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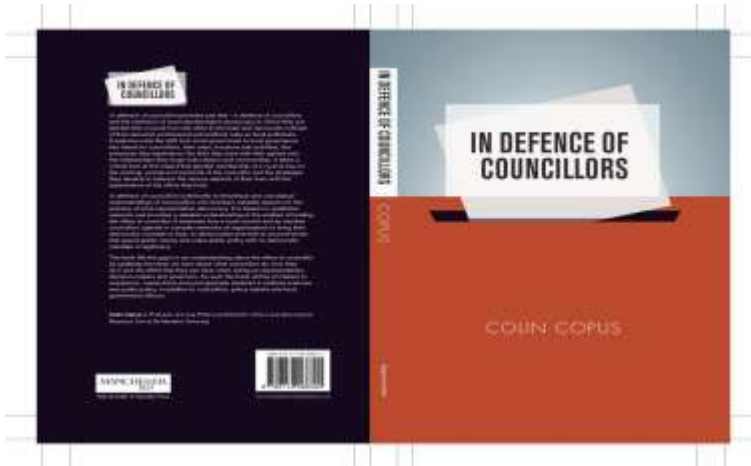
In Defence of Councillors

Association of Democratic Services Officers, Annual Conference, 24th November 2016

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The Councillor Commission



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Current and Future Challenges


- Globalisation
- Europeanisation
- Urbanisation
- Austerity
- Constitutional status and central local interaction
- The need for innovation
 - public services
 - local leadership
 - Governing
- Ensuring community cohesion
- The devolution agenda – what next?
- The Challenge of 'Place' and 'not-place'...



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Taking the Local out of English Local Government:1

- Council boundaries do not reflect natural (or any) communities of place; rather they are administratively convenient lines on a map
- Points of the compass councils:
 - East Staffordshire
 - North East Derbyshire
 - South Norfolk
 - North Shropshire
 - East Hampshire
 - West Berkshire
 - West Lindsey
 - Mid Suffolk



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Taking the Local out of English Local Government:2

- 'AND' councils
 - Redcar and Cleveland
 - Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
 - Basingstoke and Deane
 - Brighton and Hove
 - Bath and North East Somerset
 - Shrewsbury and Atcham (abolished since 2009)
 - Oadby and Wigston
 - Blackburn with Darwen



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Taking the Local out of English Local Government: 3

- And these places just don't exist
 - Three Rivers (the Chess, Gade and Colne)
 - Sandwell (Sandwell Priory)
 - Newham (Merger of East Ham and West Ham, so it was a 'New'Ham)
 - Kirklees (Kirklees Priory legendary burial place of the English freedom fighter and resistance hero: Robin Hood)
 - Telford and Wrekin (Telford a bloke and Wrekin, a hill)



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The Big Challenge: Governance and Bringing Order to Chaos

Local government exists in a fragmented and often chaotic network of competing and interacting agencies and bodies with different:

- Purposes
- Resources
- Policies
- Structures
- Ambitions
- Powers



many of which also operate beyond the boundaries of any one council and have little or no accountability to the public or concern for place


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A 24 hour-a-day job

- Proximity to the community
 - Based within the community (but may be not the ward or division)
- Ease of access for citizens
 - Visible, contactable, approachable
- Few boundaries between personal, political, council, social or work life
- Use of proximity as a representative tool
- Underestimates of the hours councillors work
- But there's always the 'A' team councillor



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Official Mind and Public Image

- Official inquiries differ from public pronouncements by ministers – of all parties (a general view)
 - **Inquires** demonstrate an understanding of the pressures of the role and the tension between political representation and public service responsibilities
 - Views from **ministers, white papers** etc is that the office is not adequately formed and requires constant tinkering to amend its second rate nature and that the holders of the office are not 'politicians' (pay, pensions, protection) – or volunteers
 - **Public Image:** On a good day, Reeves and Mortimer as Councillors Cox and Evans

Aldington-on-Sea Public Information Film
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeARXMHW4Is>



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Why Do It?

- **Public service:** motivated by a deep sense of public service, of pursuing public well-being, of giving up their time, energy and resources to provide a service to fellow citizens
- **The democratic spirit:** linked to public service, cllrs often have a deep-centred belief in the democratic system and in deliberation and the democratic way of resolving political differences
- **Ambition:** desire to achieve for personal growth and success and to stand out in some way as having secured victory in open competition and to further personal advancement and growth
- **Status and reward:** linked to ambition but status is more about being distinguished from others – even though the office of councillor is much maligned, it offers a status and public recognition within the community and separates the holder from other local citizens


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Challenges to staying a Councillor: Political or Personal

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Internal party democracy – or lack of it – Party discipline – Disagreement with the party group / party – Council having too little power – Being a cllr had too little power | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Weight of work - Time demands - Work, life, council balance - Moved out of the council area - Private personal reasons - Health |
|--|---|


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Councillors in England May 2016:


Type of Council	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Gn	Others
County	940	381	250	131	20	89
Unitary	1305	1148	307	63	37	240
London Borough	610	1063	117	11	4	46
MBC	395	1720	178	45	28	53
District	5236	1596	841	243	75	579
Totals	8,486	5,908	1,693	493	164	1,007


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Councillors in England (rounded figures):

Three main parties

- **16,087 councillors**
- **90.6 %** of England's total councillor population


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Councillors in England:

- Small Parties and Independents
 - **875 councillors**
 - 4.9% of England's total councillor population
 - that are Independent, or from smaller national parties excluding UKIP and the Greens
 - 3.7% UKIP and Greens =

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399 parties and political associations registered with the Electoral Commission



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Governing Locally

- Councillors and the office of councillor, make a positive contribution to:
 - The fabric and health of democracy
 - Participation in politics
 - Localising decision-making
 - The accountability of supra-local bodies
 - Linking citizens into the chain of governing
 - Making the local papers far less boring



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Conclusion: The Future for Councillors: Doomsday or Sunlit Uplands

- Continued austerity
- Reduction in the status and functions of elected local government
- Erosion of financial autonomy
- Partnerships and 'governance' replaces elected local government
- Networks of unelected and unaccountable public (and private) bodies continue to erode local government to become the most powerful players in sub-national government
- Elected local government further marginalised and reduced in number: merger madness prevails



- Increased support and resources for councillors
- Councils structured to recognise role of cllrs as politicians
- Government asserts role of councillors as vital to democracy
- Public and private bodies recognise right of cllrs to govern and respond accordingly
- Greatly enhanced status, position and public / media recognition of the role and importance of the office of councillor

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