age Profile of Different Types of Councillors (excluding Parish/Town Councillors) in England over Time (National Census of Local Authority councillors – 1997 to 2010 – LGA)**

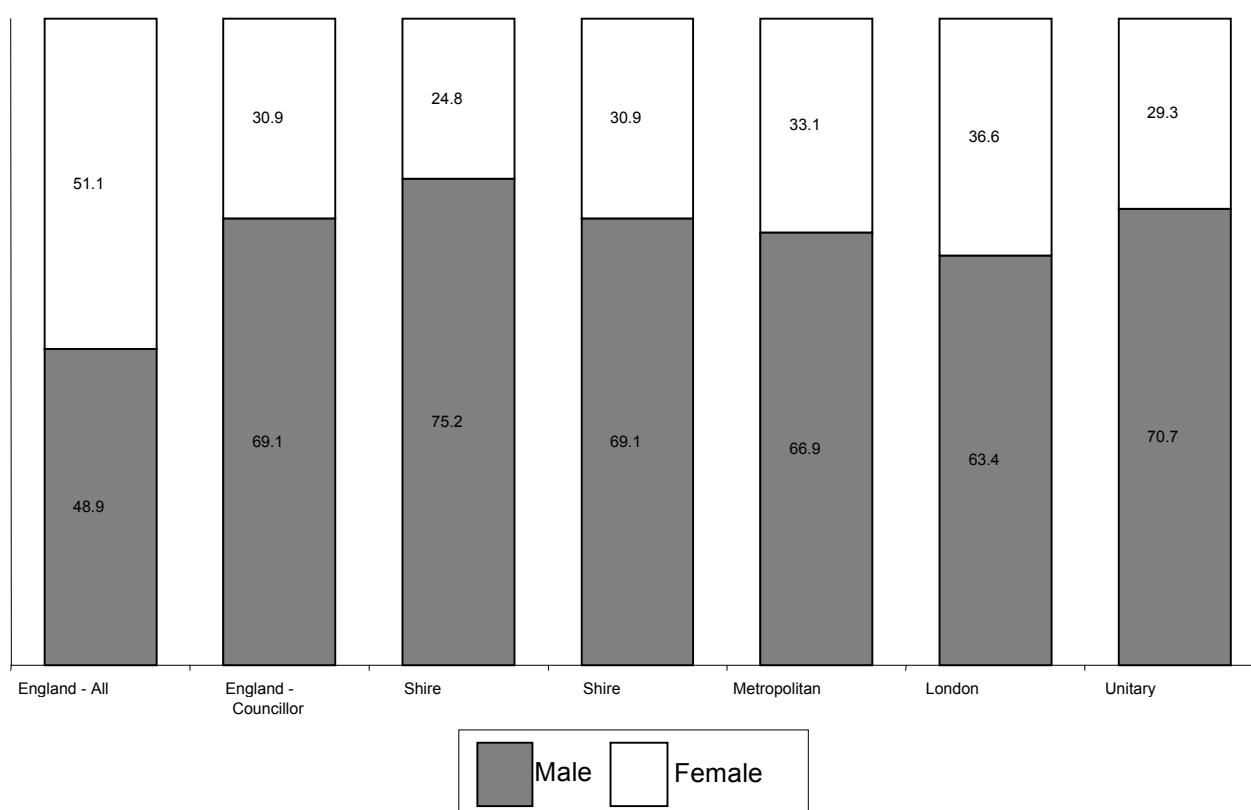


## ii) Gender

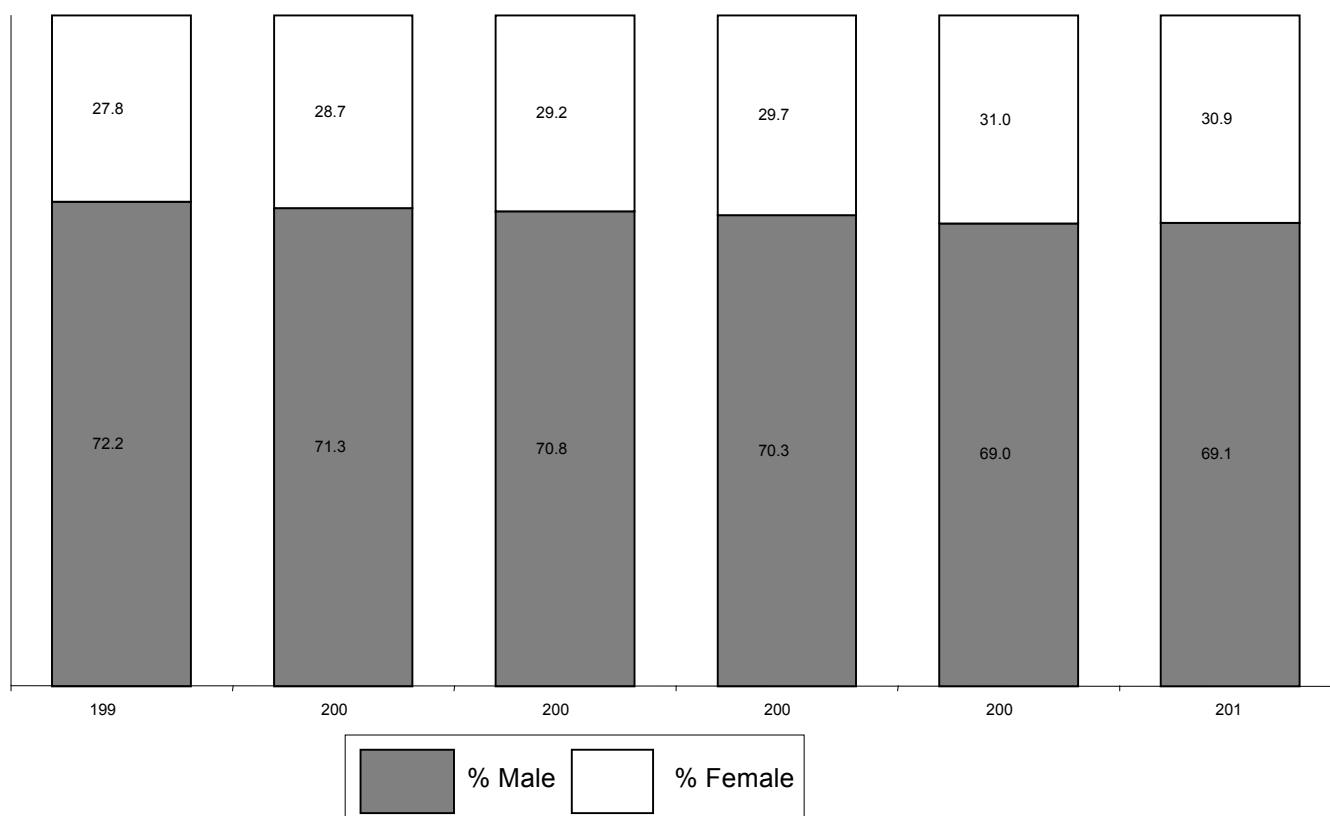
The LGA data shows that men continue to dominate representation among all types of councillor, in common with the picture for town and parish councils.

- Although males make up just under half (48.9%) of the adult population in England, they account for more than two-thirds (69.1%) of all councillors. (Fig. 9)
- This skew towards males is most apparent in the Shire Counties, where they make up more than three-quarters (75.2%) of the councillors; it is lowest in London boroughs, where females make up more than a third of councillors (36.6%).
- This gender bias is diminishing slowly. The proportion of female councillors rose by 3.1% between 1997 (27.8%) and 2010 (30.9%). (Fig. 10)

**Fig. 9.** Chart of Gender Profile of Different Types of Councillors (National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 – LGA)



**Fig. 10.** Gender Profile of Councillors (Excluding Parish/Town Councillors) in England over Time (National Census of local authority councillors, 1997 to 2010 – LGA)







## 4. Why is the composition of town and parish councils important?

Local democratic bodies perform a range of functions within the British political system, and in some areas they wield significant power. From an intergenerational perspective, their most important role relates to applications for planning permission.

