



Activity Pack: Local Government



HM Government





This is the second additional activity pack aimed at youth leaders working with groups of Democracy Ambassadors. This resource pack focuses on the role of local government and should take around an hour to an hour and a half to deliver, although you can adapt activities to fit the time and resources you have available. Some activities are suggested as extensions or alternatives.

Aims & Objectives

By the end of this topic Democracy Ambassadors should:

- understand the main areas for which local government is responsible;
- have identified issues in their area needing change;
- know how to contact their local councillor(s) and MP; and
- have learnt some tips for effective sharing online through social media and video.

Session overview



Activity 1	What do we mean by 'local government'?	20 mins	page 4
Extension Activity	How would you spend it?	20 mins	page 6
Activity 2	What would YOU do?	20 mins	page 7
Activity 3	Who can I talk to?	10 mins	page 8
Extension Activity	Can you help me please?	10 mins	page 9
Activity 4	Peer to peer sharing	10 mins	page 10
Activity cards	Whose responsibility is it?		page 11
Handout	Top tips for sharing online		page 12

Resources you will need

- Group agreement if needed
- Pre-prepared sets of Activity 1 'Whose responsibility is it?' cards
- A screen/laptop and access to the internet
- Blank flipchart paper, sticky tape and coloured marker pens
- Sticky tape
- Pens/pencils
- Different coloured/shaped stickers or sticky notes
- Copies of the peer to peer sharing handout 'Top tips for sharing online'.

Note to youth leader: If you are not familiar with who your local councillor(s) is and how to contact them, or whether there is a youth council in operation in your area, you may need to do a bit of research yourself ahead of this session.

Activity 1: What do we mean by 'local government'? (20 mins)



1. Revisit the group agreement if need be and explain the aims of the session.
2. Ask if anyone can remember and explain the difference between the UK government (sometimes referred to as 'central government') and local government (usually county and district councils).

Prompts for youth leaders

UK Government and devolution

The UK Government has responsibility for the issues that affect everyone across the UK. These include: foreign policy, international trade, and the constitution.

It also has responsibility for areas such as health, education, housing and transport in England.

However, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland these responsibilities are held by the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, known collectively as the Devolved Administrations.

Each of these governments is formed after an election (held every few years) to the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly or Northern Ireland Assembly. Representatives in the UK Parliament are known as Members of Parliament (MPs) and represent constituencies across all of the UK.

Different people can vote in different elections e.g. in UK-level elections you have to be over 18 and a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen, but in some elections 16 year olds can vote. The rules for who can vote are set by the UK Parliament for General Elections and English local authority elections, and by the devolved legislatures for their own elections and for local authority elections in their jurisdictions.

Local government

Local government is usually split into two:

- a county council (which takes responsibility for issues relevant to the whole county like schools, transport, social care and libraries), and
- a district council (sometimes called a borough or city council instead) which takes responsibility for issues at a much smaller, local level, like bin collections, recycling and housing.

In London, and some other areas, there is just one tier of local government – often called a Unitary Authority, or known in London as a London or Metropolitan Borough.

Local Councillors are appointed by us in the same way that we appoint our MPs – by voting in an election.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the voting age for local elections is 18; in Scotland it is 16. EU citizens can vote in local elections across the UK.



3. Split participants into small groups and give each group a set of the 'Whose responsibility is it?' cards, and ask them to sort them into two piles: those issues they believe are the responsibility of national government, and those the responsibility of local government.

A Local bus services	B Noisy neighbours	C Deciding how much money the UK gives as international aid
D Reducing the speed limit in the centre of town	E Increasing the speed limit on motorways	F Number of places at local secondary school
G Number of people applying to be maths and science teachers	H Dustbins not being emptied	I Not enough cycle lanes
J Street drinking around the shopping centre	K Welfare benefits	L Vandalism in the local park

Answers: ABDFHIJL are the responsibility of the local government to tackle.
CEGK are the responsibility of the national government to tackle.

4. Check answers and discuss. Are there any surprises on the list? Does anyone have any suggestions as to why it is important to have a local government structure as well as a national one?

Answers should include:

- So that decisions made about how money is spent is done by people who understand the local situation.
 - So that central government has more time to focus on wider issues that will affect the country as a whole.
 - Local government is important because councils deliver services that communities rely on, especially social care, waste collection, road maintenance and making planning decisions (ranging from housing extensions to large scale regeneration projects).
 - So that decisions are made closer to local people, communities and businesses they affect.
 - Because councils are accountable to the local people who elected them.
5. Explain that there are also some overlapping areas of responsibility, and that the local MP, elected by and representative of their local constituents, will often intervene on a constituent's behalf if the local council has not resolved a problem, eg with vandalism in the local park.