Britain's younger generation currently faces a housing crisis, primarily caused by a severe shortage in the supply of affordable new homes. Local democratic bodies have powers to determine the fate of planning applications, and resistance from town and parish councils can play an important role in preventing new housing developments from being built.

### a. Older age cohorts and housing

There is important statistical evidence which suggests that older people are more likely to resist having new housing developments in their local area than younger people are.

Data from the Housing Module of the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey, published in 2011, showed that respondents in the 55–64 and 65+ age groups were more likely to oppose new housing development in their local area than respondents in the 18–34 age group. In total, over-65s showed twice the net level of opposition towards new housing developments that 18–34 year olds did.<sup>5</sup>

This supports evidence from the *Public Attitudes to Housing 2010* survey conducted by the now-defunct National Housing and Planning Advice Unit, an advisory body within the Department for Communities and Local Government.

This survey examined attitudes towards housing among English adults, finding that 25% of 55–64 year olds and 20% of 65–74 year olds questioned had formally opposed a planning application to build housing in their local area, compared with only 8% of respondents aged 25–34.<sup>6</sup>

The same survey also revealed that levels of opposition to new housing developments were twice as high among homeowners compared to non-homeowners. 13% of homeowners admitted that the reason they were against new developments was to protect the value of their own home from falling.<sup>7</sup>



Rates of home-ownership are also much higher among older age cohorts than the young. Around 75% of people in the 65-74 and 75+ age groups own their own homes, compared to less than 50% among people aged 25–34.<sup>8</sup>

These facts illustrate that, given their significant influence over the granting of planning permission, there is a real danger of local democratic institutions becoming a means for members of the older generation to strike down attempts to increase the supply of housing which would benefit younger people trying to get on the property ladder, in order to defend the value of the properties which they already have the privilege of owning.

This carries the risk of frustrating the intentions of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, which says that the bodies involved in granting planning permission have a responsibility for “providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations” (p. 2).<sup>9</sup>

## **b. Powers of town and parish councils**

Town and parish councils are able to influence the granting of planning permission in a variety of ways. The Localism Act 2011 has made some changes to how these powers operate, which need to be explained in detail.

### **Powers prior to the Localism Act 2011**

The main powers and duties of town and parish councils fall into three categories: provision of services and facilities, representative powers and, for some, a number of miscellaneous powers. Examples of each of these areas include:

- Services and facilities – allotments, cemeteries and crematoria, and litter control
- Representative - being notified about planning applications and most types of bylaws

Although town and parish councils have historically not had the power to decide planning applications, their submissions have a significant influence in the eyes of the planning authority. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Sched.1, para.8 states that “A local planning authority who has the function of determining applications for planning permission shall, if requested to do so by the council of any parish situated in their area, notify the council of any relevant planning application.”

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 also states that the planning authority must:



- Give the town or parish council an opportunity to make representations to them as to the manner in which the application should be determined
- Take into account any such representations

One parish council ([www.tockwith.gov.uk](http://www.tockwith.gov.uk)) describes this role as follows: “any planning applications within the parish are referred to the parish council to enable us to consult neighbours in the case of a small application, say a rear extension to a house, or far more widely if the planning application is likely to have an effect on the Community as a whole.”

The two umbrella groups for local democratic bodies, CPALC (Communities, Parish and Local Councils) and NALC (National Association of Local Councils),<sup>10</sup> see little difference between town and parish councils: “They both have the same powers and can provide the same services. The only difference is that a town council has decided that it should be known as a town council instead of a parish council, and has a mayor.”

So although the parish or town council does not actually decide on the planning applications, they have to be notified and their views must be taken into account, giving them significant influence (especially if large numbers of local residents object to the presence of a development). They also have an important role in relation to planning policy and the development of the planning framework in their area.

### **The Localism Act 2011**

The powers of local democratic bodies have been changed somewhat following the passage of the Localism Act 2011 into law.

According to the website of the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Localism Act 2011 has the following aims:

*“We want to see a radical shift in the balance of power and to decentralise power as far as possible. Localism isn't simply about giving power back to local government. This Government trusts people to take charge of their lives and we will push power downwards and outwards to the lowest possible level, including individuals, neighbourhoods, professionals and communities as well as local councils and other local institutions.”*

The Localism Act will give local democratic bodies significant new opportunities to influence planning. Most importantly, for the first time town and parish councils will be able to set their own planning policies governing the use of land in the areas they represent, under a new device called “neighbourhood development plans”, although these will have to be deemed compatible with the broader development strategy which is imposed by the local authority.



Town and parish councils will also be able to permit certain types or classes of development automatically, so that they can go ahead without a specific planning application, through “neighbourhood development orders”.

Areas which don’t have a town or parish council already will be able to create “Neighbourhood Forums”: community groups who can perform the same role of formulating a planning policy for the area. The government hopes to encourage a wide variety of voluntary and community groups to participate in Neighbourhood Forums, but given how consistent the demographic profile is of people who become councillors under the present system, it seems likely that older people would continue to predominate in this new form of local democratic institution as well.

There are also new plans for local referenda on key issues. Proposed Neighbourhood Development Plans or Orders need to be voted for by a majority of local residents in order to come into force, while if a minimum of 5% of the local electorate sign a petition then a local referendum must be held by the relevant local authority on any matter that the local community wishes. Again, given the profile of the people who participate in local democracy, this could easily become another means for members of the older generation to project their power at the expense of other groups within these communities, especially in areas with large elderly populations.

Finally, there will also be a new “Developers’ Duty to Consult.” On major planning applications developers will have to perform a comprehensive consultation exercise before the plans have been produced, and then show how they have taken the local community’s views into account in the submitted version. Given the acute housing shortage, this has the potential to act as a major deterrent for much-needed housing developments, and creates another channel through which people opposed to developments can block them.

Although these powers remain untested as the Act has only just come into force, the role of town and parish councillors as the co-ordinators of communities and their representatives will see major increases in their power to shape planning policy and then have a say in the more significant planning applications that are brought forward.



## 5. Why don't young people participate in local democracy?

Little formal research has previously been conducted into the barriers facing young people who wish to become councillors. IF's investigation into these barriers – which included interviewing young councillors to learn about the difficulties they face, as well as a thorough review of the rules governing council elections – has revealed a daunting range of factors which make it harder for young people to stand in council elections and get themselves elected.

These barriers can be divided into two types: obstructions which prevent young people from being elected in the first place, and obstructions that make it harder for young people to perform the role of being a councillor after they've been elected.

### Barriers to young people getting elected

- **The first-past-the-post electoral system.** The premium this system places on attracting marginal voters creates an institutional bias in favour of “safe” candidates who are expected to appeal to the broadest possible section of the electorate. Young people often seem to be viewed as a risky choice by party managers, making them less likely to get selected in the first place.
- **Local residency requirements.** Most local councils impose some kind of residency requirement on people wanting to stand for election. In addition to being registered to vote, councils often require candidates to have owned or rented property in the area for the whole of the last 12 months (or been resident there in some other way, such as living with parents), or been employed in the area during the last 12 months.

The length of these residency requirements often acts against young people, who tend to move house regularly because of problems with rental accommodation, or may have had to move because of reasons to do with work. The present system favours people who have been entrenched in a particular area for a long period of time, which means they tend to be older.

- **Four-year terms.** Local councillors serve four-year terms of office, during which they are expected to remain in the area they represent, serving their constituents. As younger people are more likely to move house, particularly if they need to because of work (councillors are not paid a salary; see next section), there is a greater risk that they will be unable to complete their term. Young councillors have faced criticism over taking sabbaticals in order to support their own career development, for example<sup>11</sup>.