Extension Activity: How would you spend it?

(20 mins)

1. Divide participants into small groups and give each group 20 coloured stickers or sticky notes (each group must have a different colour or shape so that the groups can be easily identified). Explain that local governments are allocated money to spend on their services from central government and from council taxes (local government sets the level of council tax – central government sets other tax rates). In recent years, like all parts of government, local government have been asked to spend less in order to reduce our overspending and debt as a country. This, coupled with a bigger demand for services from an aging and increasing population, has led to some tough decisions having to be made in local areas.
2. Each group's task will be to decide how their stickers (which represent money) should be spent on the different areas of local government responsibility on the flipcharts you will stick up around the room. Which areas do they consider to be a priority? Are there areas they think they could/should manage without?
3. Stick up eight pieces of flipchart, each with one of the following titles: recycling, street lighting, housing, youth services, rubbish collections, sports facilities, social services and public transport, and then allow around 10 minutes for groups to discuss and decide on their 'spending plan'. Following their discussions ask them to place their stickers on the flipcharts, and then bring the wider group back together to discuss the decisions they made. Use some or all the following questions as prompts:
 - Are there some areas everyone agree are priorities?
 - Were there any surprises amongst the decisions made?
 - Do you think local governments have a tough job making these kinds of decisions each year?
 - Can you think of any examples locally where the council have made changes to services in order to save money? (An example might be changing from weekly bin collections to fortnightly, or increasing the cost of bus fares.)
 - Do you think councils have a responsibility to try and save as much money as they can? Why? Why not?

Activity 2: What would YOU do? (20 mins)



1. If the participants all live in the same town/village, then join a few pieces of flipchart paper with sticky tape, and explain that the next task will be completed together. If participants are drawn from a wider area, give them a piece of flipchart each.
2. Ask participants to spend a few minutes drawing their town/village (or even just their street) on the flipchart paper, and to mark on a few places that everyone knows, eg shopping centre, church, local college.
3. Once they have done this, ask everyone to think about the following, and mark on their maps:
 - The best things about living in this area
 - The worst* things about living in this area.

*You might need to give a few examples to start them off, such as: litter, dog mess, speeding cars or mopeds, lack of things for young people to do, drink and drug use or homelessness.
4. Go round the group and ask everyone to describe what they have drawn and added to the map, and explain why. Allow time for discussion.
5. Organise participants into smaller groups and ask them to pick one issue to discuss in more detail. Give them sticky notes or scrap paper and ask them to come up with ways in which they think this issue could be tackled, and write them down. Encourage the group to include really positive and imaginative ideas. For example, if the lack of things for young people to do is an issue, encourage them to think about how that could be solved. For instance, why not think about conducting a local survey and talking to lots of other young people about their ideas for things to do.
6. Ask each group to present their ideas back to the whole group, and facilitate discussion about whether they think any of these are good ideas that could be taken forward or adapted.

Activity 3: Who can I talk to? (10 mins)



1. Ask the group who they might go to in order to discuss any issues/ideas they have about their local area. Do any of them know how to get in touch with their local councillor(s) – or even anything about them?
2. Show participants the web page – <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors> – and encourage them to look up who their local councillor(s) is, how to contact them, and information on any public meetings or surgeries they hold. Tell the young people that many local councillors are interested in what young people have to say, and there will be one or more who holds a particular responsibility or interest in youth issues and services (you may want to research this in advance ready to give to them).
3. Remind participants that, whilst their main focus is on national issues in Parliament, MPs can help by talking with their constituents about their concerns. How would participants contact their MP? Show participants the website – <https://beta.parliament.uk> – and encourage them to find out more about how to contact and talk to their MP.
4. Ask young people who else they think they could get in touch with to discuss local issues that concern them. What about their Members of Youth Parliament? The UK Youth Parliament elects hundreds of young people every year around the country, whose main focus is to represent the voices of young people in their area – <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament>. British Youth Council is a national organisation and registered charity who support them – <https://www.byc.org.uk/>.

Note: If you have more than one screen you might like to split the group into three and ask one group to look up their local councillor(s), another their MP, and the rest information on the local youth council to save time during this activity. In this case each group should report back to the wider group in order to share what they have found out.



5. So, they know who to contact, and how to contact them, but what will they say when they do? Explain that it's important to have a fully formed and reasoned argument before approaching one of the above for support. On flipchart paper, write the following headings:

- What is the problem?
- How do you know it's a problem? (Where's your proof – photos, research, a petition signed by other young people?)
- Why is it a problem?
- What could be done about it? (Your suggestions.)

Explain that these are key questions to answer before making an approach for help. If you have time you may want to explore these in more detail now, or ask participants to take them away to think about and develop another time.