- If they have to resign because they are relocating, it precipitates a by-election in that seat, which creates an expensive additional campaign for their party, which there is a risk they might lose. This also makes party managers reluctant to select younger people as candidates.
- **The age profile of people who vote in local elections.** Previous research for IF has shown that at the 2009 local elections, only 10% of people aged 18-24 voted, while the over 65s had a turnout level of 85%.<sup>12</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that an older local electorate would be more likely to trust older candidates, making it harder for young people to gain representation.

### **Barriers which prevent young people serving as councillors**

- **Lack of time and money.** Councillors do not receive a salary; instead, all they are provided with is a basic allowance, which can be supplemented by expenses for necessities such as food and travel. One young councillor we spoke to had received only a basic allowance of £5,500 p.a. before tax. This is in return for a very demanding workload, as councillors spend an average of 22.5 hours a week<sup>13</sup> performing their duties, which often includes frequent evening meetings and around-the-clock availability for dealing with their constituents' problems.

Another councillor we spoke to claimed that being elected had actually made her less employable, even though she thought her public service had given her a range of skills which would be desirable to employers, such as problem-solving and team-working. She felt that employers were put off by the demands that being a councillor made on her time, and was advised by a careers advisor at her local jobcentre to stand down in the interest of her career.

As a result, if young councillors do manage to get elected they often find that the role proves to be incompatible with developing a career outside politics and potentially having a young family to look after. These institutional factors favour people with a pension or other independent means of support, who have already paid off their mortgage and generally have fewer demands on their time from work and family.

- **The confrontational style of local politics.** Young people can express surprise at just how confrontational local politics is and how taking part potentially opens them up to a level of insult that they have never come across before. There are examples of young people seeking to become councillors being attacked principally on grounds of their age.<sup>14</sup>
- **The structure of local government.** In particular, young councillors often find it difficult to accomplish their policies when elected because they have problems working with senior local government employees, who they are formally in charge of but in reality suffer from huge disadvantages in terms of pay, experience and expertise. One young councillor complained that the senior local government officers under their command seemed to be resistant to their ideas.



## 6. Recommendations

IF has shown in this report how young people are disenfranchised by a system of local representation which places a series of barriers in their way that stop them from getting elected.

Through the promotion of its localism agenda, the government has shown that it is keen to involve a broader range of stakeholders in local decision-making, but a key element of this will need to be reforms that are aimed at enabling young people to play a bigger role in democratic bodies.

IF proposes the following key recommendations to help redress the balance:

### ➤ **Help give young people a bigger voice**

Young people make up a large share of the electorate, yet many local councils consist only of people who are middle-aged and much older. This makes it harder for them to address the needs of a significant proportion of the people they are supposed to represent, and undermines their democratic legitimacy. Reforms should be enacted which will encourage young people to serve on these bodies.

At the very least, councils should hold awareness campaigns to encourage young people to stand for election. Beyond that, quotas for representatives below the age of 30 should be examined as a viable means of encouraging more youthful participation, potentially accompanied by measures designed to overcome the systematic barriers which prevent young people from becoming representatives, such as providing them with higher levels of financial support.

### ➤ **Remove the barriers which prevent young people from being elected**

As we saw in Section 5, there are a range of structural factors which help to explain why so few young people get elected to local councils. Councils which have a poor record on attracting younger candidates to stand for election should be encouraged to examine the reasons behind this and, where possible, try to make it easier for young people to stand for election in future.

This may include measures such as ensuring that council meetings aren't scheduled to take place during the working day, when it is likely that younger councillors would need to be at work, and looking at ways that councillors could be given more support to help them achieve the difficult balancing-act between their lives as public servants and their domestic responsibilities.



➤ **Produce more detailed information about local councils**

Town and parish councils do not currently have to submit very detailed information about their members to any higher authority, making it harder to audit how well they represent their local residents. Even the data used in this report was only available from third-party sources (see Appendix A).

In order to make local councils more transparent and easier to monitor, all forms of local council – including town and parish councils – should be compelled to collect detailed demographic information about their membership, including age.

The Department for Communities and Local Government could easily collate these figures so that it would be clear which councils are doing the best job of representing their younger constituents.