Extension Activity: Can you help me please? (10 mins)

If you have time, and just for fun, you might like to share with your young people some of the most random questions people have called their local councils about. This article from Metro lists ten of them <https://bit.ly/2QIMxw1>.

You could do this by choosing five or six from the list and reading them out, leaving a blank for participants to try and guess (a bit like in the TV programme 'Have I Got News for You?'). For example, 'A call from an elderly lady asking for help with her (fill the gap)'.

Activity 4: Peer to peer sharing (10 mins)



1. Remind participants that the aim of the Democracy Ambassadors programme is for them to share what they have learnt with their peers. What might they do following today's session?
Board blast ideas as a group and include:
 - writing a group letter/email to a local councillor or MP – <https://www.writetothem.com/> – is a good place to start.
 - inviting a local councillor to come and discuss issues and ideas with the group.
 - inviting a member of a local youth parliament/youth forum/young councillor/young Mayor to do a presentation on their role and some examples of the work they do.
 - starting or signing/sharing an E-petition on <https://petition.parliament.uk/> or www.change.org.
2. Thinking now more widely about peer to peer sharing, give each participant a copy of the next handout in our series to support the skills development of Democracy Ambassadors, 'Top tips for sharing online', and discuss. Add to the board blast of new peer to peer sharing ideas you have begun in point 1 above.

Don't forget that this is also a good time to collect information from your Democracy Ambassadors regarding the peer to peer sharing they have carried out this month.

Cards for Activity 1: Whose responsibility is it?



A Local bus services	B Noisy neighbours	C Deciding how much money the UK gives as international aid
D Reducing the speed limit in the centre of town	E Increasing the speed limit on motorways	F Number of places at local secondary school
G Number of people applying to be maths and science teachers	H Dustbins not being emptied	I Not enough cycle lanes
J Street drinking around the shopping centre	K Welfare benefits	L Vandalism in the local park

Top tips for sharing online



Social media channels

1. **A little research goes a long way.** Take a look into what is coming up and what hashtags are popular to use on certain days, for example #TipTuesday. Can you roll this into your top tips for spreading the word about voting or your new Ambassador role? You can do this with hashtags and notable days that might be coming up. For example International Women's Day is 8th March 2019 – something on women's votes/rights and how far this has come maybe?
2. **Keep your language simple.** Short, sweet and to the point. If you are including any facts (that have been well researched), then include links to articles so you are showing where you have sourced these facts.
3. **Keep your posts accessible.** This means making content easy to access for everyone. For example certain fonts are not accessible to people who are visually impaired. Other things to consider include colours, language, images, and videos. Put subtitles on your videos; keep your font simple and clear. Don't use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS and stick to easy-to-read colours – black and yellow are good for this. Include an image description along with your picture.
4. **Don't forget to @ the right people.** What about @local MPs? You can literally @Anyone.
5. **Show off your personality.** Always be yourself – don't lose your voice. You are unique and have something to say. All great movements start off with a simple idea.

Video Production

Video is a really powerful way to get your message across. It is easy to create something – just grab a phone and chat into the camera – and simple to share on social media. Did you know that in 2017 videos on social media (known as social video) generated 1,200% **more shares** than text and images!?

Here are our top tips for making a video:

- Keep your message simple. Think about what you can create in 30 seconds (once you put it together, it may be twice the length).
- Write a script or a plan. One page of writing (about 250 words) is about one minute of film.



- Get some friends to help you with filming.
- You can film on your phone and edit with free editing Apps. Find editing App suggestions here: www.beebom.com/best-video-editing-apps-iphone (Iphones only).
- Film in landscape for a more professional look.
- Get creative. Find the best light for your video. Natural light is good but so is dramatic lighting with (for example) all of your bedside lamps.
- Think about what is behind you when you are filming. Is there an old coffee cup or pile of clothes that you can remove?
- Don't make a video of anyone without their written permission. This applies to using music, voices or photos as well – and be mindful of copyright.
- Add subtitles wherever you can. Subtitles on videos are important for accessibility (ensuring those that are hard of hearing can read), but they are also important for putting on social media. People often watch videos without the sound on when scrolling.
- Do edit the final video. Remember – short, sweet and to the point.

Now Share...

On YouTube: Upload your video to YouTube and share the URL on social media. Email the URL to your friends and family and promote this URL on posters/leaflets. You have the option on YouTube to turn comments off and on as well if you like.

On Facebook: Upload your video directly to Facebook for maximum sharing.

On Instagram: Upload a snippet of your video to Instagram and tag away! You have around 60 seconds on Instagram.

On Twitter: Upload your video to YouTube and share the URL on Twitter