➤ **Evaluate all policies for their impacts on different age groups**

Decisions made at all levels of government are now routinely subjected to environmental impact assessments, while financial cost-benefit analyses are also widely used. IF recommends that all policies should be subjected to an intergenerational analysis which would examine their likely impacts on different age groups.

This would enable local councils to look more closely at how certain problems affect particular age-groups more than others, and to ensure that the policies they pursue are not skewed too heavily towards the interests of one generation more than another.





## 7. Conclusions

The government's localism strategy is based on the flawed assumption that decisions which are taken at the local level are inherently more democratic than those which have been made centrally. As this IF report has argued, local councils are predominantly comprised of a narrow elite which is far older, more masculine and wealthier than the people it is supposed to represent.

Young people suffer a particularly high degree of political disenfranchisement from local councils, as demonstrated by the fact that less than 5% of all councillors in England are under the age of 35. It is the young who are overwhelmingly the victims of Britain's housing crisis, for which local councils must bear some of the responsibility as they often have a significant impact on planning decisions, and surveys have shown that older people are more likely to be opposed to new housing developments.

It is still too early to gauge the precise impacts which the Localism Act will have on local politics, but it has the potential to concentrate power in the hands of the older generation even further. The biggest change is that, for the first time, local councils are able to design their own planning frameworks, rather than simply acting in response to planning applications which others submit for their consideration. Unless the age profile of people who participate in local democracy changes dramatically, this could enable members of the older generation to turn their resistance to new housing developments directly into public policy, worsening the housing crisis facing the young.

This report is not intended to criticise local councillors, most of whom do an extraordinarily committed job for very little return. However, there is a clear democratic deficit in the failure of many local councils to represent young people among their members.

This is mostly the fault of a system which doesn't sufficiently reward those councils which make an effort to appeal to young candidates, while also placing sizeable barriers in the way of young people who do try to get elected – not least of which are the inherent caution among party managers, who often view more youthful candidates as an unnecessary electoral risk, and the poor pay and conditions on offer to most councillors, which particularly burdens young people who don't have a pension or other outside source of income they can rely on.

IF has suggested a range of reforms to try and break down these barriers. These include making it easier for young councillors to support themselves and their families, as well as keeping better data on local councils to help assess how effectively they are representing their electors.

The more forward-thinking local councils may adopt some of these reforms, but it seems likely central government will ultimately have to insist on local councils pursuing strategies which encourage younger people to serve on them if real progress is to be made. Some official acknowledgement by central government on the scale of these problems would be a positive start.



## 8. The Intergenerational Foundation

The Intergenerational Foundation ([www.if.org.uk](http://www.if.org.uk)) has been established to promote the rights of younger and future generations in British policy-making.

Our work includes undertaking research into areas where we believe there is an imbalance in expectations and entitlements amongst different generations, and publishing our findings to academics, policy-makers, business, the media and the public.

Key areas of concern include housing, further education tuition fees, the lack of employment opportunities for young people, unaffordable pension entitlements, environmental degradation, health service rationing and a not-fit-for-purpose voting system that encourages short-term self-interest over the long-term legacy we should be leaving our children and grandchildren.

IF is vehemently independent and non-party-political.

If you would like to hear more about our work please contact Liz Emerson by emailing [liz@if.org.uk](mailto:liz@if.org.uk) or by writing to:

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# Appendix A - Detailed Methodology

## 1. Profiling parish and town councillors

The original research that we have undertaken allows us to profile town and parish councillors in England and Wales in 3 principal ways; in terms of their age, gender and the value of the properties in which they live.

### Identifying Age and Gender

- If the name and address of an individual is known, it is possible to identify the age of a proportion of these individuals (not all choose to provide their age) via organisations which offer directory services based on electoral roll data. The age information which is provided about an individual indicates their age group (eg 52-56 or 65+) rather than their actual age by year.
- A proportion of town and parish councils provide contact information for local councillors including their address and postcode on their website.
- As we wished to understand if there were regional differences between the age profiles, we divided England and Wales into 7 regions and set a target of a minimum of 75 individuals who were parish councillors in each region for whom we would identify their age. In order to gain a sense of the age profiles of town councillors, we chose to profile the ages of one town Council in each of the 7 regions.
- The age profiles for the town and parish councillors might be a function of the age profiles of the residents of these more rural locations. Research by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)<sup>15</sup> indicates that the age profile of rural areas is slightly older than the England average.

Age Profile of Rural and Smaller Urban Communities (CRC adjusted to adults only)

	England	Rural	Urban >10K
<b>16–29</b>	23%	17%	25%
<b>30–44</b>	26%	23%	27%
<b>45–64</b>	27%	31%	26%
<b>65+</b>	24%	29%	22%

- As we wished to obtain the age profiles of a robust sample of town and parish councils, we purchased a number of searches that would allow us to identify the ages of individuals across England and Wales.

- The resulting structure of the searches is shown in the table below for **parish councillors**:

Region	Parish Councils Profiled – All Members	Total Number of Searches Undertaken	Total Number of Councillors for whom the Age Group was Identified	% Success Rate by Region
East Midlands and East and Cambridge	14	165	96	58%
North-West and Cumbria	12	130	80	62%
Oxford & West Midlands	8	133	80	60%
South & South-East	12	148	81	55%
Wales	11	138	78	57%
West & South-West	15	162	76	47%
Yorkshire, East Yorks & Lincs & Northumbria	9	122	80	66%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>57%</b>

- The resulting structure of the searches is shown in the table below for **town councillors**. Please note that at no point do we try to identify regional differences in relation to town councillors owing to the far smaller sample sizes. In this case, we are attempting to give an overall picture of how the profile of town councillors (of whom, as we have seen, there are far lower numbers overall) compares to that of parish councillors

Region	Town Councils Profiled – All Members	Total Number of Searches Undertaken	Total Number of Councillors for whom the Age Group was Identified	% Success Rate by Region
East Midlands and East and Cambridge	1	17	14	82%
North-West and Cumbria	1	12	10	83%
Oxford & West Midlands	1	21	17	81%
South & South-East	1	17	14	82%
Wales	1	17	12	71%
West & South-West	1	12	7	58%
Yorkshire, East Yorks & Lincs & Northumbria	1	13	9	69%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>76%</b>



- When it comes to assessing the average age of these councillors in order to make comparisons with the average age data that has been used in the LGA research, we needed to make an assessment of the appropriate figure that we would use for those councillors whom the electoral roll searches had identified as being aged 65+. We chose to set an upper limit for town and parish councillors of 80 and then create an average age based on the numbers of those in each age group between 65 and 80. Using this method we identified the average of those in this 15 year age band as being 6.5 years. We, therefore, added this figure to the base age of 65 to give an average age figure of 71.5 years (this calculation is explained in more detail in Appendix B).

## Identifying Property Values

- With the information that we had obtained, we realised that an opportunity existed to begin to investigate household wealth as indicated by the value of the properties in which councillors reside.
- From the searches that we had already undertaken to determine age, we knew the postcode and the home address of (almost) every one of our 998 councillors.
- We have, therefore, taken a sample of at least one parish council from each of our 7 regions and entered the postcode of each of the members into the Zoopla ([www.zoopla.com](http://www.zoopla.com)) property search website (under the database Current Property Values). From that we can identify:
  - **Local Area Average.** Current average property value of all properties in the postcode area (eg AB12) in which the town or parish councillor lives.
  - **Full Postcode Area Average.** The current average property value for the properties in the immediate neighbourhood of this property as evidenced by the full postcode (eg AB12 3DE).
  - **Property Estimate.** For a portion of the properties (101 out of 256), the current estimated value of that actual property (eg 3 High St).
- The numbers of successful searches that were completed are shown below (see next page). A successful search meant that the Zoopla website had provided an estimated value for the properties in the full postcode area in which the address of that Councillor (as detailed on the town or parish council website) sat and, in the case of a proportion of these properties (39.5%), an estimate of the value of that property itself.
- The data below is provided for information only and to demonstrate that the sample was drawn from across our 7 regions. Owing to the sample sizes involved, no analysis is undertaken from within the full sample as to differences by region.

Region	Number of Searches – Local Area (eg AB12).	Number of Searches – Full Postcode (eg AB12 3DE)	Number of Searches – Property Estimate (eg 3 High St)
East Midlands and East and Cambridge	55	55	16
North-West and Cumbria	31	31	15
Oxford & West Midlands	30	30	14
South & South-East	32	32	16
Wales	51	50	8
West & South-West	28	28	16
Yorkshire, East Yorks & Lincs & Northumbria	30	30	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>101</b>

## 2. The Profile of local authority councillors in England (excluding town and parish councillors)

- To provide context for new IF research into the profile of town and parish councillors, we have made use of some of the research findings that have been undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- The LGA undertakes a biennial National Census of local authority councillors. This has been run since 1997 and the most recent survey was undertaken in 2010. The data is available from the LGA website (<http://www.local.gov.uk>).

## Appendix B – How We Calculated an Average Age for those Aged 65+

The table below shows how we reached the decision to add 6.5 years to those identified by the electoral roll search as being aged 65+. Columns 1 and 2 show the UK population estimates for 2010 for the number of males and females in each year group<sup>16</sup>. Setting the age of 80 as the upper limit for participation as a town or parish councillor, we then (Column 3) looked at the structure of those aged from 65 to 79. We see that the half way point of those in this age span is reached between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> extra year. We chose, therefore, to add 6.5 years to our base figure of 65 to give an average of 71.5 years for those classed as being 65+.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Age	Total number of people, 2010	Upper Age Limit 80	Extra Years
65	650,066	8.8%	1
66	632,948	8.6%	2
67	603,828	8.2%	3
68	541,619	7.3%	4
69	503,210	6.8%	5
70	517,582	7.0%	6
71	511,820	6.9%	7
72	498,577	6.7%	8
73	480,023	6.5%	9
74	459,749	6.2%	10
75	436,892	5.9%	11
76	410,060	5.5%	12
77	396,677	5.4%	13
78	385,689	5.2%	14
79	372,437	5.0%	15
80	348,683		16
81	321,437		17
82	292,554		18
83	275,632		19
84	254,329		20
85	228,051		21
86	204,268		22
87	181,904		23
88	167,073		24
89	153,256		25
90	476,059		26
90 refers to 90+			

## Appendix C – List of References

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<sup>1</sup> “About NALC”, *National Association of Local Councils*: [http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About\\_NALC/About\\_NALC.aspx](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About_NALC/About_NALC.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> “Community and Town Councils”, *One Voice Wales*:  
<http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/allabout-councils>

<sup>3</sup> *Mid-2010 Population Estimates Analysis Tool*, Office for National Statistics, 2011

<sup>4</sup> *National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010*, Local Government Association, 2011

<sup>5</sup> *Public attitudes to housing in England: Report based on the results from the British Social Attitudes survey*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011

<sup>6</sup> *Public Attitudes to Housing 2010*, National Housing and Planning Advice Unit, 2010

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *English Household Survey Headline Report 2009/10*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011

<sup>9</sup> *National Planning Policy Framework*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012

<sup>10</sup> *National Association of Local Councils*: [http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About\\_NALC/About\\_NALC.aspx](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About_NALC/About_NALC.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> “[Long-distance city councillor serving ward from Cameroon](#)”, *The Argus*, 09/03/12

<sup>12</sup> *The Rise of Gerontocracy?*, Intergenerational Foundation, 2012

<sup>13</sup> *National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010*, Local Government Association, 2011

<sup>14</sup> “[Emily White is Not Alright](#)”, *Burgess Hill Uncovered*, 2011

<sup>15</sup> *State of the Countryside 2010*, Commission for Rural Communities, 2010

<sup>16</sup> *Mid-2010 Population Estimates Analysis Tool*, Office for National Statistics, 2011